

AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMANIAN UNDERSTANDING
(of theistic argumentation)

Norman Geisler

A fine paper. You have understood Runc & grappled
* effectively with his epistemological premises. I wish you
had given more attention to the specifics of his
Dialogues, & his other reasons (besides the epistemological)
for questioning the traditional arguments. Perhaps you
plan to do so in your next paper.
An unduly large number of Errata.

Wheaton College

1958

A

Enquiry Concerning
Human Understanding

AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMANIAN UNDERSTANDING
(of theistic argumentation)

With the publication of David Hume's Enquiry^u Concerning Human Learning^u came one of the most vicious assaults on the extremes of speculative philosophy in the history of thought. So incisive were his conclusions and so powerful his pen that to this day it is considered as axiomatic in many philosophical circles that Hume has "destroyed" the certitude of human knowledge and forever silenced the dogmatism of the metaphysicians. For the Theistic thinker these results are most disturbing and consequently deserve our keenest attention. What did David Hume demonstrate concerning human knowledge, and how is this related to traditional theistic argumentation? These shall be the questions of our enquiry. !!

First we turn to the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding to discover exactly what Hume is saying and then we shall see how this affects natural theology.

To Hume there are but two species of moral philosophy or the science of human nature: one which treats man chiefly as born for action influenced by sentiment but pursuing happiness as life's good, and the other which considers man chiefly as a reasonable (not active) being. The latter endeavors to form man's understanding not cultivate his manners. It attempts to find the first principles of vice and virtue and considers it the task of philosophy to establish the foundations of morals. This philosophy Hume considers ~~abuse~~ and makes a plea for the easier, common sense philosophy to which men will adhere in the long run and by its nature will spare us from the

gross abstraction and "hidden truths" for which the other philosophy is noted.

However, on behalf of metaphysical speculation Hume speaks a brief word. Its significance lies in its attempt at accuracy and precision in reasoning along with the gratification it brings to innocent curiosity. At the same time, Hume vehemently objects to its excesses. He feels that a considerable part of metaphysics isn't science but superstition. It attempts to enter areas utterly inaccessible to reason and retreats to abstract obscurity when unable to defend itself on fair ground. Hence, he concludes that the only way to free learning from this encumbrance is to analyze the exact capacity and power of the human mind and show that man isn't fitted for such remote and ~~abstuse~~ speculation. So he hopes to cultivate a true metaphysics to destroy the false one. The author adds that there are certain positive advantages to this endeavor as well. It will outline a "mental geography" or the scope of knowledge. It will help order and correct disorders of the operations of the mind. To deny the philosopher this privilege would be more sceptical than Hume desires to be. In fact, it would be more dogmatic than most affirmative philosophers have been. As the other sciences have attempted to find general or universal principles to unify themselves, so such a search has merit with regard to the operation of the mind. And if by discovering these principles we shall ^eundermine the foundation of ~~abstuse~~ philosophy and unify profound enquiry with clarity, then we shall be happy, says Hume.

So he begins with the origin of ideas. He starts with the axiom that everyone allows a difference between actual sensation and the memory of or reflection on sensation. The latter is a mirror

which reflects the former only faintly. What we consider the creative power of the mind is simply the job of compounding the impressions given to it by the senses. Hence, all such ideas are feeble copies of the more lively ones gained by direct impression of the senses. There are no ideas in the mind which cannot be divided into simple ideas of sense. This we can prove by introspection and analysis of all complex ideas plus the fact that when a sense organ is defective there is also a corresponding defect in ideas. As, e. g., a man born blind never sees anything in his dreams or has a picture of anything in his mind.

This is where Hume makes a basic mistake. There are spontaneous non-sensory experiences too, not dependent on the body.

So Hume is suspicious of the origin of philosophical terminology and desires the impressions they represent. Unless the impression can be produced which is much clearer than our faint memory of it, then we must reject the idea. In this way he hopes to remove all doubt concerning the nature and reality of ideas.

Hume states three ways that ideas can be connected or associated. When a picture naturally leads us to think of the original we call this connection, resemblance. When the mention of one apartment naturally leads us to think of the adjoining ones, we call this, contiguity, and when thinking of a wound we think of pain, we call this cause and effect. To be sure these are the only three ways we must engage in constant examination of ideas. The more we examine ideas the more positive we are that these are the only three ways of associating ideas.

In this connection, Hume introduced certain ~~sceptical~~ *Skeptical* doubts concerning the operation of the understanding. It is evident that there are only two objects of human enquiry: matters of fact and relation of ideas. The relational are discovered by the mere

operation of the mind. An example of this is geometric reasoning. The factual understanding is where a fact is conceived of as conformable to reality yet the opposite is possible, e. g., "the sun will rise tomorrow". Now all reasoning concerning matters of fact seems to be founded on relation of cause and effect. This appears to be the only way to go beyond the senses. The only reason given for the cause is some other fact than the cause itself. How do we arrive at a knowledge of cause and effect? It is not by a priori reasoning. Here Hume affirms as a universal proposition that has no exceptions that we arrive at a causal relationship from experience because certain objects are constantly co-joined with each other. A man never infers a cause or effect from the nature of a new object. Gunpowder could never have been discovered by a priori argument. This truth isn't as evident with regard to things with which we are familiar from birth. Why? Because of the influence of custom. It covers natural ignorance and conceals itself where it is present in the highest degree. To convince us of this we need only note the fact that the mind can't find an effect by examining the cause. The effect is totally different from the cause, e. g., the motion in the second ball which it received from the first one is not the same but a totally different motion. There is no hint of one in the other. And as the connection is imaginary, so is the relation between cause and effect. So, if every event is distinct from its cause then the effect can't be discovered in the cause. In vain can we predict without observation and experience.

Now if matter of fact is based on our experience (of cause and effect), then what is experience based on? We don't know. Nature has kept hidden her great secrets. All we know is that certain

However, it is spiritual - thus
undoubtedly certain.

events always follow certain objects. What the medium of this inference is we do not know. And such a medium must be produced in order to disprove the assertion that experience is our only guide. We cannot beg the question by saying that our past experience will hold true in the future for this is precisely what we are to prove.

Whence then comes such authority to this thing called experience? And on what basis can we infer that this will follow that or tomorrow will be like yesterday? It certainly isn't intuitive. And to say it is experimental argues in a circle. Nor is it demonstrative for the opposite could be true. We simply do not know where experience gets its power. Any opponents to this view must produce the link. If you hesitate to dream one up, then you confess what I assert viz., that it isn't reason but experience that makes this inference.

What can we conclude then? Only that all inferences are the effect of custom or habit and not reason. Now we need not fear this scepticism for nature will always keep her balance, and men will induce some principle to explain this.

Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It alone renders experience useful. It makes us expect the uniformity of nature. Without it we would be ignorant of everything beyond sense and memory.

Though conclusions from experience carry us beyond memory and sense yet some fact must be present from which we draw these, otherwise, reasoning is hypothetical or carried on ad infinitum upon antecedent premises. So we conclude that "all belief of matter of fact...is derived merely from some object present to memory or

senses, and a customary connection between that and some other object".¹ How does this account for illusion? Wherein lies the distinction of belief and fiction? Belief comes to the mind as a stronger sentiment. Its force comes not from the nature of the idea but the manner of conception. It arises from a customary conjunction of ideas in the three ways stated above. Belief in these gives us a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and succession of events. This is essential for human action.

It is natural to conclude from this that there is no certainty in knowledge. Since we are ignorant of the necessary connection of things, we can only have probability. Herein is the advantage of "belief" which holds true with regard to cause and effect. We transfer all our past experience of events to the future with the same proportion of probability. As any event is confirmed by a greater number of concurrences it begets the sentiment we call "belief".

Where, then, do men get the idea of a necessary connection, force, power, etc.? We must define these terms in order to remove the difficulty. In so doing, we will remember that our ideas are nothing but copies of our impressions. So if we can produce the impression we have clarified the idea. Now where is our impression of necessary connection, force, etc.? All we know is what follows. We never perceive the actual force or connection. Hence, objects of sense don't discover for us any necessary connection. Maybe the will is this power of connection? The only way we know what the will can do is by experience. Perhaps it is by reflection we know power and causality? But the mind's command over itself is limited and limits

1. Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, p. 46.

are known only by experience. We can't pretend to know all the circumstances. To say that God does it really robs Him of His power and nature of its significance, much less to say, we still don't know how God does it if He does.

Therefore, we conclude since we have no idea of a necessary connection either by sense or sentiment, that the terms have no meaning to us at all. The only remaining alternative is to say that experience gives us probability, and "necessary connection" arises from a number of similar instances. The mind is influenced by habit after a repetition of instances. Thus, when we say two objects are connected we mean they have acquired a connection in our mind by habit. Hence, causality can be defined as "an object followed by another and whose appearance always conveys the thought of the other".²

To sum up the reasoning thus far we may say: every idea is copied from some impression(s). If there is no impression, we have no real idea. In all single instances in the operation of the mind or body there is nothing that produces any idea of a necessary connection. But when many uniform instances appear and the same object is followed by the same event, then we begin to entertain a customary connection between object and antecedent. This sentiment is the origin of the idea of causality. It occurs not at first but after many similar instances.

The same is true with our idea of necessity and liberty. If there were no similar operations, we would have no such concept. But since all men have the experience of custom, then all men virtually agree on concepts though there is a verbal dispute among

2. Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, p. 79

them. We are carried by customary transition from the occurrence of one to the belief in the other.

Hume briefly applies these principles to the reason of animals too. Nature provides experience as a guide to their understanding also. He then attempts to show how men are superior to animals since both make inferences on the same basis, viz., custom. This is due to the facts that man has a better memory, broader comprehension, more accuracy, more extensive experience and great ability to communicate via language.

When we come to the subject of miracles, Hume applies the same empiricism. He rejects transubstantiation because it is based on the weaker testimony from the apostles having diminished as it has been passed down as over against the direct impression we receive from our senses. What is directly contrary to the senses cannot be true. Senses are our guide concerning matters of fact. The wise man will proportion his belief to degree of probability based on his observation and the balance of possibility built there-upon. the testimony of others is assured only by their veracity and our experience as it conforms to their testimony. When their testimony is about the miraculous, we believe it not because of any connection we perceive between witness and witnessed but because we are accustomed to have a connection between them. When their testimony is one that we haven't experienced, then we have a contest of opposites. The stronger one must be believed. Now since miracles violate the law of nature no proof could be stronger against them. Hence, they are to be most strongly doubted.

An event doesn't qualify as a miracle unless it has never happened before. But if it has never happened before then we have

no experience of it and since it is a violation of nature, we have the whole of experience against it. Hence, no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless its falsehood is more miraculous than the fact it endeavors to establish. Even then, there is a mutual destruction of arguments, or the superior only gives us a degree of assurance. But there never was a miracle established beyond question because the number of witnesses were insufficient, men are not to be trusted, miracles abound among ignorant people, and there are miracles supposing to prove conflicting religions. So we conclude that no testimony concerning any miracle is even probable, much less, proven. I would rather believe all men are deceiving me than one single contradiction of sense.³ With this, of course, Hume rejects the miracles of the Bible and Christianity.

When applying his principles to providence, Hume concludes that we can't rightly infer more in the cause than we find in the effects.⁴ When we infer God's existence from nature, we cannot be so enamored by our discovery that we attribute to God the ability to make something more perfect than this present world of ill and disorder. We only need infer a cause sufficient for the task and no more.⁵ It is only "imagination" that makes this transition. Why attribute to the cause what can't be found in the effect? Thus, what is wrong with denying providence and a future state? It isn't the basis of society. It is from experience that we observe virtue to be attended by the greater peace of mind than vice.

3. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

4. It is from the consistent application of principles such as these that men have been forced to reason to a "Finite God".

5. See foot note #4.

If there are marks of distributive justice in the world, then it is satisfied. If not, then we have no right to attribute the power to rectify it to the gods who made it. Our arguments from nature to providence are uncertain because they go beyond present evidence and are useless because we can't attribute to God any more than our experience affords of Him.

Hume poses a possible objection to this; we infer from a partially completed building that it will soon be finished so why can't we infer that God will complete the justice and goodness of the universe? To this he replies there is an infinite difference in the illustration. We know man by experience. But God is known only by his productions. If the universe shows wisdom, He is wise proportionately.⁶ Further than this we cannot say.

To press the issue even further, Hume points out two disputed assumptions in this reasoning: 1) That God will act the same way we would act when we know His ways are different ~~than~~ ours; 2) That it is possible to know a cause merely from its effects. Especially since it is only when species of objects are constantly cojoined that we arrive at a cause and effect relationship. Experience is our only guide and that is specifically what we lack.

Hume concludes by analyzing the extent to which this sort of scepticism can be carried. He acknowledges the need of a scepticism antecedent to philosophy so as to wean it of all biases and prejudices. Another is needed consequent to philosophy to show that the mind isn't fitted to discover absolutes. Such a scepticism for Hume has destroyed naive realism and has shown the relativity of primary as well as secondary qualities. He asserts that the chief aim of scepticism is

6. See foot note #4

Berkeley showed this

to destroy reason both abstract and concrete.⁷ The chief objection to scepticism, and by far its greatest weakness, Hume concedes to be that no durable good comes to society from it. It has no purpose and is opposed to practical life. Hence, Hume would mitigate scepticism to make it purposeful. To do this he points out that doubts are corrected by common sense and reflection. That scepticism guards from extremes and dogmaticism^{and} limits the scope of our inquiry to subjects adapted for the human mind. Reason is not purposed for religion. Faith in divine revelation is best suited for that.✕ Nor are morals properly the object of reason. The fields of intellectual inquiry are 1) matters of fact, 2) quantity and number. All else is illusion and sophistry.

It is not difficult to see, then, how Hume feels about theistic speculations. In the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion he simply applies the principles of his epistemology already concluded to this extreme form of speculation and concludes very simply that we cannot prove anything about the existence and nature of God though he himself is not willing to give up these realms as subjects of "belief". There is no need then to elaborate the detailed dialogue of Demea, (the inflexible Orthodox) Philo (the careless sceptic), and Cleanthes (the accurate philosopher), but to note that Hume claims more sympathy with Cleanthes though at times Philo seems to express his sentiments as well. Historically, it seems to be the voice of Philo that has had the greater influence.

The sum of the matter is this: the summer's conversation arises when Cleanthes suggests a method of religious and academic education in response to the compliment of Demea who noted his care in educating

7. Hume, op. cit., p.

his pupil. The place of religion in education is the focal point of which there is some disagreement. From this the stage is set to forge into the heart of a discussion on Natural Religion. All the while Cleanthes is the "middle of the roader" who opposes Philo's extreme and inconsistent scepticism while Demea is siding with him in a desire to rid religion of its entanglements with vain philosophy only to be disillusioned in the end to find that her supposed ally was really her foe.

The essential implications of the Dialogue are clear. We cannot prove the existence of God a posteriori since we do not have any impression of God from sense experience nor of a necessary cause which could demonstrate his existence. "Why not stop at the material world?", says Hume. "How can we satisfy ourselves without going on Ad infinitum? No satisfaction can ever be gained by these speculations...."⁸ And further, we have no a priori knowledge since all knowledge comes from impressions as was demonstrated in the Enquiry. So the lack of ability to show any necessary connection destroys the validity of the arguments from effect to cause as the teleological and the cosmological, and the absence of the a priori necessitates our rejecting any ontological argument. What is left? Only degrees of probability and ambiguity. Reason is out of its realm and has tackled areas far too sublime for it. Occupation with the more common things should suffice for its curiosity.

Mainly the latter I think he would say

Before considering what his opponents have said, we might note Hume's own statement of intent in writing the Dialogues. It is an attempt to help the cause of both philosophy and religion. The key is found in a footnote of the last chapter where he says,

8. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 325

cf modern log. positivism with LRS A. about
The meaning of religious language

"It seems evident that the dispute between sceptics and dogmatists is entirely verbal, or at least regards only the degree of doubt and assurance....No philosophical dogmatists denies that there are difficulties both with regard to senses and to all science; and that these difficulties are in a regular logical method, absolutely insoluble. No sceptic denies that we lie under an absolute necessity, notwithstanding these difficulties of thinking, and believing, and reasoning with regard to all kinds of subjects, and even of frequent by assenting with confidence and security. The only difference...is that the sceptic from habit, caprice, or inclination insists on the difficulty; the dogmatists for the same reason insists on the necessity."⁹

Whether his intents were achieved and whether he was consistent in pursuing them we have yet to discuss.

The immediate question is how does this relate to theistic argumentation? The answer is: in several obvious ways. First, he has attempted to show that there is no such thing as a necessary causal connection. The idea of such comes entirely from custom and has only a psychological necessity since we can produce no impression which it represents. Hence we cannot prove God's existence, much less ~~we~~ speculate concerning His nature. Secondly, that we cannot attribute perfection to God on the basis of imperfection in His creation. Thirdly, that a miracle is impossible by its very definition and nature.

But all he does is raise the point that there are excellent reasons for believing that there is no such a cause

Hence, we can neither "prove" the existence of God by any argument which uses cause and effect (which all arguments do in some form or another), nor can we use miracles to establish the uniqueness of our religion. So both the natural and supernatural evidence is swept from beneath us, and we are left with a "belief" rooted in custom having only a psychological validity.

What can be said of these incisive declarations in defence of theistic argumentation? Historically, there have been many reper-

cussions. Among the more serious and philosophical replies are those of Robert Flint, C. S. Lewis, and A. E. Taylor. A less serious yet very potent reply is cleverly concealed in a satire by Richard Whatley.

Flint in his book on Agnosticism classes Hume with the greatest of sceptics. He suggests that we fail to understand Hume at all unless we see him in this light. That "the sceptic and the dogmatists are alike the instruments of providence"¹⁰ and Hume's day called on the former. He contends that Hume was a precursor of agnosticism in men like Huxley, Riehl and Compayre and attributes their acceptance of scepticism to the adoption of Hume's principles without seeing their consequences for the validity of knowledge. He then traces the molding influence on Hume as being 1) an ambition for literary fame; 2) Bacon's experimentalism; 3) Locke's epistemology; 4) Berkley's view of abstraction, and distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Hume's distinctive contribution was that all mental states can be analyzed into mere sensations and must be as a test of their validity. Says Flint, "Granted this premise and Hume's sweeping agnosticism conclusively follows".¹¹

Flint proceeds to point out some of the consequences of Hume's original assumption as to the origin of our knowledge of reality. 1) He objects that there can be no such thing as knowledge at all since all we have is ideas, not reality. The problem becomes: why are impressions mistaken for reality? This is "Subjective Idealism" or "Illusionism", says Flint. Nor can we know ourself since we only know "states of mind". Hume considers the mind a fiction and how can a fiction ever know "states"? 2) The concept of "substance" for Hume is simply a product of association and imagination. But how

10. Flint, Agnosticism, p. 137

11. Ibid., p. 143

Are they?

Hume would say "a good question". That why is a sceptic.

can these "states" or perceptions which are separate and successive ever be collected? Certainly they don't collect themselves. But these are the only things that exist. 3) Hume considered mind merely as a heap of impression bundled together and giving us a false impression of identity. This he affirmed of all men. But he isn't entitled "to do so since he hasn't experienced this of all men" nor can he validly assert as he does "I can never catch myself at any time with a perception"¹² for it implicitly affirms what it expressly denies, viz., that there is a perceiver under all his perceptions. 4) Causality is based on custom--a necessary belief yet is an illusion. "In other words, he represents the very basis of all seemingly intelligible experience as an illusion...."¹³ 5) He distinguishes belief from imagination by the force and vivacity of impressions. In other words, he ignores numerous instances where it is weaker and denies belief for what it really is. From these general principles Flint concludes that:

"The agnosticism of Hume...must be admitted to be both radical and consistent. It goes straight to the very basis of belief, to the ultimate foundations of knowledge, and does not shrink to draw from the premises their natural inferences even when most likely to cause unrest and alarm. And in this lies the chief merit, and the reason why it has exerted so great an influence as it has done on the development of philosophy...."¹⁴

Concerning Hume's Agnostics in Religion Flint also says a few words. Basically Hume was ~~just as agnostic~~ in religion as he was in philosophy (not more so). At the same time, he wasn't hostile to religion and objected to being called a deist. He believed religion to have a sure foundation in revelation. What he does assert is that "those who adopt his premises must be prepared to adopt his conclusions"¹⁵

12. Flint, Agnosticism, p. 150

13. Ibid., p. 154

14. Ibid., p. 154

15. Ibid., p. 158

*not a book title!
but a section title in Flint*

whether in philosophy or religion.

Actually Hume helped more than anyone else in his day to do away with "halfness" in religion. However, his view of substance, causality, and personality left him no principles on which to justify the existence of a Divine being. He rejected as not deserving any discussion that we know God by intuition. Nor does he give any serious consideration to the a priori argument. He condemns it by the assumption that every matter of fact is a contingent existence. The a posteriori argument is rejected because of his view of causality as a necessary connection.

In his Natural History of Religion Hume properly distinguishes between the reason and the causes of religion. He feels that the causes have been imagination, fear, illusions, and desires while there has never been a rational ground for religion nor has reason ever been a strong factor in religion. Yet he recognizes that religion has steadily grown more reasonable. However, to grant this is to assert that reason has been a strong factor in religion.

In his Essay on Miracles he assumes revelation to be essentially miraculous and only provable by miracles of an external character. However, many Christian apologists are not willing to grant this.

The general tenor of his argument is agnostic. He didn't attempt to prove the impossibility but to show the incredulity and unprovability of miracles by means of human testimony. Hume himself admits scepticism in religion and so "by his own confession...(had) a final and complete scepticism".¹⁶

To Hume's chapter on Miracles we have two replies to consider. The first is that of A. E. Taylor who suggests that perhaps Hume put this chapter in his Essay to gain notoriety. At least "his logic is

16. Flint, p. 167

one of amused detached contemplation".¹⁷

Taylor outlines eleven steps in Hume's argument and notes that if Hume is serious, ~~then~~ confusion is at a maximum for a number of reasons. First, because he begins with a general definition of a miracle as that which is unusual or unexpected and later in the argument inserts a new definition as that which "violates the laws of nature". This Hume does to justify the paradox that at best the only uniformity is within his own experience, not in external nature. Further, he asserts that no testimony for a miracle has ever amounted to a probability much less a proof. This he does not know since he personally hasn't canvassed the evidence for all alleged miracles. Finally, Hume concludes that religion is founded altogether on faith, not reason. This when compared to his original exordium to the wise man "to proportion his belief to evidence" is a mockery. It is "a transparent substitute for a true ending".¹⁸ Thus Taylor presents the thesis of his paper. "The question I propose to ~~raise~~ is whether after all, the conclusion satisfactory or not, is not that which follows from the reasoning on Hume's principles, and the violent contrast between exordium and peroration itself a part of the Mockery".¹⁹

The question now becomes what value does his argument have after all the irrelevances have been removed? At best it is wrong headed. He begins by saying we should weigh the evidence and concludes that if an alleged occurrence is strong enough we can dismiss it without a hearing. If he really means that his premises are at odds with his conclusion. Even Huxley, who was anxious to maintain Hume's main contention was obliged to acknowledge that it is only after we scruti-

17. Taylor, Philosophical Studies, p. 333

18. Ibid., p. 342

19. Ibid., p. 342

andize the evidence for miracles that we find it lacking.

But to understand Hume, Flint suggests that we must conceive of him in the context of his scepticism. It is because "belief" is merely "a strong propensity to conceive things in a certain light" that Hume can believe his own metaphysics. And his "uniform experience" can mean no more than a regularity in his recollections. So with all Hume's judgments; they can be reduced to "the actual observer expects this...."²⁰

Further we might restate Hume's main argument in this way. Since the believer has a continuous miracle in himself (a bend to believe the miraculous), his faith has causes which are not those of other men nor his own on most things. This isn't shocking for the orthodox but the reverse would have been. Then "why the statement that this is not so should have been couched in language which was certain to create scandal can hardly be explained except by Hume's resolution to attract notice at all costs".²¹

The problem of Hume's essay is "vitigated simplicity". When we deal with testimony to a startling event we have two questions not one to ask: 1) Is it more likely that the most unexceptional witnesses should fail us or the event is a fact? 2) If it is a fact, is it merely puzzling or has it the value of a "sign". The answer to both questions will be influenced by our metaphysics whether Theistic or non-theistic but in any case should be a serious expression of our personality. "I can never feel that Hume's own philosophy was that, I have only to own a haunting uncertainty whether Hume was really a great philosopher, or only a very clever man."²²

20. Taylor, p. 348

21. Ibid., p. 335

22. Ibid., P. 365

The next to address Hume's treatment of miracles is C. S. Lewis who contends that the acceptance of miracles is tracable to one's philosophical framework whether a naturalist or supernaturalist. He then proceeds to show that naturalism is irrational since for them "mind" is not the basis of but the product of their total system. "The naturalists have been engaged in thinking about nature. They have not attended the fact that they were thinking. The moment one attends to this it is obvious that one's thinking cannot be merely a "natural event", and that therefore something other than nature exists".²³ The supernatural is not so far but so close it is abstruse. So it is reason that judges whether a miracle can happen. It is left to experience to tell us whether a miracle does happen, ^(or has happened) or not.

Lewis then proceeds to remove some stock objections to belief in the fact that miracles have happened. First, that people in ancient days were ignorant of the laws of nature and therefore could believe that miracles happened. But belief in a miracle is far from being ignorant of natural law; it is dependent on it. "Belief in a miracle is only possible in so far as those laws are known."²⁴ One couldn't consider an event to be unusual that didn't differ from the usual. Secondly, men once had a false concept of universe, viz., that it was much smaller than we now know it to be. So what? We aren't contending that we merit God's concern. Magnitude is in man's imagination. You can't both argue from uniqueness of this planet as harboring life and the obscurity of it as infinitesimal that Christianity isn't true. You must maintain a consistent perspective. Thirdly, that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature. This is to conceive of nature's

23. Lewis, Miracles, p. 51

24. Ibid., p. 58

patterns as inviolable laws that cause things to happen. Laws don't cause but merely describe events. "It is inaccurate to define a miracle as something that breaks a law of nature. It doesn't....The divine art of miracle is not an art of suspending the pattern to which events conform but of feeding new events into that pattern."25 God causes a miracle and its effects follow according to natural law. It is interlocked with nature going forward not backward. Their interlocking is found in the design of a common creator not in nature alone. So though they interrupt the usual course of nature, they add more unity and self-consistency to the whole they are not arbitrary or simply "stuck in." "If nature brings forth miracles then doubtless it is natural for her to do so...In calling them miracles we do not mean that they are contradictions or outrages; we mean that, left to her own resources, she could never produce them."26

Therefore, there is no reason to disbelieve in miracles since nature is only a part of reality. It is possible for the rest of reality to invade nature. But to this the naturalist objects claiming that it is childish to think that nature will do the spectacular. It is tyrannical of God to break His own laws. "Not so!", says Lewis, "There are rules beyond rules, and a unity which is deeper than uniformity."27 "To think that a disturbance of them would constitute a breach of the living rule...is a mistake. If miracles do occur we may be sure that not to have wrought them would be a real inconsistency."28

To sum up the argument thus far we can say that miracles are possible since there is nothing ridiculous about their occurrence.

25. Lewis, p. 72
26. Ibid., p. 75
27. Ibid., p. 116
28. Ibid., p. 118

The probability of whether an event is a miracle will depend on evidence of sufficient history. Hume's argument that miracles are the most improbable of all events since we have uniform experience against them is irrelevant because it begs the question. Of course "we must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely 'uniform experience' against miracles...then they have never happened. Unfortunately we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact we are arguing in a circle".²⁹

Hume assumes the uniformity of nature to ~~disprove~~ prove that nature cannot be broken, i. e., that a miracle cannot happen. Both are the same question. Actually, only the Christian Theist has the right to trust the uniformity of nature. "But if we admit God, must we admit miracle? Indeed...."³⁰

But must we admit all alleged miracles? How do we judge the intrinsic probability of supposed miracles? By our innate "sense of fitness of a thing"; the same thing that leads us to the uniformity of nature. "More than half the disbelief in miracles that exists is based on a sense of their unfitness...that they are unsuitable to the dignity of God or nature...."³¹

Lewis then proceeds to show how the three great miracles of the Christian faith "fit" into the overall meaning of life: 1) The incarnation which if accepted illuminates and orders all phenomenon and surpasses other theories as well as, 2) miracles of old creation (pre-resurrection of Christ), and 3) miracles of new creation (post resurrection). And he concludes by noting that "God does not shake miracles into nature at random as if from a paper caster".³²

29. Lewis, p. 123

30. Ibid., p. 124

31. Ibid., p. 129

32. Ibid., p. 201

For a reply that is a little more on the amusing side and yet profoundly practical we turn to the satire of Richard Whately. Briefly the thought goes something like this: It is no wonder that the public is yet occupied with recounting the exploits of Napoleon Bounaparte when we consider their extraordinary character, but in the midst of the controversy about him it seems never to have occurred to anyone to ask the preliminary question concerning the existence of such an unusual personage. This has never been questioned. But the unquestioned is not necessarily unquestionable. Even as the celebrated Hume has pointed out, men often admit hastily what they are accustomed to take for granted and readily believe with the slightest of evidence stories that please their imagination. Now this seems to be exactly the case when we enquire as to the evidence of the stories about this French hero. Excluding the rare first hand witness we find that the newspapers are the only source of authority for all that is said about him. Now when we consider the most basic questions as to the means of the newspaper's information, their purpose in propagating and the agreement of their testimony,

"It appears...that those on whose testimony the existence and actions of Bounaparte are generally believed, fail in all the most essential points...first, we have no assurance that they have access to correct information; secondly, they have an apparent interest in propagating falsehood, and thirdly, they palpably contradict each other in the most important points."³³

He then challenges the freethinkers to weigh all the evidence "and if they find it amounts to anything more than a probability"³⁴

33. Famous Pamphlets, p. 266.

34. Ibid., p. 271.

they will receive his felicitations for their easy faith.

Whately presses the issue even further by insisting, as Hume did, that these stories should be even more seriously doubted since they partake of the extraordinary. Then after cleverly tracing the fantasy of Napoleon's conquerings, he says, "Does any one believe all this and yet refuse to believe a miracle? Or what is this but a miracle. Is it not a violation of the laws of nature".³⁵

He insists that certainly there is a prejudice here to accept the one and reject the other. Of course these stories may be true, but if someone had fabricated a story for the amusement of the British people who could have done it more ingenuously than this? It has a considerable resemblance to a Greek myth.

He concludes by indicating the sceptics are inconsistent in applying their own principles. "If, after all that has been said, they cannot bring themselves to doubt the existence of Napoleon Bounaparte, they must at least acknowledge that they do not apply to that question the same plan of reasoning which they have made use of in others...."³⁶

Now since we have given the replies of the above men in detail we will not repeat their case here but only indicate their relevance and validity.

1) It seems that Flint's summary of Hume's scepticism is valid in the main assuming that Hume proported these arguments seriously. The fact that Hume's conclusions do not follow unless we accept the major premis of his empirical epistemology, viz., that all knowledge is derived from isolated impressions, is important. Flint's main argument against Hume seems to be that if his principles are con-

35. Famous Pamphlets, p. 274

36. Ibid., p. 290

sistently applied, as Hume tried to do, then his scepticism is radical. In fact, Hume has "a final and complete scepticism".

2) On the other hand, Taylor doubts the sincerity of Hume's argument and ~~proposes~~ that the breach between premises and conclusion is due to Hume's literary ambition to attract attention at any cost. At least, if hume was serious, his argument is wrong headed and self-contradictory. And even after the irrelevances have been removed from Hume's arguments, that we must understand his acceptance of his own metaphysics in terms of his scepticism, viz., that he believed it in the sense he defined "belief" i. e., "a propensity to consider things in a certain light". We must, then, understand him as doubting his own scepticism and in so doing we find not a great philosopher but "a very clever man".

3) To carry this even a step further, Richard Whately turns the literary table on Hume in a very clever satire. The implications of his satiristic reply are that the freethinkers are not consistent in their application of Hume's principles. They accept the relativity of "witnesses" in relation to miracles and religion but fail to apply this to the existence and extraordinary escapades of Napoleon Bounaparte. There seems to be two arguments represented in this satire based on an either/or. Either be consistent in the applications of principles you accept from Hume and apply this to other historic facts as well, or if you are consistent, they naturally lead to a reductio ad absurdum.

4) In brief, C. S. Lewis contends that Hume's concept of the patterns of nature as inviolable laws or forces is ill-founded, and that Hume begs the question by an a priori denial of miracles before we ever get a change to experience them. Of course, if we already

know before hand that nature is inviolably uniform, then nothing can violate this uniformity, but Hume has not proved the uniformity of nature. Hence, he argues in a circle.

So in brief, we have Hume charged with absurdity (Flint), insincerity and/or self-contradictoriness (Taylor), inconsistency or absurdity, the whole gamut of irrationality (Whatley), and misconception and begging the question (Lewis); However, it seems that none of these has really answered him in the sense of giving a positive construction of an alternative epistemology although their charges are justifiable. Flint pointed in the right direction when he said it is the basic premise of Hume's epistemology with which we must contend if we are to give an adequate defence of the validity of knowledge. It is to this task we must set ourself.

Hence, it is clear to see that the important issue is not a metaphysical one but an epistemological problem. So the questions we would like to ask are: does Hume "prove" his epistemology from which all else follows? If so, how does he prove it and how conclusively? If not, how can we show that the principle of causality in human reasoning has a valid basis? These are the more searching questions to which we seek answers.

First, what are Hume's proofs and on what premises does he base them? In chapter two, On the Origin of Ideas in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Hume outlines his case as follows.

Everyone allows a distinction between sensation and memory. The first we call impressions and the second, ideas. What we consider the creative power of the mind is simply the faculty of compounding into ideas the material given to it by the senses. Therefore, all ideas are feeble copies of our more lively sense impressions. Where

we cannot produce the original impressions we do not have any valid ideas. Now it is evident that ideas are associated in three ways: 1) by resemblance, 2) contiguity, and 3) cause and effect. This association takes place not because of any a priori determination of the mind but without exception it is based on a "customary conjunction" of events in our experiences. Now all that "cause and effect" amounts to is a "customary conjunction" since in our experience certain events always follow certain other events. But we have no sensory impression here of a necessary connection. Hence, there is no such thing as a necessary cause and effect relationship.

In order to more fully scrutinize this argument let us put it in valid syllogistic form and examine the premises.

Everyone allows a difference between ideas and impressions.
All ideas are derived from (weaker copies of) sensory impressions.
Therefore, where the original impression cannot be produced we must reject the validity of the idea.
But we have no impression of "Causality" or a "necessary connection"
Therefore, these ideas are not valid.

All ideas are associated entirely on the basis of experience and custom.
But "causality" is an idea gained solely from experience.
Therefore, "causality" is based entirely on custom and experience (and not any a priori determination of the mind).

Now it is with these premises that we must find our dispute for granted) their veracity and the conclusions necessarily follow.

The crucial premise in the first syllogism is the major. How does Hume attempt to justify that all ideas are merely faint copies of sensory impressions? He asserts that an analysis of our thoughts reveals that all ideas are divisible into their original impressions and that a defective sense organ is always accompanied by a corresponding defect in ideas. For example, a man born blind never has an idea of light. Now his conclusion is an extrapolation which is by

no means necessary. Syllogistically, his argument could be put like this:

copied or compounded from

All ideas are divisible into corresponding sensory impressions;
Therefore, all ideas are derived from these corresponding
impressions, and,
All defects in sensory organs are accompanied by a corresponding
defect in ideas.
Therefore, all ideas are derived from sensory impressions.

Now these by no means follow. How can we say that derivation follows from divisibility or accompaniment? There is no necessary connection here. In fact, this is what Hume himself should be the first to admit. This is exactly his whole point, viz., that we can't prove "causality" from conjunction. And yet this is just exactly what he attempts to do here. In fact, he is asserting in the major premis/what he denies in the conclusion later on.

Therefore, with all of Hume's own, now self-incriminating, authority we reject his major premis/from which all of his other conclusions follow, and so to, we reject the validity of his entire system of epistemology and metaphysics which is based on it. Hence, since Hume has never really "proved" his case, he has never really "disproved" the case for theistic argumentation.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that he does have a good case of "circumstantial evidence". His explanation does seem to be very possible and/or probable even if it can be shown that it does not logically follow. Why is it that there is such a correspondence between impressions and ideas? This question gives Hume the distinction for setting a completely new direction which subsequent epistemology must travel. What are the alternatives to this problem and how shall we judge among them?

These questions are at once larger than our discussion permits, but it is necessary to note some possible alternatives and delineate

among them. First, we might note an alternative³⁷ which historically preceeded Hume and yet contains a possible answer. The reason for the correspondance between impressions and ideas being explicable in terms of a pre-established harmony of mind and matter so that a stimulus of the later is accompanied by a corresponding idea in the former without any causal relation between them which makes the idea a weak copy of the impression. For example, on the occasion of our sensory experience, the action occurs in the mind by means of some superintending principle as teleology or God. The difficulty with this alternative being the justification of ~~envoking~~ this other principle. It seems to assume what it must prove in order to answer Hume.

Another alternative³⁸, and one which seems to offer more ^{promise?} ~~probability~~ as an answer is that of an "intentional abstraction". That is, while admitting that all concepts in the mind are derived from the images of sensory things yet asserting that the mind by a transcendent act of intentionality abstracts all of the ~~sansible~~ characteristics from particular objects of sense and grasps the very reality of the thing in an intellectual and immaterial way. The concept of reality is a direct and more lively one than the impression and is more universal. Hence, by means of such an immediate contact with reality we can know with some degree of certainty. In this case the problem seems to be the justification of the act of abstraction and intentionability without envoking some principle yet to prove.

It is at this point that the most satisfying answer comes in. For it is noted that we must justify the very acts of reason itself

37. Cartesian Occasionalism or Leibnitzianism

38. Thomistic Scholasticism

*are Descartes & Leibniz
occasionalists? - in the
technical sense?*

before we can answer Hume. Otherwise, it seems that we are merely stating possible alternatives and no more. It was Kant who demonstrated that the intellect requires in all its operations a necessary condition as well as contingent impressions. That is, there is a necessary structure of the mind ^{YES! Created by God! Involuntary, unchangeable, and indestructible (eternal)} with which it comes to meaningless experience and which it impresses thereup to give us resulting ideas.

Finally, another alternative would be possible if we deny Hume his first and most basic distinction between impressions and ideas which we have allowed him thus far. This view considers Hume's atomistic sense datum theory to be invalid and insists that we are immersed in a flux of consciousness. We aren't searching for the real we are swimming in reality as it were. Ideas emerge by a process of discrimination, and are not mediated to us.

Though by no means exhaustive, these alternate positions are mentioned to show that Hume's "circumstantial evidence" isn't the only way to explain the facts of epistemology. The remaining questions are: which is the best way out, and how do we construct from this perspective a positive epistemology that gives us enough certitude to prove the existence of God?

It seems to me that the clue from Kant is the one that alleviates the apparent difficulty in constructing just such an epistemology. That is, we must begin with certain a priori determinations of knowledge. The form of rationality which the mind possesses even prior to experience is such that human thinking would be impossible without it and is necessarily what it is because of it. It is worthy of note again that we are not beging the question as to whether this structure of rationability is also the form of external reality. All we are attempting to demonstrate is that the very act of reason which, as we

shall attempt to show, includes causality and teleology is undeniable and that it is based on an analysis of human reason, not on custom or experience.

How can this be done? First because of the a priori necessity of the law of non-contradiction. All philosophers must accept this as the basic principle of thought from which all else follows or stop philosophizing since everything would be meaningless and absurd. This is apparent because the law cannot be denied without asserting it, and when it is explicitly denied it is at the same time implicitly affirmed. It is ~~that~~ with which all men must think if they are to think at all.

Not only is it that with which we think, but it is that to which we can trace two other principles with which all men think, viz., causality and teleology. In other words, to deny that there is purpose in thought or a sufficient reason (cause) for thought involves two things: 1) a self-contradiction and 2) a reductio ad absurdum. Therefore, the structure of human reason itself, that is, its very a priori determination includes these three undeniable principles.

First, to deny that there is any purpose in human reason is to assert that there is. Because the thought that there is no purpose is either purposeful or meaningless. If purposeful, it has implicitly proved what it has explicitly attempted to deny. If it is not purposeful ~~then it is meaningless and hence absurd~~. But it must be purposeful because it is determined to an end (which is a purpose) viz., that of denying purpose. Hence, teleology in thought cannot be denied.

The same can be said of the rational principle of causation. To assert that human thought is not caused is to say that reason does not have a sufficient reason or cause. It implicitly asserts what it expressly denies, viz., that reason does not have a reason for so

reasoning. If reason did not have a reason for reasoning, then why did it reason thusly? If it does, then it is asserting its own denial and hence contradicting itself.

Secondly, it is elucidating to see this argument in a chain form.³⁹ That is, to deny teleology leads to a denial of causation which when denied leads to a denial of the law of non-contradiction. For example, to deny that human thought is necessarily purposeful is to say that it is not necessarily purposeful. But if this is true, then thought is not being determined to a particular end. And if it is not being determined to any specific effect, then it is not being effected or caused. Hence, this is a denial of causality. But to deny causality is to say that it does not have any sufficient reason for its reasoning. But if it has no reason for its reasoning, then its reason is unreasonable. But this is a contradiction. Hence, to deny teleology and causation as principles of reason is reducible to the absurd.

For convenience we will outline this into a syllogism:

The law of non-contradiction as a principle of human reason is necessarily true.
But we can't deny teleology or causation without denying non-contradiction.
Therefore, teleology and causation are necessarily true as principles of human reasoning.

To put it another way, we are saying that it is impossible to think there is no purpose in thought without that very thought being a purposeful one. And likewise, it is absurd to reason there is no cause for human reasoning without a sufficient reason for that very cognition.

It will be noted that we are merely contending for what Hume contested and no more, viz., that there is only a psychological and

39. This is pointed out by Garrigrow La Grange in his book, The Nature and Existence of God, p. 209.

not logical necessity for the idea of causation etc. Hume said it was based on custom and we have endeavored to show it is based in the undeniable laws of logic and human reason. Whether or not this rationality is the same structure as reality is another question.⁴⁰

So in conclusion, we feel that the case against Hume is incisive both negatively and positively. First negatively for many reasons:

- 1) Because when his principles are consistently applied to our knowledge of historical events it is a reductio ad absurdum (Richard Whately).
- 2) Because the implications of his principles are reducible to "a radical and complete scepticism" (Flint).
- 3) Because much of Hume is either insincere or wrongheaded and self-contradictory (Taylor).
- 4) Because his treatment of miracles is based on a false concept of the laws of nature and involves a circular argument (C. S. Lewis).
- 5) That Hume's major premise is logically invalid and hence all of his arguments and conclusions are non sequitur.

Secondly, by a positive reconstruction of some kind of epistemology which shows the absolute necessity of the principles of causation and teleology such as Kant's or an a priori determination of knowledge as the laws of thought, it is demonstrably clear that there is a logical and necessary basis for the principles of causation and teleology.

It seems then that Hume's great serious contribution (whether intended or not) was to rid metaphysics of some excessive speculations and to reset the course in the epistemological field. The absurdity of his pure and consistent empiricism caused his successors to rethink the question and re-examine the premises and to seek diligently for

40. The author deals with this problem in a paper on Kant, The Critique of Kant's Pure Reason (about theistic argumentation).

an answer to the dilemma. The credit for this revived interest in epistemology goes to Hume. The question: "How do we know?" has been an important one ever since Hume and perhaps has never been sufficiently explicated yet. But at the same time it is not to be confused with another very similar question, viz., how do we know that we know? The latter is answered by the self-contradictions of any attempt to deny it and its inseparable connection with the absolutely indispensable law of non-contradiction. The former question properly concerns a theory of perception which is open to further research within the prescribed limits of rationality already demonstrated.

Either:

- 1) we can know, or
- 2) we have only high probability. So what?

And all our ~~image~~ of the world is mental anyway. "Truth" is simply "reality". It is the correspondence of the mental image to it that is important. And we ~~have~~ do commit ourselves to some image, necessarily. All we can do is keep refining it, the best we can.

There is no such thing as perceiving and believing and doing nothing. At all times, a de facto perceiving, belief action, and method of approach to all of them, is in force. Our only task, then, performer, is to utilize the involuntary powers that we have, the best that we can. What we try to do, then, is to determine whether or not our course is leading to pain or pleasure, and whether or not the course can be altered. The real nature of the human enterprise, then, is hermeneutical: interpretation of experience.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Flint, Robert. Agnosticism, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.
- Garrigou-Lagrange, R. God, His Existence and His Nature, from 5th French edition by Dom Bede Rose...St. Louis, Mo. and London, B. Herder Book Co., 1934, 1949.
- Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Oxford, Claredon Press, 1894 (reprint of 1777 edition).
- Hume, David. Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, edited by Norman Kemp Smith, Oxford, The Claredon Press, 1935.
- Lewis, C. S. Miracles, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1947.
- Taylor, A. E. Philosophical Studies, Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1934.
- Whateley, Richard. Famous Pamphlets, George Routledge and Sons, Limited, London, Second Edition, Introduction by Henry Morley. Chapter entitled Historical Doubts Concerning the Existence of Napoleon Bounaparte.