# The Role of Naturalistic Explanation

# in Hume's Critique of Religious Belief

# By

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Notes

References to Hume's works are as follows: For *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I cite book, part, section, paragraph number from the Clarendon edition (Hume (2000b)), followed by the page number from the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition (Hume (1978)). For example (T 2.3.9.3; 438). For the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, I cite the section number, followed by the page number from the Gaskin edition (Hume (1993)), followed by the page number from the Kemp Smith edition (Hume (1947)). For example (DNR X; 95; 193). For the *Natural History of Religion*, I cite the section and paragraph number from the Clarendon edition (Hume (2007)), followed by the page number from the Gaskin edition (Hume (1993)). For example (NHR 1.3; 135). For *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, I cite the section, part, paragraph number from the Clarendon edition (Hume (2000a). For example (EHU 4.1.5).

ABSTRACT


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Before the pioneering work of Norman Kemp Smith, most Hume scholars read him as a thoroughgoing skeptic. The dominant view today is that, for Hume, 'natural beliefs'—paradigmatically, beliefs based on induction—are warranted in virtue of features of the psychological mechanisms that produce them; moreover, Hume would endorse a suitable naturalistic theory of warrant to sustain this position. I survey four naturalistic interpretations of Hume's epistemology: Kemp Smith's theory, proper-function theory, stability theory, and reliabilism. I do not argue for one of these interpretations over the others; instead, I focus on what they have in common: Hume provides a naturalistic response to any generalized skepticism.

From within this broad interpretive framework, some commentators argue that Hume would extend the class of 'natural beliefs' to religious belief. The bulk of the evidence supporting this position is derived from the *Dialogues*; in particular,

commentators argue that, instead of being supported by the argument from design, there is a natural propensity that causes one to form the belief in an intelligent designer upon noticing the order and regularity in the world.

I argue that the evidence is insufficient to support the claim that, according to Hume, religious belief is a 'natural belief'. I examine Hume's *Natural History*, where he provides an account of the origin of religious belief, in conjunction with his epistemological observations about various belief-forming mechanisms in the *Treatise*. I show that, no matter which theory of naturalistic epistemology best fits Hume's own, religious belief is not warranted naturalistically. Furthermore, I argue that on Hume's view, polytheism, while still unwarranted, is epistemically superior to monotheism.

I conclude that, for Hume, the psychological explanation of religious belief, in conjunction with the fact that religious belief cannot be warranted on the basis of any evidence or *a priori* or *a posteriori* argument, provides grounds to reject all forms of religious belief. The *Natural History* is best read as an important piece of a larger destructive project which has as its goal showing that religious belief is not warranted by any means—through reason or experience, by revelation, or by its naturalistic explanation.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1.    Two Questions

> As every enquiry, which regards religion, is of the utmost importance, there are
> two questions in particular, which challenge our attention, to wit, that concerning
> its foundation in reason, and that concerning its origin in human nature. (NHR
> Introduction.1; 134)

Hume begins *The Natural History of Religion*, and with the simple stroke of a pen,
divides the study of religion into two branches. In so doing, Hume makes a distinction
between the reasons supporting religious beliefs and the causes of them. On the one hand,
he allows for the examination of philosophical arguments which concern God's existence
and nature. The study of such arguments is commonly called "natural religion," or, more
accurately, "natural theology."[1] On the other hand, Hume allows for an enquiry into the
causes of the various religious beliefs and practices that arise in different societies.
Presumably, each of these sets of questions can be considered independently: in
explaining the causal processes by which a particular person or culture has come to hold

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[1] Hume used these terms synonymously (see, for example, the *Dialogues*, where Pamphilus uses both terms
(DNR Introduction.5; 30 and DNR 1.1; 32). However, more recently, the term "natural theology" has been
differentiated to include the study of arguments for the existence of God that can be understood without the
aid of revelation, whereas the term "natural religion" requires an additional belief that the truths knowable
by natural reason alone are sufficient for salvation (or would have been sufficient were original sin not an
issue). (For a further discussion of these issues see the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* articles on
Natural Religion and Philosophy of Religion (ed. Robert Audi, Cambridge, 1995).

certain religious beliefs, it is not necessary to make any claims regarding the truth or epistemic status (whether the belief is warranted or not) of those beliefs; in examining the arguments for and against them, it is not necessary to determine the psychological causes of religious belief.

The bifurcation of the field was particularly important to Hume's immediate successors, since it allowed them to avoid tensions that arose in light of the fact that even though the basic tenets of Christianity were supposedly knowable by all men with the capacity to reason, many societies (both ancient and those located in other parts of the world) not only believed a different set of religious doctrines, but also held beliefs that directly contradicted the basic tenets of Christianity (e.g., the claim that there are multiple gods). The division of the study of religion gave them an opportunity to make meaningful claims about, in particular, the origin of non-Christian beliefs without considering how to reconcile their findings with traditional biblical claims of the origin of religion or any claims of natural theology.

Indeed in the *Natural History*, Hume himself takes advantage of this division. He says, "happily, the first question, which is the most important, admits of the most obvious, at least, the clearest solution…But the other question, concerning the origin of religion in human nature, is exposed to some more difficulty" (NHR Introduction.1; 134). He claims that in the *Natural History*, he will not examine the first question, but will instead direct his attention to the second. He states, "what those principles are, which give rise to the original belief, and what those accidents and causes are, which direct its operation, is the subject of our present enquiry (NHR Introduction.1; 134).

It is important to note, however, that Hume devotes a considerable amount of effort to answering the first question as well. In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* as well as in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume rejects all *a priori* arguments in support of what he calls "matters of fact"—truths of which the opposite are conceivable.[2] For Hume, *a priori* arguments for God's existence, such as the ontological argument, are rejected on the grounds that they supposedly prove a "matter of fact" (that God exists) from premises known by reason alone.[3] He devotes an entire work—*The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*—to a discussion of, among other things, the argument from design—one of the two traditional *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence.[4] He also discusses other issues pertaining to religion—miracles and particular providence—in sections X and XI of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

It might seem that Hume treats the two questions concerning religion—its foundation in reason and its origins in human nature—separately, by examining the causes of religious beliefs in complete isolation from questions about their foundation in reason. Though it is possible to make claims about the origin of various religious beliefs without evaluating their epistemic status, I maintain that Hume does not intend to undertake this kind of enquiry in the *Natural History*. Despite appearances, Hume takes the causal history of beliefs to bear on questions of warrant. I argue that the causal explanation for religious belief Hume details in the *Natural History* has important epistemic consequences. Further, I argue that, for Hume, knowing the causes of religious belief provides reason to reject religious belief, so long as we know that religious belief

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[2] See EHU 4.1.6ff. and also T 1.3.1.1ff.; 69ff.
[3] See Section 3.4 for my exegesis of Hume's argument.
[4] The other is the cosmological argument, which Hume briefly argues against in Part IX of the *Dialogues*.

cannot be warranted on the basis of any evidence or *a priori* or *a posteriori* argument. Thus, I conclude that, taken in conjunction with Hume's other works on religion, the *Natural History* is best read as an important piece of a larger destructive project which has as its goal showing that the belief in God is not justified by any means—through reason or experience, by revelation, or by its naturalistic explanation.

1.2.     The Prima Facie Interpretation of *The Natural History of Religion*

If we take Hume's statement of purpose in the Introduction of the *Natural History* at face value, it seems that the *Natural History* is best understood as a work which concerns only Hume's second question—concerning religion's origin in human nature. Hume devotes the first nine sections of that work to a thorough investigation into the origin of religious belief. He describes what he thinks are the psychological mechanisms responsible for various forms of religious belief, including polytheism and monotheism. Moreover, he details the conditions (within individuals' psychologies, in society, and in the natural world) that are involved in the formation of religious beliefs. Whatever implications Hume's naturalistic explanation of religious belief might have, there is no doubt that, in the *Natural History*, he spends considerable effort in examining the origin of religious belief in human nature.

The best evidence to support an interpretation of the *Natural History* as a work which is purely (or at least primarily) explanatory, and which does not purport to make claims about the epistemic status of any particular religious beliefs, is Hume's own declarations of the work's intent. In the Introduction, he divides the study of religion into two questions, and claims to focus solely on the second—religion's origin in human

nature—stating that the answer to the first question—religion's foundation in reason—is easily answered. However, it is not obvious that the first question, concerning religion's foundation in reason, is so easily answered on the basis of Hume's statements on this question. In the Introduction to the *Natural History*, Hume states that "the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion" (NHR Introduction.1; 134). Besides Hume's introductory comment, there are several other places in the *Natural History* at which he seems to indicate support for the argument from design. It might appear that, for Hume, the reason why there is no need to question religion's foundation in reason is because the teleological argument is sound. Yet, the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, along with Hume's other writings about religion, at least according to many interpretations, sounds a different tune.

Although a full analysis of Hume's work on the first question concerning religion is beyond the scope of this dissertation, in Section 3.4, I argue that, for Hume, religious belief is not warranted on the basis of any evidence or arguments in its favor. Because it is a "matter of fact," religious belief cannot be warranted on the basis of any *a priori* argument. In the essay *On Miracles*, Hume argues that religious belief cannot legitimately be based on revelation in the form of testimony of miracles. The *Dialogues* provides numerous forceful objections against *a posteriori* arguments supporting religious belief, especially the argument from design. Whereas Hume, in the *Natural History*, seems to indicate that the teleological argument is sound, in the *Dialogues*, Philo, the character who best represents Hume (insofar as he employs typical Humean

arguments, in particular, regarding inductive inference), concludes that, at best, the design argument results in a belief so vacuous that it cannot be considered religious belief at all.[5] It is not the case that, according to Hume's arguments in the *Dialogues*, religious belief is so obviously justified that "no rational enquirer can suspend his belief."

Moreover, Hume found it quite difficult to publish the *Dialogues*—he was never successful in this during his lifetime, and though he attempted to leave the fate of the *Dialogues* in the hands of Adam Smith, to whom he left the manuscript in his will, Smith advised against its publication. As a provision, Hume stated that if it had not been published two and a half years after his death, it should be given to his nephew who should publish it as Hume's last request. Still, when the work was finally published posthumously by Hume's nephew, it did not have a publisher's name on the volume.[6] This is a testament not only to the controversial claims made in the *Dialogues*, but also to the fact that Hume himself was aware that his contemporary readers (especially the Scottish clergy who opposed his writings and person vehemently throughout his lifetime) would find his conclusions in the work subversive.

Thus, there are considered reasons for believing that Hume's statements which seem to support the argument from design are not sincere. Hume does not think that religious belief can be warranted on the basis of the teleological argument, or any other argument *a priori* or *a posteriori*. It can seem uncharitable to claim that Hume is not being truthful in his apparent statements of approval of the teleological argument. But, one must remember that Hume wrote in a time at which being an atheist could result in

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[5] I argue for this in Section 3.6.2.
[6] From Gaskin's Introduction (Hume (1993) xi ff.).

exile or death. Besides the difficulty Hume had in publishing the *Dialogues*, according to Gaskin:

> He [Hume] was twice rejected for professorial chairs at Scottish universities on account of his 'infidelity,' and was on several occasions threatened with ostracization or even prosecution on account of his publications despite his evident care to keep his most critical views at several removes from himself. (Note the reported views of the Epicurean in Section XI of the *Enquiry*, and the literary form of the *Dialogues* which distances what is said from the author.) (Hume (1993) xiii)

Hume, in his more critical pieces regarding religion, did not present himself as the clear author. As Gaskin notes, the *Dialogues* are in dialogue form, with none of the characters being Hume himself; moreover, several of the characters are supporters of various religious beliefs. In his essay "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State" in the first *Enquiry*, he presents the negative conclusions about particular providence as the position of Epicurus, not himself.

Further, Hume was a suspected atheist, as is evidenced by not only the fact that he was rejected twice for professional positions, but also insofar as he was threatened for his supposed infidelity. While religious persecution was not as vehement as it had once been, the threat of prosecution was not empty. Russell, for example, explains:

> It should not be forgotten that in 1697, just a few decades before the *Treatise* was published, a young Edinburgh student named Thomas Aikenhead was hanged for ridiculing the doctrine of the Trinity…When Hume published the *Treatise*,

considerable caution or 'prudence' was still called for regarding an attack on the

Christian Religion. (Russell (1988) 263n52)

Hume was well aware of the issues surrounding free expression of, in particular, anti-religious views. The *Natural History* was first published as one of four papers in a volume entitled *Four Dissertations*. The dedication to that volume (the only dedication Hume ever wrote) includes the following passage:

> Another instance of true liberty, of which antient [sic] times can alone afford us an example, is the liberty of thought, which engaged men of letters, however different in their abstract opinions, to maintain a mutual friendship and regard; and never to quarrel about principles, while they agreed in inclinations and manners. Science was often the subject of disputation, never of animosity. Cicero, an academic, addressed his philosophical treatises, sometimes to Brutus, a stoic; sometimes to Atticus, an epicurean.[7]

Falkenstein argues that since the dedication is to John Home, "a minister who had caused a scandal for having had a play produced on the Edinburg stage," and given that "the preface laments the lack of free speech in Scotland," it "might be taken to suggest that its author did not feel himself able to speak frankly on the matters up for treatment in the attached volume" (Falkenstein (2003) 16-17). It seems that, as Falkenstein argues, Hume was not able to fully express his views about religion. The fact that Hume attends to free speech issues in the dedication strongly suggests that he was cognizant of the reality that

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[7] Hume, David, *Four Dissertations*, London: A. Millar, 1757; reprinted in facsimile (New York: Garland, 1970) and also quoted in Falkenstein (2003) 17.

he could not freely endorse negative conclusions about the warrant of (especially Christian) religious belief.

Just because Hume may not be sincere in all of his comments about the warrant of religious belief, especially those in the *Natural History*, we should not take everything he says in the introduction as mere posturing. In the *Natural History*, he *does* offer a psychological explanation for religious belief. Religious belief is extremely widespread; it is plausible that Hume felt compelled to provide an explanation of the existence of religious belief in light of the fact that he thought its truth is not well-supported by experience or arguments of any kind. In the *Natural History*, Hume provides a psychological explanation not only for religious belief typically associated with the design argument (a 'philosophical' conception of a single, intelligent designer), but also for other religious beliefs, such as polytheism, and a popular or anthropomorphized form of theism. Regardless of the status of religious belief as potentially justified by the teleological argument, an explanation for these other beliefs still warrants discussion.

I argue in Section 3.10, though, that just because Hume has good reason to provide an explanation for various religious beliefs, this does not require that his purposes in the *Natural History* are limited to providing a psychological explanation that is epistemologically neutral. After all, Hume often employs naturalistic or psychological explanations for beliefs which he argues are not justified through reason or experience. As I argue in Chapter 3, these explanations bear on justification, from Hume's point of view.

## 1.3.    Hume's Naturalism

It may not surprise readers to learn that Hume was, at the very least, skeptical about religious belief. After all, Hume is often interpreted as a thorough-going skeptic. He is perhaps most famous for his attacks on inductive inference, found in both the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*.[8] I detail arguments for a skeptical interpretation of Hume in Section 2.2.

But, perhaps the predominant view today is that Hume is not a thorough-going skeptic. Rather, he holds that 'natural beliefs'—paradigmatically, inductive beliefs—are warranted in virtue of features of the mechanisms that produce them, and he would endorse a suitable naturalistic theory of warrant to sustain this position. In Section 2.3, I argue against the skeptical interpretation of Hume and in favor of the plausibility of a naturalistic interpretation. I survey evidence from the *Treatise*, where Hume indicates that beliefs based on causal inference have positive epistemic status. Moreover, I note that the warrant of the 'natural beliefs' depends on the psychological mechanisms which cause them; however, commentators disagree about the precise criteria for 'natural beliefhood.' In Chapter 2, I survey four possible naturalistic interpretations of Hume's epistemology: Kemp Smith's original theory of 'natural belief', proper-function theory, stability theory, and reliabilism, though I do not argue for one of these interpretations over the other—each theory has some evidence in its favor, along with some interpretive difficulties. Instead, I focus on what the various theories have in common: Hume provides a naturalistic response to any generalized skepticism.

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[8] T 1.2.2ff., and also T 1.2.6 and EHU 4.

From within this broad interpretive framework, some, including Butler, Hurlbutt, Tweyman, Reich, Harris, Penelhum, and Prado, argue that Hume would extend the class of 'natural beliefs' to religious belief. In Chapter 3, I examine the evidence for the view that Hume's naturalism comes to the aid of religious belief. These interpreters use comments Hume makes in the *Natural History*, where he seems to endorse religious belief, to support their position; however, the bulk of the evidence is derived from the *Dialogues*. In particular, commentators argue that, instead of being supported by the argument from design, the belief in intelligent design is caused by a natural propensity which leads one to form the belief in a designer upon noticing the order and regularity in the world.

I claim that Hume denies that religious belief, of any form, is a 'natural belief'. In Chapter 3, I argue that the evidence from Hume's apparent endorsements of religious belief in the *Natural History* and the *Dialogues* is insufficient to support the claim that, according to Hume, religious belief is a 'natural belief'. Moreover, in Section 4.6, I show that, according to Hume, religious belief is not based on a natural propensity to believe in a designer. In order to determine whether religious belief is caused by a psychological mechanism which lends warrant to belief, I claim that we must examine Hume's discussion of the genesis of religious belief, found in the *Natural History*.

1.4.    The *Natural History*: Epistemic Consequences

In the *Natural History*, Hume provides an explanation of the causes of religious belief. While it might be argued that Hume's account is merely explanatory, I maintain that it has epistemic consequences. For one, I argue that his account shows that, contrary to some interpretations, religious belief is not among the 'natural beliefs.' Moreover, I

conclude that, for Hume, the psychological explanation of religious belief detailed in the *Natural History*, in conjunction with Hume's other works on religion, provides grounds to reject all forms of religious belief.

In the *Natural History*, Hume claims that religious belief is founded on various psychological propensities of the imagination, in conditions where man finds himself ignorant and anxious about his future. He argues that, in its first occurrence, religious belief is the result of the apparent disorder in nature. In Sections 4.2, 4.4, and 4.5, I detail Hume's account of religious belief. I examine his description of the psychological mechanisms responsible for religious belief in conjunction with his epistemological observations about various belief-forming mechanisms in the *Treatise.* I argue that the mechanisms that generate polytheism do not meet Hume's epistemic approval. I conclude that, no matter which theory of naturalistic epistemology best fits Hume's own, religious belief is not warranted naturalistically. What is more, I claim that Hume maintains that monotheism is epistemically inferior to polytheism.

Some commentators, such as Falkenstein and Costelloe, argue that Hume's account of the causes of religious belief in the *Natural History* only provides an explanation of false or superstitious forms of religious belief, leaving room for a 'genuine theism' which is unhindered by its psychological causes. In Section 5.2, I argue against this view, claiming that in the *Natural History*, Hume provides a causal explanation for all forms of religious belief. I conclude that since the causes of religious belief are psychological propensities of the imagination which are problematic, for Hume, we have reason to reject (not just suspend) any and all religious belief.

Chapter 2

A Naturalistic Interpretation of Hume's Epistemology


2.1.    Introduction

David Hume is generally considered to be a purely negative philosopher—the arch sceptic whose primary aim and achievement was to reduce the theories of his empiricist predecessors to the absurdity that was implicitly contained in them all along. (Stroud (1977) 1)

When Stroud wrote in 1977, a negative reading of Hume was standard. Commentators of Hume, both his contemporaries and ours, read him as a skeptic, both globally, and on more particular issues (especially about beliefs based on induction). Perhaps the predominant view today is that Hume is not a thorough-going skeptic. Rather, commentators argue that Hume holds that 'natural beliefs'—paradigmatically, inductive beliefs—are warranted in virtue of features of the mechanisms that produce them, and he would endorse a suitable naturalistic theory of justification to sustain this position. A naturalistic interpretation of Hume's philosophy began in 1905 with the publication of Kemp Smith's groundbreaking articles, "The Naturalism of Hume I and II."[9] This type of interpretation of Hume gained new emphasis in the 1970s in the work of Stroud and numerous others, and remains dominant today.

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[9] Kemp Smith (1905 I and II).

In this chapter, I argue for a naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology. According to this view, Hume thinks that some beliefs have positive epistemic status, despite the fact that Hume employs numerous skeptical arguments against them. While commentators differ on how to describe beliefs which possess positive epistemic status, I will call them *warranted,* following Plantinga who introduced the term as a "name for that property—or better, *quantity*—enough of which is what makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief" (Plantinga (2000) xi).

I argue that, according to Hume, these beliefs are warranted naturalistically. Loeb characterizes this position as follows:

> Hume holds that the justificatory status of a belief depends on non-epistemic facts (facts that can be characterized without utilizing such notions as 'knowledge', 'justification', and 'evidence') about either beliefs or the processes or mechanisms that generate or sustain beliefs. Naturalism, or a naturalistic theory of justification, taken in this sense discriminates among beliefs with respect to their justifiedness, with reference to non-epistemic facts (and more generally non-normative facts) about the beliefs or the mechanisms that produce them. (Loeb (2002) 21)

While Hume clearly believes that some beliefs are warranted naturalistically, he is less clear about what features of beliefs or belief-forming mechanisms provide warrant. Commentators disagree about what is the best naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology, but the most promising views are found in proper-function theory, stability theory, and reliabilism. Following my argument supporting a naturalistic interpretation, I provide summaries of each of these views, beginning with the account of Kemp Smith,

the predecessor to any contemporary naturalistic interpretation. Instead of arguing for one of these views over another, I focus on what they have in common: for Hume, some beliefs which are not justified on the basis of any evidence or arguments are still warranted on the basis of the psychological mechanisms which produce them.

## 2.2.    A Skeptical Interpretation

Hume gained fame, or notoriety, for many claims, but his arguments against the justification of beliefs based on induction would be high on anyone's list of controversial Humean claims. Hume first published these arguments in his *Treatise of Human Nature,* and revisited them in the first *Enquiry.* While there are differences between the arguments in these two texts, that is of little concern for my purposes here. Traditionally, Hume's readers have taken him to be a skeptic, not just about the existence of miracles or divine providence, but even about inductive inference and the continued existence of external objects. What is more, some interpreters claim that Hume is a global skeptic—as holding the view that humans have no (or very little) knowledge.

Hume's own contemporaries began this interpretive tradition.  Although his contemporaries compared him to the other empiricists (notably Locke and Berkeley) insofar as he began with similar empiricist claims, they thought Hume to have reached far different conclusions—destructive conclusions which showed the limits of reason, especially in the metaphysical sphere. His contemporary readers claimed that Hume's most important theses were those which demonstrated what we cannot know (e.g., causal claims, claims about "matters of fact", etc.). Thomas Reid, for example, frames his discussion of causation around responding to Hume's negative conclusions about our

knowledge of necessary connection. Reid not only interprets Hume as a skeptic about causation, but also sees Hume as a global skeptic. He contends, "the ingenious author of that treatise, upon the principles of Locke, who was no sceptic, hath built a system of scepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather than its contrary" (Reid (1997) 3-4).

This tradition continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In fact, as Kemp Smith observes, the editor of the only generally obtainable reprint of the *Treatise* available until 1888, "takes the opening sections of the *Treatise* as an adequate statement of Hume's central position, and accordingly regards a scepticism of an extreme self-destructive type as being their sole legitimate outcome" (Kemp Smith (1941) 7). Furthermore, this position is still alive among contemporary interpreters of Hume.[10]

It is not surprising that many astute commentators read Hume as a skeptic about causal inference. In the *Treatise,* Hume stresses that the vast majority of our beliefs about "matters of fact"—excepting those which concern the objects of our immediate sense perceptions—are based on the relation of cause and effect. According to Hume, I believe that my friend is in France because I have received a postcard from him; I believe that when I strike the eight ball with the cue ball at the appropriate angle, the eight ball will sink into the corner pocket; and upon seeing ashes smoldering in the fireplace, I believe that there was a fire burning there earlier.

Each of these beliefs, and numerous others like them, is founded on what we now call induction: on the basis of my past experiences, I form a belief in the cause

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[10] See, for example, Meeker (1998), Popkin (1951), and Stove "The Nature of Hume's Skepticism" in Norton, Capaldi, and Robison, eds. (1976).

immediately after experiencing the effect to which it is constantly conjoined (or, similarly, I form the belief in the effect after experiencing the cause). For example, I have seen many fires, and in each of those cases, after some time passed, I found smoldering ashes where the fire once was ablaze. Thus, upon seeing some ashes in the pit, I believe that earlier, the pit contained a fire. Hume argues that inductive beliefs cannot be warranted either by *a priori* reasoning or by non-circular arguments based on experience.

There are several passages, especially in *Treatise* 1.3.6, that support a skeptical interpretation. For example, toward the end of that section, Hume concludes:

Thus not only our reason fails us in the discovery of the ultimate connexion of causes and effects, but even after experience has inform'd us of their constant conjunction, 'tis impossible for us to satisfy ourselves by our reason, why we shou'd extend that experience beyond those particular instances, which have fallen under our observation. We suppose, but are never able to prove, that there must be a resemblance betwixt those object, of which we have had experience, and those which lie beyond the reach of our discovery. (T 1.3.6.11; 91-92)

This passage is just one example in which commentators read Hume as endorsing negative conclusions regarding causation: reason (or experience, for that matter) cannot demonstrate a necessary connection between cause and effect. Moreover, reason does not license us to make inferences based on past experience of constant conjunction. There are similar passages that support a reading of Hume as a skeptic about the continued existence of external objects. For example, Hume claims, "the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and

by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity" (T 1.4.2.1; 187).

Hume draws negative conclusions about both our knowledge of the metaphysical connection between cause and effect and also about the justification of our beliefs based on induction and about external objects. Some commentators, both historical and contemporary, use these conclusions, along with other observations, to argue that Hume is not just a skeptic about particular issues, but is a global skeptic. While Hume may admit that we have very limited knowledge based on *a priori* reasoning, this knowledge is limited to the relations among ideas: mathematical claims, definitions, etc. He claims that all of our knowledge of "matters of fact" must be based on the relation of cause and effect (T 1.3.2.2; 73-74). Granting Hume's negative conclusions about beliefs based on induction, it is simple to conclude that Hume believes we have no knowledge of "matters of fact," excepting those beliefs which are based on immediate sense perception (such as the belief that there is a computer in front of me right now).

Supporters of the global-skeptical interpretation also find support for their position in *Treatise* Book I, Part IV, Section I, where Hume casts doubt on all the deliverances of the faculty of reason. He concludes:

> When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider the objects concerning which I reason; and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence. (T 1.4.1.6; 183)

In the Conclusion to Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume describes the position he finds himself in after examining the fruits of his labors:

> I have expos'd myself to the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians; and can I wonder at the insults I must suffer? I have delcar'd my dis-approbation of their systems; and can I be surprised if they shou'd express a hatred of mine and of my person? When I look abroad, I foresee on every side, dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. (T 1.4.7.1; 264)

He exclaims, "I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another" (T 1.4.7.8; 268-69).

From just the small sample of evidence above, it is easy to see why Hume is treated as a purely negative philosopher. According to those passages, he believes that our most important beliefs—the belief that there are objects in the world which have a continued and distinct existence from our perceiving them and the belief that these objects interact causally with each other—are not justified directly by our observation, nor by arguments which rely on our experience, nor by any other kind of philosophical arguments (such as *a priori* arguments). The faculty of reason itself is suspect, and perhaps cannot be trusted to produce knowledge. At the end of Book I, Hume declares that he is ready to reject all of his beliefs. It is no surprise, then, that readers of Hume conclude that he is a radical skeptic: Hume believes that the vast majority of our beliefs are not warranted at all.

2.3.    Toward a Naturalistic Interpretation

The skeptical reading of Hume was the standard until Norman Kemp Smith challenged it in "The Naturalism of Hume I and II."[11] In these articles, he argues that Hume should not be interpreted as a skeptic. While Kemp Smith agrees that Hume believes that "we cannot *by means of reason* explain any of the ultimate characteristics of our experience—the origin of our sensations, the true 'secret' nature of causal connexion, apprehension of external reality, appreciation of beauty, judgment of an action as good or bad," he argues that there are certain beliefs which "can be shown to be 'natural', 'inevitable,' 'indispensable,' and are thus removed beyond the reach of our sceptical doubts" (Kemp Smith (1905 I) 152). Kemp Smith calls these the 'natural beliefs.'

Much of the secondary literature tends to follow the spirit of Kemp Smith's interpretation, insofar as commentators argue that beliefs can, for Hume, be warranted naturalistically.[12] The members of this tradition hold the view that there are some beliefs, including beliefs based on induction, which although they are not justifiable by a *priori* reasoning or by non question-begging arguments based on experience, still have a positive epistemic status according to Hume.

There is abundant textual support for a non-skeptical reading of Hume. The most important evidence is found in the *Treatise,* where Hume often refers to beliefs based on causal inference in such a way as to indicate that they have a positive epistemic status. Before the main arguments concerning induction in Book I, Part II, Section VI, Hume

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[11] Kemp Smith (1905a and b).

[12] This view has been expressed in some form by, to name a few: Arnold (1983), Beauchamp & Mappes (1975), Beauchamp & Rosenberg (1981), Broughton (1983), Connon (1976), Fogelin (1985), Lenz (1958), Loeb (2002), Schmitt (1992), Spector (2003), Winters (1979), Wolterstorff (1996).

claims that "the relation of cause and effect" is the only relation that allows us to "go beyond what is immediately present to the senses, either to *discover* the real existence or the relations of objects" (T 1.3.2.2; 73, emphasis added). He says that the relation of causation "*informs* us of existences and objects which we do not see or feel" (T 1.3.2.3; 74, emphasis added). Within Section VI, he claims that the relation of causation "'tis the only one, on which we can found a *just* inference from one object to another" (T 1.3.6.7; 89, emphasis added). After Section VI, he not only refers to inductive inference as a "true species of reasoning" (T 1.3.7.5 n20; 97), but also states, "A person, who stops short in his journey upon meeting a river in his way, *foresees* the consequences of his proceeding forward; and his *knowledge* of these consequences is convey'd to him by past experience, which *informs* him of such certain conjunctions of causes and effects" (T 1.3.8.13; 103, emphasis added). Finally, Hume claims, "one who concludes somebody to be near him, when he hears an articulate voice in the dark, reasons *justly* and naturally" (T 1.4.4.1; 225, emphasis added). Throughout Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume uses language which indicates that he thinks that beliefs based on induction are warranted.

The non-skeptical reading is also supported by Hume's overall project in the *Treatise*. The complete title of the *Treatise* is: *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. Hume's self-stated goal is to use inductive reasoning to develop the science of man, and he frequently employs the experimental method to reach his conclusions. It would be surprising if, at the beginning of the *Treatise*, Hume showed that beliefs based on induction were not warranted, given that his goal is to convince his audience that his views of the mind and of morality are correct.

Finally, there is additional evidence in Hume's discussion of probability (T 1.3.11-13; 124ff.). Hume indicates that some inductive inferences are epistemically superior to others. He claims that inductive reasoning based on numerous observations of constant conjunction is "allow'd to be [a] reasonable foundation of belief and opinion" (T 1.3.13.1; 143), while other kinds of reasoning—"unphilosophical probability"—"are deriv'd from the same principles, tho' they have not had the good fortune to obtain the same sanction" (T 1.3.13.1; 143). Hume proceeds to explicate a system of rules "by which to judge of causes and effects" (T 1.3.15; 173ff), explaining that "since therefore 'tis possible for all objects to become causes or effects to each other, it may be proper to fix some general rules, by which we may *know* when they really are so" (T 1.3.15.2; 173). Because Hume believes that he can systematically make epistemic distinctions among beliefs based on induction, it is clear that he does not think all inductive beliefs are not warranted at all.[13]

From the evidence above, it is not clear *why* Hume thinks beliefs based on induction are warranted, but he does provide some clues. Immediately following the arguments about induction, he declares, "thus tho' causation be a *philosophical* relation, as implying contiguity, succession, and constant conjunction, yet 'tis only so far as it is a *natural* relation, and produces an union among our ideas, that we are able to reason upon it, or draw any inference from it" (T 1.3.6.16; 94). It is because of the naturalness of beliefs based on induction that Hume deems them warranted. However, Hume later argues that while some psychological mechanisms confer warrant on our beliefs, others do not. He declares:

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[13] Beauchamp & Mappes (1975) argue this point at 125ff .

I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are received by philosophy, and the latter rejected. (T 1.3.4.1; 225)

Whether or not a belief is warranted by the psychological mechanisms which cause it depends on certain crucial features of those mechanisms.

There is, however, much disagreement about which features of psychological mechanisms are epistemically relevant. One fairly obvious way to interpret the term 'natural belief' is a belief which has natural causes. Yet, this interpretation will not suffice. In the *Treatise*, Hume often explains the origins of beliefs of which he clearly does not approve; for example, he claims that superstition of every kind "arises naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind" (T 1.4.7.13; 271). It seems possible to explain the origin of *any* belief in terms of certain natural psychological mechanisms; all beliefs are, in the sense of having natural causes, 'natural'.

Kemp Smith argues that beliefs based on induction are warranted because they are caused by propensities of the imagination which are irresistible, universal, and

inevitable—one cannot help but hold these beliefs, despite the existence of numerous skeptical arguments against them. Some commentators prefer a proper-function analysis—beliefs based on induction are warranted because they are the result of properly functioning cognitive mechanisms aimed at truth formation.[14] Others argue that beliefs which are produced by mechanisms which tend to produce stability in belief have positive epistemic status.[15] Still others argue that beliefs are justified if they are produced by mechanisms which are reliable in that they tend to produce true beliefs.[16]

All of these interpreters have one thing in common: each views Hume's project in the *Treatise* as not simply a destructive attack on the principles held by his predecessors, but as a positive construction of a new theory of knowledge—a theory which attempts to provide an alternative method of normatively evaluating the epistemic status of our beliefs. Following this kind of interpretation, one can see why Hume is not a skeptic. In the following sections, I examine each of these interpretations in turn. First, though, I believe it is necessary to look at the roots of the naturalistic interpretation tradition as found in Kemp Smith's work.

## 2.4.    Kemp Smith

The naturalistic interpretation of Hume's philosophy began with the publication of "The Naturalism of Hume I and II."[17] In these articles, Kemp Smith argues that "the establishment of a purely naturalistic conception of human nature by the thorough

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[14] Spector (2003), Wolterstorff (1996).
[15] Loeb (2002), Williams (2004).
[16] Beebee (2006), Schmitt (1992).

[17] Kemp Smith (1905a and b). For the remainder of this section, I will abbreviate Kemp Smith as KS.

subordination of reason to feeling and instinct is the determining factor in Hume's philosophy" (KS (1905a) 150). Here he first presents the discussion of 'natural beliefs.'

Though Kemp Smith's first coining of the term 'natural belief' occurs in the 1905 *Mind* articles, his 1941 book, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, expresses a more complete statement of his general thesis. In the *Mind* articles, Kemp Smith argues that Hume is a naturalist: that nature plays a central role in Hume's philosophy insofar as it provides the criteria for which some of our most important beliefs can be saved from skeptical doubt. According to Kemp Smith, "what is central in Hume's philosophy is his contention that reason 'is and ought only to be' the servant of the 'passions'" (KS (1941) v). In the *Mind* articles, he argues that according to Hume there are some beliefs which, despite the fact that they are not justified by reason, but because they are sanctioned by nature, are nonetheless warranted.

However, in *The Philosophy of David Hume*, Kemp Smith makes an addition to his interpretation in the *Mind* articles. He claims that "it was through the gateway of morals that Hume entered into his philosophy, and that, as a consequence of this, Books II and III of the *Treatise* are in date of first composition prior to the working out of the doctrines dealt with in Book I" (KS (1941) vi). Although Kemp Smith does provide some evidence for this claim, he is not concerned with the "many historical questions that can be endlessly discussed in regard to influences and origins" (KS (1941) vii). Instead, he argues that his interpretation will be valuable insofar as it "is genuinely of assistance in the critical study of Hume's central doctrines, as enabling us to understand better what these doctrines precisely are, and how far Hume's arguments in support of them can, or cannot, be allowed to be philosophically cogent" (KS (1941) vii).

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What Kemp Smith hopes to show, by way of the claim that Hume first composed Book II and III, is that Hume's moral views strongly influence his epistemological views as expounded in Book I of the *Treatise*. According to Kemp Smith, Hume's moral philosophy is sentimentalist: he argues that one cannot know what is right and wrong on the basis of reason, but rather that one makes moral judgments on the basis of feelings. This same type of thesis, Kemp Smith argues, is at work in Hume's epistemology. This addition provides the motivation for Kemp Smith's views as described in the *Mind* articles and represents a more complete interpretation of Hume's philosophy.

In *The Philosophy of David Hume*, Kemp Smith argues that "Hume's philosophy can be more adequately described as naturalistic than as skeptical, and that its main governing principle is the thorough subordination—*by right*, if not always in actual fact—of reason to the feelings and instincts, i.e. to the 'impressions' of sensation and reflection" (KS (1941) 84). This thesis—argued for in both the *Mind* articles and his book—is meant to be applied not solely to Hume's moral philosophy, but to his epistemology and metaphysics as well.

Kemp Smith believes that Hume was primarily influenced by both Hutcheson and Newton. Kemp Smith emphasizes the Hutchesonian tendency in Hume's work, especially in his moral theory. According to Kemp Smith, Hutcheson contends that "all moral and aesthetic judgments rest not on reason or on reflectively considered empirical data, but solely on feeling" (KS (1941) 43).[18] He argues that Hume's moral theory rests on a similar principle. However, Kemp Smith claims that Hume applied this point of view to

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[18] This claim is controversial. It is not clear just how deep Hutcheson's influence runs, nor is it clear how tight are the parallels between the two views.

"all judgments of matters of fact and existence" (KS (1941) 44). Kemp Smith explains,

"Man, no less than the animals, lives under the tutelage of Nature, and must find in *its*

dictates, not in any programme which has to justify itself to reason, the ultimate criteria

alike of belief and of action. Accordingly Hutcheson's teaching appears in a new and

revolutionary light when Hume reformulates it in his fundamental maxim that 'reason is,

and *ought only to be* the slave of the passions' (T 2.3.3.4; 415)" (KS (1941) 45).

Kemp Smith also emphasizes Newton's influence—Hume praised and adopted

Newton's focus on the empirical method and the way he valued experiment. Further, he

claims that Hume's "associationist teaching [was] modeled on the pattern of the

Newtonian physics" (KS (1941) 71). Whereas Hutcheson claims that feelings determine

moral judgments because of the way in which the human constitution is arranged, Hume

offers a naturalistic account of the reasons why feelings determine moral judgments. He

tries to give an explanation of the various principles of the imagination causally

responsible for those beliefs. Kemp Smith argues that despite Hume's problems in this

analysis (insofar as he ends up leaving certain principles of association as "ultimate and

unanalysable" (KS (1941) 154)), there are "beliefs which are 'manifest' in experience,

and which are therefore more certain—being in this respect like gravity—than any theory

that can be brought forward in explanation of them" (KS (1941) 76).

One of the most interesting features of Kemp Smith's work is that he focuses on

the positive aspects of Hume's project. He argues that while many of our beliefs are not

justified by evidence or philosophical argument, there are some beliefs which none the

less gain Hume's approval. Hume does this by expanding upon a Hutchesonian principle:

feeling, not reason, determines our judgments of "matters of fact", and determines them

as certain. There are some beliefs—the 'natural beliefs'—which are believed with certainty, despite the fact that they are not justified by reason.

It is important to note that, according to Kemp Smith, the 'natural beliefs' are not considered by Hume as items of knowledge.[19] This is due to the fact that, according to Kemp Smith, Hume has strict criteria for what makes something an item of knowledge. He explains: "What we know we know with absolute certainty; so long as there is even the bare possibility of error, knowledge is absent; what differentiates it from all *opinion*, is that its opposite is not even conceivable" (KS (1041) 66). For Hume, one can only know p if ~p is inconceivable; all items of knowledge are subject to demonstration. So, is not the case that propositions such as '2 + 2 = 4' are 'natural beliefs.'

Belief, on the other hand, is a species of opinion, which concerns all "matters of fact" and existence. It concerns those propositions whose contradictions are conceivable (and thus, according to Hume, possible), and are not subject to demonstration. However, this does not mean that we do not gain assurance from belief. Quite the contrary—of some of our beliefs, we have no doubts. Though 'natural beliefs' are mere beliefs, rather than items of knowledge, we still are certain of them.

Kemp Smith argues, "this doctrine of natural belief is one of the most essential, and perhaps the most characteristic doctrine in Hume's philosophy" (KS (1941) 86). Though Hume does show that many of our beliefs do not constitute knowledge, he does not claim that we ought to give up those beliefs. Kemp Smith elaborates:

> That he ascribed to analytic thinking a quite definite, though limited, role is, however, undoubted. He had no intention of proving—quite the contrary—that

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[19] I will further discuss this in Section 2.5.1.

there is no such thing as rational necessity. For consciousness of it, as he recognised, is implied in the proof that in particular instances it is absent. But postulating it in this limited form, he seeks to show that owing to the constitution of our experience it cannot be attained in any department of our knowledge of matters of fact. There natural belief takes the place of rational insight. (KS (1941) 102)

Although Kemp Smith does not provide a detailed definition of a 'natural belief', throughout his work, he does emphasize some characteristics which must be possessed by a belief in order to call it 'natural'. Besides the fact that 'natural beliefs' are not subject to demonstration, they are also not supported directly by evidence (as in the case of direct observation, for example). To be considered a candidate for 'natural belief', the proposition must be one that is not believed either on the basis of direct perception, or on the basis of some empirical argument (KS (1941) 454, 457).

Kemp Smith argues that 'natural beliefs' are determined by principles of human nature, not by reasoning. They are the result of causally determined principles of the mind. He claims, "'natural belief' is then the title which he [Hume] gives to the complex attitude of mind which the associative mechanism and the instinctive propensity are thus, in their co-operation, declared to condition" (KS (1941) 120).[20] The 'associative mechanism' and the 'instinctive propensity' are both, according to Kemp Smith, principles of the imagination. He explains, "imagination…is the faculty which is at work whenever *belief*, and not mere 'feigning', is in possession of the mind" (KS (1941) 459).

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[20] Hume does not actually use the term 'natural belief', as this quote suggests.

Furthermore, according to Kemp Smith, 'natural beliefs' cannot be questioned (KS (1941) 124). This does not mean that it is impossible to question (or be skeptical about) a 'natural belief' even for a short time, since it seems that one can, for a brief period, raise doubts about even our most solid beliefs (e.g., the sun will rise tomorrow). Rather, this means that it is impossible to seriously question the 'natural beliefs' for a sustained period. "Since belief, *unlike knowledge*, is not induced by argument (or even by *logically* cogent evidence), neither is it liable to be destroyed by any arguments which the sceptics may propound" (KS (1941) 363). Even if we try to focus on possible skeptical doubts about a 'natural belief', we cannot remain skeptical. Kemp Smith explains, "the assurance that accompanies the conception is an assurance which can be called in question, though not without an artificial effort which can only be temporarily maintained. As soon as the effort is relaxed the attitude of belief reinstates itself" (KS (1941) 114). This is because 'natural beliefs' are determined by human nature. Despite our best efforts to question a 'natural belief', nature will take over and we will regain confidence in the belief.

Kemp Smith claims that 'natural beliefs' are unavoidable and irresistible.[21] Given the facts of our constitution, and some rudimentary and unspecific experiences (any kind of experience at all that is like the experiences you and I have), we cannot help but believe these things (KS (1941) 116-117, 455). Kemp Smith argues that 'natural beliefs' are determined by certain principles of the imagination, therefore are not beliefs that we can choose to eliminate. Thus, he argues, "since belief is precisely *not* subject to the

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[21] In the *Mind* articles, he also uses the similar terms 'inevitable' and 'indispensable.' Though these terms might have slightly different meanings, Kemp Smith uses them interchangeably.

individual's arbitrary choice, imagination in *this* sense can be operative only when

principles 'permanent, irresistible, and universal' are in control" (KS (1941) 114). [22]

Kemp Smith notes that, sometimes, Hume's explanation of these faculties is not

promising. He says, "the least convincing parts of the *Treatise*, it will probably be agreed,

are precisely those parts in which he has elaborated the mechanisms in explanation of the

natural beliefs and (at such inordinate length) of the indirect passions" (KS (1941) 226).

Further, he notes that Hume, at times, is apt to mention the mechanism without providing

much of an explanation of it. He notes, for example, that association (between ideas) is an

undeniable feature of human experience, but he does not provide an explanation of the

causes of association. He states, "it resembles the force of gravity in yet another feature,

namely, that *for us* it is ultimate, and that the yet more ultimate causes, physiological or

other, upon which presumably it depends, can be a matter only of unprofitable

conjecture" (KS (1941) 240). So, he argues, even if the discussion of the particular

mechanisms which are in operation in determining the 'natural beliefs' is unsuccessful,

the 'natural beliefs' "are to be regarded as more certain than any theories that can be

propounded in explanation of the manner in which, and the cases in virtue of which, they

thus take possession of the mind" (KS (1941) 409).

According to Kemp Smith, 'natural beliefs' are those beliefs of which Hume

gives epistemic approval. On this view, despite the fact that he provides detailed

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[22] Here Kemp Smith is referring to one of two senses of the imagination as employed by Hume (T 1.3.9.19n; 117). On the one hand, Hume sometimes refers to the imagination as the faculty which we would normally think of when thinking of the imagination, i.e., that faculty in which we freely combine or manipulate ideas to form new ideas—this constitutes a strict sense of imagination. On the other hand, Hume often uses the term in a quite different sense, to describe the faculty which is at work when we gain beliefs not generated by demonstrative or probable reasoning. This constitutes a broad sense of the imagination, which produces *beliefs*. Hume sometimes calls this sense of the imagination 'reason.' The second is the sense to which Kemp Smith refers.

arguments which show that beliefs are neither items of knowledge nor supported by evidence, Hume thinks that we cannot be criticized for holding them. 'Natural beliefs' are not subject to demonstration nor supported by evidence, are determined by human nature, cannot be questioned, and are irresistible. Kemp Smith claims that there are two such beliefs: the belief that there are objects which have a continuing, independent existence (this would include not only what is commonly known as 'external objects' but also the self); and the belief that these objects are "causally operative upon one another" (KS (1941) 124). These are very general beliefs; for Kemp Smith, more specific instantiations of these beliefs (such as that fire cause smoke) would also be considered 'natural beliefs' by Hume.

The belief in external objects explains two features of our actions: (1) that "we attribute a *continued* existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses"; and (2) that we suppose these bodies to have an "existence *distinct* from the mind and from perception" (KS (1941) 449). Although Hume argues that the belief in body is not demonstrable and is also not justified by either direct perception or empirical arguments, according to Kemp Smith, he gives epistemic approval to the belief. [23] Hume says, "we may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but 'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings" (T 1.4.2.1; 187).

Hume's discussion of our belief in body is long and somewhat complicated, so I will not go into the details here, and will instead simply examine the main features of the

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[23] See T 1.2.5; 66 ff. and T 1.4; 187 ff. for Hume's discussion of the belief in the continued existence of bodies and T 1.4.6; 251 ff. for Hume's discussion of the belief in the continued existence of the self.

naturalistic explanation for the belief, in order to explicate the manner in which Kemp Smith's criteria are applied in the case of our belief in external objects. In looking for the cause of our belief in body, Hume notes two features of our experience on which he claims our belief is based: constancy and coherence. We observe constancy when our impressions of objects at one time and at another "present themselves in the same uniform manner, and change not upon account of any interruption in my seeing or perceiving them" (T 1.4.2.18; 195). So, for example, when I look at my desk, I see books and papers; and if I look away for a moment, when I turn back, the books and papers look the same to me. However, Hume notes, in many of our experiences, we do not perceive such perfect constancy. When I look outside my window one day, I see an empty street and trees with green leaves; when I look outside my window another day, I see a street with cars parked on it and trees with orange leaves. Still, our experience is coherent. Hume explains, "bodies often change their position and qualities, and after a little absence or interruption may become hardly knowable. But here 'tis observable, that even in these changes they preserve a *coherence*, and have a regular dependence on each other" (T 1.4.2.19; 195). Although there are now cars parked on my street and the leaves on the trees are orange, I have often seen other instances of "a like alteration produc'd in a like time" (T 1.4.2.19; 195).

As Kemp Smith observes, Hume claims that "when we view an object which is both invariable and uninterrupted, the passage from one moment to another is 'scarce felt' (T 1.4.2.33; 203)" (KS (1941) 477). Because our experience of variable and interrupted objects possesses the features of coherence and constancy, the passage of the mind from one perception of the tree outside to a later perception of the tree outside, or

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from one perception of the books on my desk to a later perception of those books, is equally as smooth. Even though our two experiences (of the books or the leaves) are different (insofar as they are not numerically identical), either (in the case where our experience is constant) we overlook the differences and think the one the same as the other or (in the case where our experience is coherent) our mind passes so easily from one to the other that it seems like a viewing of the same object (KS (1941) 477).[24]

According to Kemp Smith, when our experiences exhibit coherence or constancy, we project the identity we attribute to our perceptions onto the objects themselves. I believe that the books I saw five minutes ago are identical to the books I am viewing currently. I attribute to them a continued existence. Hume explains this: "An easy transition or passage of the imagination, along the ideas of these different and interrupted perceptions, is almost the same disposition of mind with that in which we consider one constant and uninterrupted perception. 'Tis therefore very natural for us to mistake the one for the other" (T 1.4.2.35; 204).[25]

However, this ascription of identity poses a problem. The unphilosophical, according to Hume, identify our perception of an object with the object itself (direct realism). When we say that the book at one time is identical to the book at another time, we mean that the two perceptions are identical. But, after a bit of reflection, we note that our perceptions are often interrupted—we blink, we leave the room, etc., and this interruption causes us to see them as distinct, though quite similar, things. This uneasiness, Hume claims, cannot last. In order to clear up these difficulties, we suppose

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[24] See T 1.4.2.24; 199.
[25] See also KS (1941) 478 ff.

that the objects exist independently of our perceiving them (T 1.4.2.36; 205 ff). Hume argues that this claim, because it is so intimately linked to the claim that objects have a continued existence, also becomes a belief. He explains, "'tis the opinion of a continu'd existence, which first takes place, and without much study or reflection draws the other along with it, wherever the mind follows its first and most natural tendency" (T 1.4.2.44; 210).

It is easy to see how the belief in body meets Kemp Smith's four criteria. It is a belief which is neither demonstrable nor justified by evidence. It is determined by our human nature insofar as it is caused by our natural propensity to project what we find in our perceptions onto the world. Furthermore, this belief cannot be questioned: it is one that we "must take for granted in all our reasonings." Finally, it is irresistible. If we have experiences that exhibit constancy or coherence, we are causally determined to hold the belief that bodies exist continuously and independent of our perceiving them.

The second belief—the belief that external objects interact causally with each other—arises from a cause similar to that of our belief in body. According to Kemp Smith, this belief is not simply the belief that objects act with regularity; rather, it is the belief that there is a necessary connection between certain events.[26] For example, in our experience, when one billiard ball hits another, the first one stops and the second one moves forward. We do not simply believe that these two events will always follow one another. Instead we believe that the first ball hitting the second necessitates that the first ball will stop and the second ball will move: the two events are necessarily connected.

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[26] See T 1.3.14; 155 ff.

Hume explains that this belief is not demonstrable, nor is it either directly observed or justified on the basis of an empirical argument (T 1.3.12; 130 ff. and T 1.3.14; 155 ff.). Instead, he argues, this belief is based on the fact that the two events are constantly conjoined in our experience. After we see several instances of billiard balls behaving in the manner described above, our imagination becomes accustomed to seeing the one event followed by the other. So, on perceiving one billiard ball rolling toward another, we acquire the idea of the first ball stopping and the second ball moving. He explains, "after we have observ'd the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that relation" (T 1.3.14.20; 165). And because "the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects" (T 1.3.14.25; 167), we believe that the necessity is between the objects themselves and not simply between our ideas of them.[27] Furthermore, according to Kemp Smith, Hume claims that the belief in body is one which we cannot question.

The belief that bodies causally interact is one that meets Kemp Smith's criteria for 'natural belief'. It is not demonstrable and it is not justified by direct perception or empirical argument. It arises from the natural propensity to project what we observe in our perceptions onto the external world. It is a belief that cannot be questioned, and because it arises naturally when we have the experience of constant conjunction, it is also irresistible.

According to Kemp Smith, Hume's account of 'natural beliefs' dissolves the skeptical interpretation. It is true that Hume presents numerous skeptical arguments

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[27] See also Kemp Smith (1941) 393 ff.

against a number of our beliefs. For example, he shows that beliefs based on induction, such as that fire causes smoke, cannot be justified by *a priori* arguments, direct observation, or non question-begging empirical arguments. This does not, however, represent the conclusion of Hume's philosophy. Skeptical arguments show that many of our beliefs cannot be justified by reason, but this does not mean that we ought to give up those beliefs. In fact, according to Kemp Smith, some beliefs—the 'natural beliefs'—are ones which we cannot possibly reject; skeptical arguments have no force against them. Stroud, who adopts a version of Kemp Smith's view, puts the point as follows:

> The powerful negative arguments have an important positive point. They show that reason, as traditionally understood, has no role in human life. If man, the rational animal, had to have good reasons to believe something before he could believe it, then Hume's arguments would show that no rational man would ever believe anything. But of course we all do believe all kinds of things all the time. In fact, we cannot help it. 'Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel'(T 1.4.1.7; 183). (Stroud (1977) 14)

According to Kemp Smith's reading, Hume's skeptical arguments show that reason does not—cannot—justify most of our beliefs; still, we do no wrong in retaining them, so long as those beliefs meet the four criteria outlined above—so long as those beliefs are 'natural'. Skeptical arguments, generated by reason, do not cause us to give up or seriously question the 'natural beliefs.' The 'natural beliefs' are not justified or supported in any way by observation or argument (either *a priori* or empirical). However, we

remain certain of their truth—because the 'natural beliefs' are irresistible, inevitable, etc., skeptical arguments do not and should not give us cause to doubt them.

## 2.5.  Other Naturalistic Interpretations

### 2.5.1.  Problems with Kemp Smith's View

While Kemp Smith's promising view is influential, it is also problematic. He does not capture the strength of Hume's epistemic approval of the 'natural beliefs.' According to him, the 'natural beliefs' do not constitute knowledge. Of course, he is right insofar as the 'natural beliefs' do not constitute knowledge, as distinct from probability, "which arises from the comparison of ideas" (T 1.3.11.2; 124).  In Section 2.3, I provided textual evidence to support a non-skeptical reading of Hume. Much of this evidence focuses on the language Hume uses when referring to beliefs based on induction, emphasizing terms such as 'just,' 'knowledge,' 'informs,' etc. These are terms which clearly show that Hume gives epistemic approval to beliefs based on induction, and considers them as constituting a looser form of knowledge. According to Hume, that which he considers knowledge, in the strict sense, is necessarily true—its opposite is impossible. However, the knowledge that we gain from causal inference does not meet this standard: "such an inference [that one object implies the existence of another if we consider these objects in themselves] wou'd amount to knowledge and wou'd imply the absolute contradiction and impossibility of conceiving any thing different" (T 1.3.6.1; 86-87). There are good reasons for rejecting Kemp Smith's view and, instead, endorsing the view that Hume has in mind a looser sense of knowledge—warranted belief that is contingently true. Hume's term for this kind of knowledge is proof:

Many arguments from causation exceed probability, and may be receiv'd as a superior kind of evidence. One wou'd appear ridiculous, who would say, that 'tis only probable that the sun will rise tomorrow…For this reason, 'twould perhaps be more convenient, in order at once to preserve the common signification of words, and mark the several degrees of evidence, to distinguish human reason into three kinds, viz. *that from knowledge, from proofs, and from probabilities*. By knowledge, I mean the assurance arising from the comparison of ideas. By proofs, those arguments, which are deriv'd from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty. By probability, that evidence, which is still attended with uncertainty. (T 1.3.11.1; 124)

Since Kemp Smith focuses merely on the fact that the beliefs are not dislodged by skeptical arguments, his view does not emphasize the degree to which Hume gives epistemic approval to 'natural beliefs.' In the case of beliefs based on induction—the beliefs on which most skeptical interpreters of Hume focus—Hume's language suggests not just that these beliefs are not justified by *a priori* argument, sense perception, or *a posteriori* argument, though we will believe them anyway; rather, it suggests that these beliefs are warranted—they are more than just merely true beliefs, but are certain, and thus, items of knowledge (in the looser sense, indicating that they are mere contingent truths).[28]

Moreover, the reason why we are not moved by skeptical arguments to reject 'natural beliefs' is because, for one, the beliefs are irresistible. To say that we are right in

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[28] Kemp Smith's interpretation is subtle, and there may be a reading of *The Philosophy of David Hume* which supports a stronger naturalistic interpretation. Since this is not obvious, and since commentators such as Stroud have interpreted Kemp Smith as holding a weaker naturalistic interpretation of Hume, I do not think this is a serious problem for my argument.

retaining the 'natural beliefs' because we are causally determined to do so is problematic. In order to capture the fact that, for Hume, 'natural beliefs' are items of knowledge (understood loosely), it must be the case that the reason why we are not criticized for holding them is not simply because we cannot do otherwise. This does not capture the normativity Hume describes in his discussion of proofs. It is not just that we can't help but believe that the sun will rise tomorrow; it would be "ridiculous" not to believe that, since, for Hume, that belief is based on a "superior kind of evidence." Kemp Smith's view does not provide a good explanation of why the 'natural beliefs' deserve epistemic approval according to Hume.

Since the publication of Kemp Smith's *Mind* articles, several commentators elaborate on his naturalistic interpretation, attempting to correct some of the problems with his view. These commentators argue for a stronger naturalistic interpretation of Hume, each attempting to capture the strength of Hume's epistemic approval of certain beliefs or classes of beliefs, to provide an explanation of the facts which underlie Hume's epistemic approval, and to provide a means to make epistemic distinctions among beliefs. These distinctions depend on "nonepistemic facts (facts that can be characterized without utilizing such notions as 'knowledge,' 'justification,' and 'evidence') about either beliefs or the processes or mechanisms that generate or sustain beliefs" (Loeb (2002) 21). These commentators agree that Hume has a positive project in which he shows that beliefs are justified or warranted by naturalistic means. Their interpretations differ with respect to the grounds underlying Hume's normative epistemological distinctions. According to each of these theories, a belief will be justified or warranted if it meets certain specified conditions; it will not be justified or warranted if it fails to meet those conditions. Further,

these conditions are explained in terms of a naturalistic explanation Hume gives for the origin of the belief. In the following sections, I detail three naturalistic interpretations: proper-function theory, stability theory, and reliabilism.

### 2.5.2. Proper-Function Interpretations

Commentators who claim that Hume is a proper-function theorist about warrant claim that Hume is reaching toward a proper-function view, rather than developing a full-fledged account. Furthermore, no interpreter has yet attempted to spell out this view in much detail.[29] In his 1996 book, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, Nicholas Wolterstorff introduces the view in a footnote:

> The clearest expression of this account that Hume ever gives in his published works—and they are quite unclear—are to be found in Book I, Part IV, Section IV (Of the modern philosophy) of the *Treatise*, and here and there in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, where he speaks of the "irregular inference." What is clear, in spite of the uncertainty, is that it is a "proper functioning" account. In calling it this, I mean both to allude to the fact that it is an immediate predecessor of Reid's account, and to indicate that Alvin Plantinga's "proper functioning" theory of *warrant* is the most recent, and far and away the most sophisticated, manifestation of a line of thought adumbrated by Hume. (Wolterstorff (1996) 166n)

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[29] Craig claims that Hume wants "to give an account of [reason] in terms of the normal healthy functioning of the human belief-producing mechanism" (Craig (1987) 81), but does not interpret proper-functioning as warrant-producing for Hume. Spector (2003) is an attempt to support an interpretation of Hume's proper-function account of the normativity of the passions—not an attempt to support an interpretation of Hume's proper-function account of epistemic justification or warrant. Greenberg (2008) merely hints at this kind of interpretation. Meeker (2006) argues against a proper-function interpretation.

As Wolterstorff makes apparent, Hume's view is far from clear. A full-fledged proper proper-functionalist account is characterized as follows: A belief (B) is warranted only if (1) the cognitive faculties which produce B are functioning properly, (2) the cognitive environment is similar to the one for which the faculties are designed; (3) the faculty is designed to aim at true belief, and (4) the design plan is good—it tends to produce true belief. (Construe the design plan as a set of triples: circumstance, response, purpose or function—in the right circumstances, the faculty will produce a true belief.)[30] To interpret Hume as a proper-function theorist, one must argue that Hume thinks a belief is warranted so long as that belief is produced by a properly functioning psychological mechanism aimed at true belief.

The main piece of evidence in support of this interpretation is found in *Treatise* Book I, Part IV, Section IV, "Of the Modern Philosophy," where Hume says:

> One who concludes somebody to be near him, when he hears an articulate voice in the dark, reasons justly and naturally; tho' that conclusion be deriv'd from nothing but custom, which infixes and inlivens the idea of a human creature, on account of his constant conjunction with the present impression. But one, who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of specters in the dark, may, perhaps, be said to reason, and to reason naturally too: But then it must be in the same sense, that a malady is said to be natural; as arising from natural causes, tho' it be contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man. (T 1.4.4.1; 225-226)

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[30] Plantinga (2000) 153ff.

In this passage, it seems as though Hume is distinguishing between proper and improper functioning. On the one hand, when we reason that someone is near us after hearing an articulate voice, the imagination is functioning properly—we acquire belief on the basis of the customary transition between cause and effect. On the other hand, when we reason that there is a specter in the room, the imagination is not functioning properly—it is producing beliefs in a state of torment, and its operation is analogous to a disease. Although the imagination is, in a sense, performing the same function in both cases—producing *beliefs*—it is clear from Hume's language that he thinks our reasoning in the first place is warranted ("we reason *justly*"), while our reasoning in the second place is not. According to the proper-function theorist's interpretation of this passage, a belief is warranted if it is produced by a psychological mechanism that is functioning properly; whereas a belief is not warranted when it is produced by a mechanism that is functioning improperly.

Though this account is not applied systematically to Hume's epistemology, Jessica Spector attempts to interpret Hume as a proper-function theorist about the normativity of the passions. She focuses, in particular, on Hume's discussion of pride; however, her account can be transferred not only to the other passions, but also perhaps to Hume's epistemology. She argues that Hume's descriptive project—which centers on an account of the psychological mechanisms which cause pride (and, we could add, belief)—provides a description of the normal functioning of a kind (in this case, humankind).

Spector explains:

> Whether or not we accept Hume's particular phenomenology of pride, we can see that the framework in which it is set is a descriptive account that is itself evaluative. The double relations of impressions and ideas that constitute the indirect passions are not formulae for the production of passions; rather they are descriptions of the proper functioning of these passions. They are descriptions of mechanisms—mechanisms that are prone to break down and function improperly. (Spector (2003) 157)

Spector argues that Hume's description of the relevant psychological mechanisms is not *merely* a project which aims to explain the causes of the relevant passions. Rather, his description is intended to describe the normal functioning of those mechanisms in humans. She elaborates:

> As soon as Hume can say what humans, *as a kind*, are like, he can say whether a particular human has the feature and behaves the way it is supposed to *qua* human. An individual human that does not fit the anatomical model can then be called "defective," just as a frog without eyes might be called defective. (Spector (2003) 157)

The project of describing the proper functioning of particular psychological mechanisms opens the door to making normative distinctions between one passion and another.[31]

Spector explains exactly how a proper-function account can lead to a normative theory of the passions:

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[31] This would apply both to two different passions in the same person as well as to the same passion in two different people.

Insofar as the account can yield such descriptions of proper functioning and defect, it can ground an account of morals, since an assessment that a passional mechanism has broken down or is otherwise defective is an assessment that a person *ought* not to have certain passional reactions to certain sorts of things. The move from empirical description of what is the case to evaluation of how we ought to function need not be a leap across some is/ought gap if the "is" itself is normative (even minimally so). (Spector (2003) 156-157)

This theory can be applied to Hume's epistemology, so long as one includes conditions relevant to truth. Of course, Spector does not argue that the emotional responses she has in mind are capable of being true or false. If Spector is right, then in describing normally-functioning psychological processes which produce belief, Hume is providing a system by which the warrant of beliefs can be assessed. If a belief is caused by a mechanism which is defective in some way (for example, is being affected by fear, as in the case of the "specters in the dark" passage), then that belief is not warranted. However, if a belief is caused by a psychological mechanism which is functioning properly and which is aimed at forming true beliefs, then the belief is warranted.

It is important to note that Spector sees Hume as having a purely naturalistic, as opposed to a teleological, account of proper function. She explains, "the difference between such a view about the end of human life and a view about the proper features of a kind is the difference between theology and natural science. Hume conceives of what he is doing as naturalism—applying a scientific method of proceeding to a study of the human mind and morals" (Spector (2003) 157). (This fact both distinguishes Hume from

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other proper-function theorists and also emphasizes the importance of a naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology (as well as moral psychology).

It is fairly easy to see how, on this account, most beliefs based on causal inference would be warranted. So long as the imagination is working properly (causing beliefs based our past experience of the constant conjunction of cause and effect), and we are in the right circumstances (presented with a cause which we have experienced in constant conjunction with a certain effect), then the belief is warranted. Yet, while this view is intriguing, and does seem to be supported by the passage at *Treatise* Book I, Part IV, Section IV, this is one of few passages which provides evidence of this kind of reading.[32] Further, the commentators who support this interpretation admit that Hume's epistemology, at best, is a precursor to a full-fledged proper-function theory.

### 2.5.3. Stability Theory

The most thorough account of a stability theory of justification is found in Loeb's 2002 book, *Stability and Justification in Hume's Treatise*. According to this interpretation, a belief is justified if it results from a mechanism which tends to produce stability in belief. A mechanism which tends to produce stability in belief will produce beliefs which are "infixed" in such a way that they are steady in their influence on the will. Since Loeb argues that belief, according to Hume, is best understood as a dispositional state, he argues that the stability of a belief must be determined

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[32]At T 1.4.2.57; 218 Hume says: "skeptical doubt…is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd." Another passage from the first *Enquiry* may support this interpretation: see EHU 5.21-22. Wolterstorff also refers to Hume's use of the "irregular inference" in the *Dialogues* (DNR III; 57; 155) to support his interpretation. I discuss the "irregular inference" in Section 3.6.3.

dispositionally. A belief will be considered stable if it consistently causes us to make the same decisions, undergo the same actions, etc.

On the stability interpretation, a belief is not justified if it results from a mechanism which tends to produce unsteady beliefs—a mechanism which typically produces beliefs which do not affect the will consistently. For example, a belief A is unsteady if we tend to oscillate between affirming and denying A, or if we tend to oscillate between affirming A and affirming some other belief B which is inconsistent (though not directly contradictory) with A. Similarly, a belief can be unsteady if there are other beliefs which "reduce the likelihood of the occurrence of its characteristic manifestations or its typical effects, which reduce its influence on the will and action" (Loeb (2002) 80).

Loeb cites an abundance of textual support for this view. The first type of evidence is found in an examination of Hume's language when discussing belief. He explicates:

> It is a commonplace that Hume uses a cluster of closely related terms—'vivacity', 'vividness', 'intensity', and 'liveliness'—to characterize belief. This vivacity cluster, however, is prima facie distinct from a second cluster of terms— 'firmness', 'solidity', 'steadiness', together with 'fast', 'firm', 'settled', 'solid', and 'steady' (T 97, 105, 106, 108, 116, 121, 624, 625, 626, 627, 629, 631)—that also has a prominent role in Hume's discussion of belief…Hume contrasts steady ideas with ideas that are 'momentary' (T 110), 'floating'(T 116), and 'loose'(T 97, 106, 116, 123, 595, 624, 625; cf. 110). (Loeb (2002) 65-66)

Hume uses the terms in the 'steadiness' cluster in two intertwined ways: in distinguishing beliefs from ideas, and in discussing beliefs for which his language also suggests epistemic approval (e.g., when discussing beliefs based on causal inference). It seems that steadiness is important to both Hume's concept of belief and his theory of justification.

The stability interpretation explains why "the claim that causal inference results in belief and the claim that causal inference is justified frequently find themselves in close conjunction with each other in Part III, though Hume does not explain the connection between them" (Loeb (2002) 73). The fact that stability theory can explain this puzzle provides the second type of evidence in support of the view. Loeb explains that "to make sense of these phenomena, we must locate a property that Hume ascribes to belief and that Hume might take to be germane to justification" (Loeb (2002) 73). On the one hand, stability is essential to belief—Hume repeatedly claims that "beliefs result from a process of infixing and that they are fast, firm, settled, solid, and steady" (Loeb (2002) 73). On the other hand, "the claim that causal inference is justified—that it 'brings us acquainted' with objects we have not perceived and is due to 'judgment'—accompanies the claim that causal inference is due to custom or repetition" (Loeb (2002) 73). This indicates that the infixing which occurs due to constant conjunction does more than just produce belief—it produces justified belief. Loeb concludes stability is the property which plays a role both in creating and justifying belief.

Because stability plays a dual role in Hume's theory of belief, a puzzle arises. All beliefs are, to some (fairly high) degree, infixed or steady—otherwise, they would not be considered *beliefs*, but rather merely ideas (perceptions, thoughts, etc.). If stability is also the property by which Hume bases his theory of justification, then how can Hume

distinguish between beliefs that are justified and those that are unjustified? All beliefs, in order to be considered a belief, must be stable to some degree. Loeb explains, however, that from a belief's being steady enough to be considered a belief does not mean that the belief is steady in its influence all things considered. He elaborates:

A belief might fail to be steady in its influence owing to the presence of beliefs with which it conflicts, beliefs that reduce the likelihood of the occurrence of its characteristic manifestations or its typical effects, which reduce its influence on the will and action. In Hume's view, the point of a distinction between establishing that a belief is justified, other things being equal, and establishing that a belief is justified, all things considered, is to call attention to the kinds of circumstances in which belief, a steady disposition, might nevertheless be unsteady in its effects. The 'other things being equal' qualification is thus cashed out substantively, with reference to conditions in which states are infixed but nevertheless unsteady in their influence due to the operation of other mechanisms. (Loeb (2002) 80)

Loeb solves the puzzle by pointing out that Hume uses stability in two ways: first, in order to determine if a particular idea has enough influence on the will to be considered a belief. If it does, then the belief is *prima facie* justified. Second, in order to determine whether or not the belief is justified, all things considered. If a belief is stable in its influence consistently, or globally, then the belief is, according to Hume, justified.

Loeb continues:

Once it has been established that a state results from a mechanism that produces belief, no separate or additional argument is required to establish that the belief is

justified, other things being equal… By contrast, establishing that a belief is not

justified, all things considered, carries a heavier argumentative burden. In cases

where Hume seeks to establish that a belief is not justified, all things considered,

he will need to provide a separate or additional argument, beyond an argument for

its status as the product of a belief-forming mechanism. (Loeb (2002) 77)

Thus, in order to show that a belief is not justified all things considered, Hume must show

that a belief is not steady in its influence on the will. One way in which he typically does

this is to show that we oscillate between affirming the belief in question and affirming

another belief with which it is inconsistent.

Additionally, justification relies not simply on the stability of the particular belief

in question, but rather the mechanism which produces the belief. Loeb explains, "in

assessing justification, we identify the degree to which the subject is reflective. We then

consider whether the belief-forming mechanism tends to produce stable beliefs in persons

who are reflective to a similar degree. The fact that an individual's beliefs are stable does

not in itself imply that they are justified, for they might result from mechanisms that do

not tend to produce stable beliefs" (Loeb (2002) 95).

The skeptical remarks that Hume makes in Book I of the *Treatise* (besides the

attack on reason) are interpreted as arising "within the naturalistic epistemology itself"

(Loeb (2004) 340). Loeb argues that Hume's Conclusion to Book I indicates an apparent

failure of Hume's theory of justification to produce any stable beliefs, at least for the

reflective person.[33] It is important to note that Loeb thinks that Hume has a pre-

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[33] This destructive result, expressed in T 1.4.7 is based primarily on material in 1.4.1 and 1.4.4, the "dangerous dilemma", and the "manifest contradiction". Loeb argues that Hume was not forced to come to

theoretical commitment to certain beliefs which he thinks should turn out justified. However, Loeb argues, Hume ultimately believes that his pre-theoretical commitments cannot be sustained—beliefs which he hopes will be justified turn out to be unjustified on the basis of the sketch of the epistemological theory Hume develops in Book I of the *Treatise*. Loeb explains, "we need to extract from the *Treatise* a theory of justification that Hume, on the one hand, intends to sustain in his pretheoretical epistemological commitments and, on the other hand, views as failing to do so, at least with regards to the reflective person" (Loeb (2002) 20).

I believe that his interpretation of the skeptical parts of the *Treatise*, especially in so far as they relate to the description of Hume's more constructive project, constitutes the final piece of evidence in support of the stability view. Loeb explains:

> Though Hume's endorsements of causal inference and related belief-forming mechanisms are pre-theoretical, he must contemplate a theoretical basis for his epistemic distinctions. He must hold that there is some account of justification that explains his pretheoretical distinctions between justified and unjustified beliefs. At least, he must have in view a favored epistemological theory, in the sense of a theory that he considers the best prospect for systematizing his pretheoretical distinctions among belief-forming mechanisms. (Loeb (2004) 359)

Stability provides the account of what justifies belief, in so far as it is "a theory of justification that systematizes and explains, and thereby sustains, his pretheoretical epistemic assessments" (Loeb (2004) 359).

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this conclusion. Rather, he thinks Hume was too quick in his assessments of the fact that reflection tends to destabilize belief.

2.5.4. Reliabilism

Schmitt, in his 1992 *Knowledge and Belief,* argues that Hume is a reliabilist. According to this view, a belief is justified when it results from an operation that is reliable—tends to produce true beliefs. According to this account, for Hume, a belief would be justified so long as it is caused by a psychological mechanism which typically causes true beliefs.

The primary piece of evidence for Schmitt's view comes from the fact that Hume, throughout the *Treatise*, focuses on the reliability of various belief-forming mechanisms, both purely rational, such as the faculty of reason, and also mechanisms which are more 'natural', such as the customary transition between cause and effect. He claims, "Hume is engaged, then, in an empirical assessment of the reliability of our operations, an assessment based on science" (Schmitt (1992) 74).

He points out several places in Book I where Hume seems concerned with the reliability of a variety of operations. For example, Hume claims that the methods of geometry (T 1.3.1.4; 71) and the observations and inferences concerning the three philosophical relations (T 1.3.12.1; 73) are fallible (Schmitt (1992) 56). In addition, he states that our confidence in memory is "the greatest imaginable" (T 1.3.13.19; 153), and argues that introspection leading to the belief that a certain state of affairs is a perception is infallible (T 1.4.2.7; 190) (Schmitt (1992) 56). Hume, as Schmitt interprets him, is primarily concerned with judging the mechanisms as infallible or fallible, judging whether or not the outputs of various belief-forming mechanisms are usually true or false; thus determining the reliability of various operations.

Schmitt argues that his interpretation is confirmed by the fact that, in the *Treatise*, there is often a correlation between talk of justified belief and talk of true belief. For example, Hume asks, "what, then, can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falsehood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?" (T 1.4.2.56; 218) (Schmitt (1992) 56). Additionally, Hume says, "we may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses" (T 1.3.5.2; 84). Hume often will seamlessly switch between talk of justification and talk of truth.

Schmitt claims that Hume bases his epistemic distinctions on the reliability of belief-forming mechanisms. He states, "Hume's *central* concern in epistemology is the assessment of the reliability of operations" (Schmitt (1992) 56, my emphasis). He argues that "since his central concern is also the assessment of justification, it is plausible to see him as defining justifying operations as reliable ones" (Schmitt (1992) 56).

According to Schmitt, reliabilism is also supported by a piece of textual evidence in the *Enquiry*. When discussing beliefs formed on the basis of causal inference, Hume says:

> Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature. Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so

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necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in

every circumstance and occurrence of human life. (EHU 5.21-22)[34]

Again, we can see that Hume approves of beliefs based on induction; further, he is

connecting this to a pre-established harmony with nature. It seems that he is, at the very

least, pointing out that the psychological mechanism which results in beliefs based on

induction is reliable. This, in conjunction with the fact that he seems to (both in this

passage and in many other places) give beliefs based on induction a positive epistemic

status, seems to indicate that he does connect justification with reliability.

Schmitt also incorporates some of the evidence supporting both the proper-

function and stability views into his account. He argues that that both strength and

proper-function play a role in determining if operations are reliable.[35] On the one hand,

strength plays a role insofar as in determining whether or not an operation is reliable, we

must rely in part on what we already believe about the truth-values of the beliefs

produced by the mechanisms. For example, Hume rejects "bright fancy" (the imagination

in the strict sense[36]) because it produces beliefs which directly contradict strong beliefs

caused by sense perception and causal inference. On the other hand, proper-function

plays a role because, as he explains, "it is plausible to suppose that adaptive [or properly

functioning] operations will frequently produce beliefs with more true and less false

information. Thus, adaptive operations will tend to count as reliable, at least if we define

reliability as a high ration of true to total information in the output" (Schmitt (1992) 71).

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[34] Interestingly, this is among the passages that are used to support a proper-function interpretation.
[35] By strength, Schmitt has in mind what Kemp Smith might call irresistibility or inevitability. However, in Schmitt (2004), he also indicates that stability would play a similar role.
[36] See my note 14.

Schmitt argues that Hume's apparent skepticism "derives from the apparent unreliability of imagination" (Schmitt (1992) 72). He believes that the skepticism found in the *Treatise* is subsumed under a reliabilist epistemology—any belief that is not the product of a reliable mechanism (or operation) is unjustified. Moreover, Hume systematically worries about some of the propensities of the imagination; yet, as Schmitt claims, "he never attempts a thorough or systematic review of the considerations for and against the reliability of imagination, and such a review would be needed to reach firm conclusions about its reliability" (Schmitt (1992) 74). Thus, any skepticism would have to be tentative. Schmitt explains, "though he swings wildly from dogmatism to extreme skepticism, he ends with what he clearly regards as Academic skepticism, a modesty in claims to knowledge and justification" (Schmitt (1992) 74).

Schmitt argues that any mechanism which reliably produces true belief will be justifying. Thus, he provides an epistemology which incorporates Hume's insistence that knowledge results from reason (intuition and demonstration) with his inclination to use language that indicates a positive epistemic status to beliefs caused by certain propensities of the imagination. While Schmitt does not view himself as having a naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology, he does believe that certain natural mechanisms—such as causal inference—are justifying.[37] These mechanisms are justifying just in case they are reliable. Because of this, I think it is reasonable to group him with those who argue for a naturalistic interpretation.

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[37] See Schimtt (1992) 67, where he sets himself apart from Kemp Smith, Lenz, and Loeb.

2.6.    Conclusion

Each of the views discussed in the previous sections (Kemp Smith's view, proper-function theory, stability theory, and reliabilism) find textual support in Hume's writings. Each interpretation is supported insofar as it represents a naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology. I believe that the evidence presented in Section 2.3 provides a strong basis for the conclusion that Hume cannot be interpreted as a thorough-going skeptic or as presenting only negative conclusions about our beliefs based on induction. Moreover, each of the naturalistic readings of Hume is supported individually by the relevant passages mentioned. However, each view is not without its problems.

Kemp Smith's view suffers because it does not provide a means to make epistemic distinctions among irresistible beliefs—distinctions that Hume clearly makes in the *Treatise*. Proper-function theory, stability theory, and reliabilism all correct for these difficulties, but face their own problems.

Proper-function theorists agree that, at best, Hume's view is a precursor to a full-fledged proper-function account. Moreover, there is not sufficient textual support to claim that Hume always has proper-function in mind when he attempts to make normative epistemic claims about belief-forming mechanisms.

Stability theorists, on the other hand, boast a great deal of textual evidence in support of their interpretation. However, on that view, the fact that all beliefs are *prima facie* justified according to Hume may be problematic. There are instances, such as the case of credulous beliefs (T 1.3.9.12; 112ff), in which it seems that Hume argues that

these beliefs are not warranted at all (even *prima facie* justified).[38] The link between belief-production and warrant is so close, according to the stability theorist, that the view makes it difficult to account for the existence of completely unwarranted beliefs.

Reliabilists argue that Hume, in determining justification, is primarily concerned with judging the mechanisms that produce belief as infallible or fallible. However, Schmitt admits that Hume never attempts to fully review the "considerations for and against the reliability of imagination" (Schmitt (1992) 74). None the less, many commentators agree that the primary locus of evidence supporting a reliabilist interpretation comes in Hume's discussion of principles of the imagination. It is difficult, then, to conclude that Hume did have in mind a reliabilist epistemology when he expresses epistemic approval of beliefs based on, for example, causal inference.

Perhaps the most damaging difficulty for each of the aforementioned views is the existence of the evidence in support of alternative naturalistic interpretations. One thing we learn from Kemp Smith is that Hume sometimes emphasizes irresistibility when discussing beliefs of which he gives epistemic approval despite the fact that the beliefs face damaging skeptical arguments. The proper-function theorists show us that there are passages in which it is clear that Hume does consider the proper functioning of psychological mechanisms relevant to the epistemic status of beliefs caused by those mechanisms. From the stability theorists, we realize that stability also plays an important role in Hume's discussion of belief—both insofar as it distinguishes belief from mere ideas, and also in his epistemic evaluation of beliefs. And from the reliabilists, we see

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[38] Black (2010) argues this point at 15ff.

that there is evidence that Hume closely connects reliability with justification. However, each of these views cannot be correct.

It is clear that Hume thinks that there are some beliefs—paradigmatically beliefs based on induction—that are warranted despite the fact that there are no arguments (*a priori* or empirical) to support them, and that their warrant derives from natural, non-epistemic facts about the beliefs or the mechanisms which produce them. Yet, it is not clear that Hume has a fully-developed position about which facts ground his epistemic approval. Sometimes, Hume focuses on irresistibility, other times on stability; sometimes on proper-function, and sometimes on reliability. Perhaps all of these facts are indicators of a different epistemic theory, but perhaps not.

Instead of arguing for one of these interpretations here, I focus on what they have in common: they all represent a naturalistic interpretation of Hume. Even though Hume thinks that some of our most important beliefs cannot be rationally justified, he provides a means for allowing us to retain those beliefs—means which are not pragmatic. Certain beliefs are not warranted simply because it is in our best interest to operate on the assumption that those beliefs are true. Rather, a belief which is not justified by *a priori* argument or non-circular *a posteriori* argument is warranted if it is sanctioned by nature.

Using Kemp Smith's terminology, but broadening it significantly, I call a belief 'natural' if it is one which cannot be justified by *a priori* or empirical argument, but is nonetheless warranted on the basis of the psychological mechanisms which cause it. To simplify my discussion in the following chapters, I call a belief 'natural' so long as the mechanisms which cause it meet the criteria for any one of the naturalistic interpretations of Hume's epistemology: the mechanisms are common to all humans and produce beliefs

which are unavoidable or irresistible (Kemp Smith); the mechanisms are properly functioning, and aimed at the production of true beliefs (proper-function theory); the mechanisms are reliably productive of true beliefs (reliabilism); the mechanisms generally produce stable beliefs (stability theory). This is not to say that, for Hume, meeting any one of these criteria is sufficient to establish that belief is 'natural'. Since I aim to show that, for Hume, religious belief is not warranted naturalistically, I will argue that the psychological mechanisms leading to religious belief do not meet *any* of the criteria, and thus, no matter which naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology turns out to be the best, religious belief, for Hume, is not a 'natural belief'.

Chapter 3

Natural Belief and Intelligent Design

3.1.    Introduction

In Chapter 2, I argued that a naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology is plausible. The paradigm examples of beliefs which are warranted naturalistically are those based on induction, but commentators argue that there are other 'natural beliefs,' such as belief in the external world, and in the continued existence of the self. Some commentators argue that religious belief is among the 'natural beliefs.' In this chapter, I examine the evidence for the view that religious belief is 'natural' according to Hume.  I specifically focus on the claim that, for Hume, belief in a single intelligent designer is a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smiths' strict sense—it is a belief which is not supported by evidence or philosophical argument, is determined by psychological propensities of human nature, cannot be questioned, and is irresistible.

I argue that, for Hume, belief in intelligent design (and, in fact, all religious belief) meets Kemp Smith's first criterion—it is not warranted on the basis of evidence or arguments in its favor. I then consider evidence from the *Natural History of Religion*, as well as from the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* appealed to by commentators as purporting to show that the belief in intelligent design is a 'natural belief', and maintain that this evidence is insufficient. I show that the belief in an intelligent designer is not irresistible, and therefore cannot be a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smith's sense.

However, in order to show that religious belief is not warranted naturalistically by any means, I must examine the explanation Hume provides for the origin of religious belief in the *Natural History* and show that the psychological propensities responsible for religious belief do not meet the criteria for any viable naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology: proper function theory, stability theory, and reliabilism. I do this in Chapter 4.

## 3.1. The Content of Religious Belief

Several interpreters, including Butler, Hurlbutt, Tweyman, Reich, Harris, Penelhum, and Prado, argue that religious belief is a 'natural belief'; however, commentators disagree about the content of natural religious belief. In the *Natural History*, Hume provides a naturalistic explanation for the causes of religious beliefs, including polytheism (the belief in many gods) and monotheism (the belief in a single god). He considers various versions of each of these belief-systems, including an intermediate position wherein one god is raised above the others as the favorite (I call this position henotheism). One of the monotheistic beliefs Hume discusses is belief in the God of the traditional theologians and philosophers—omniscient, omnipotent, and omni-benevolent creator of the world. He also considers the 'vulgar' monotheistic belief which is infused with more human-like characteristics (e.g., vindictiveness, kindness) than the God of the traditional theologians. Hume typically discusses the Christian God in this context. In the *Dialogues*, Hume's primary focus is on a single intelligent designer (who may or may not be the creator of the universe); though, again, he considers various versions of religious belief, including polytheism, the theologians' God, and a more

anthropomorphized God. It is not surprising that commentators have considered a variety of religious beliefs to be 'natural' for Hume: beliefs in an intelligent designer (or designers), the philosophical conception of God, the vulgar conception of God, and even polytheistic religious belief.

In the Introduction to the *Natural History*, Hume claims that the belief in "invisible, intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places and in all ages" (NHR Introduction.1; 134). He begins his explanation of all religious belief with an account of belief with this content. Kail argues that invisible, intelligent power represents the 'core content' of any religious belief:

> Having emerged in this original form, the core content can subsequently figure in different forms, including monotheism of various sorts, true philosophical religion, or enthusiasm, all fixed in the attitude of belief by causes other than fear [which fixes the polytheistic belief]. Fixed by hope, the belief is that of benevolent invisible intelligent power; fixed by reason, the belief is the philosopher's conception of invisible intelligent power. Without an account of the initial emergence of the content, however, there would be no notion of invisible intelligent power with which reason, hope, or faith could work. (Kail (2007b) 193)

The 'core content' is contained in the religious belief which, according to some commentators, should be interpreted as 'natural' on Hume's view: the belief in intelligent design. The 'core content' and the idea of intelligent design overlap insofar as they both contain the idea of an invisible intelligence that has or had power over the course of nature. It is important to note that both the 'core content' and intelligent design are

consistent with both deism and traditional theism: God could have determined the laws of nature and set matter into motion, but does not interact with the world; or he might intervene in daily events, perform miracles, and the like. Intelligent design adds the idea of design to the 'core concept'. An invisible, intelligent power has power over the course of nature, and can control nature, but this does not necessarily mean that the power *designed* the world, or the laws which govern it. Thus the concept of intelligent design adds the idea that the universe was designed by the invisible, intelligent power.

Most commentators who argue that religious belief is 'natural' for Hume agree that the belief in a *single* intelligent designer is a 'natural belief'. In this chapter, I focus primarily on the belief in an intelligent designer. I argue that the evidence supporting the claim that belief in intelligent design is a 'natural belief' is insufficient. But I will also show that this evidence supports neither the claim that belief in the 'core content' nor the claim that any more elaborate system (such as monotheism) is 'natural'.


3.3.    ID Naturalism

There are several commentators who argue that Hume ought to be interpreted as claiming that religious belief is a 'natural belief'. Butler, Hurlbutt, and Tweyman argue that the belief in intelligent design, on Hume's view, is a 'natural belief'.[39] Prado does not argue for the conclusion, but says that he is sympathetic to the view that belief in intelligent design is 'natural' for Hume.[40] Penelhum also argues for this position, but has since changed his view.[41] Harris argues that Christian belief is 'natural' for Hume, while

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[39] Butler (1960), Hurlbutt (1985), Tweyman (1986).
[40] Prado (1981) 162.
[41] Penelhum argues for the view in Penelhum (1979) but changes his position in Penelhum (1983).

Reich (1998) argues that belief in an immanent God (akin to the Spinozistic conception of God) is 'natural' according to Hume.[42] In this chapter, I will focus primarily on those commentators who argue that belief in an intelligent designer is natural for Hume, since their interpretation is most common and the most reasonable.[43] Moreover, this view is best supported by the evidence in the *Dialogues*. I call a proponent of the view that, for Hume, the belief in an intelligent designer is a 'natural belief' an ID naturalist. I call the view itself ID naturalism.

Proponents of ID naturalism argue that, for Hume, the belief in intelligent design is a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smith's strict sense—it meets Kemp Smith's criteria for natural belief: (1) it is not justified by evidence or argument (either *a priori* or *a posteriori*), (2) it is determined by human nature, (3) it cannot be questioned for a sustainable period (even in light of skeptical arguments against it), and (4) it is irresistible. ID naturalists use evidence from several of Hume's writings, including certain passages in the *Natural History* to support their interpretation; however, the bulk of textual support is found in the *Dialogues*.

The ID naturalist argues that certain claims Hume makes in the *Natural History* indicate that the belief in intelligent design (or at least in invisible, intelligent power—the 'core concept') is (almost) universal and therefore 'natural'. Butler, in particular, claims that each of the characters in the *Dialogues* professes his belief in intelligent design, and that each character claims that holding the belief is irresistible or unavoidable: belief in intelligent design is an irresistible reaction to observing nature's regularity, and is

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[42] Harris (1987), Reich (1998).
[43] In Chapter 4, I argue against Harris that monotheism ('vulgar' or philosophical), and therefore Christianity, is not warranted naturalistically according to Hume. I also argue against Reich that polytheism (or pantheism, or any form of immanentist belief is not warranted naturalistically.

therefore a 'natural belief'. He cites in turn Cleanthes: "Consider, anatomize the eye; survey its structure and contrivance, and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation" (DNR III; 56; 154); Demea: "It is my opinion, I own, replied Demea, that each man feels, in a manner, the truth of religion within his own breast" (DNR X; 95; 193); and Philo: "A purpose, an intention, a design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems as at all times to reject it" (DNR XII; 116; 214). I discuss the evidence from the *Natural History* in Section 3.5, and evidence from the *Dialogues* in Section 3.6. First, however, I consider the evidence which suggests that belief in intelligent design meets Kemp Smith's first criterion for 'natural belief'.

## 3.4.   The Non-Rational Status of Belief in Intelligent Design

Kemp Smith's first criterion for 'natural belief' requires that any candidate for 'natural belief' must be one which cannot be justified by evidence, or by *a priori* or empirical argument.[44] This feature is common to all naturalistic interpretations of Hume's philosophy. For all 'natural beliefs,' Hume offers a psychological explanation. As Yandell correctly explains, "neither we nor Hume will ordinarily offer a causal account of the fact that a person has a belief unless there is doubt that the person has sufficient reason for holding it." (Yandell (1979) 95). If a belief were warranted by evidence or

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[44] In my discussion of Kemp Smith, Section 2.4, I argue that this is one of Kemp Smith's criteria for 'natural belief'.

arguments in its favor, then there would be no need to locate any additional source of warrant.

According to Gaskin's interpretation of Hume, there are two basic types of belief—reasonable and non-rational. Reasonable beliefs are justified on the basis of either the available evidence alone, or argument (either *a priori* or *a posteriori*) alone, or evidence in combination with philosophical argument (Gaskin (1998) 130). The non-rational beliefs are "those in which thinking and assessing do not influence the belief-feeling" (Gaskin (1998) 130). Non-rational beliefs, for Gaskin, fall into two categories: 'natural beliefs,' which are "in some way justifiable," and those which are "in a straightforward way irrational or unreasonable" (Gaskin (1998) 130). Non-rational beliefs are such that "there is an inability to produce good evidence that the belief is true" (Gaskin (1998) 133). For straightforwardly non-rational beliefs, there may be evidence or arguments which make it more reasonable to adopt an alternative belief (Gaskin (1998) 133). However, according to Gaskin, 'natural beliefs' are such that "there is no evidence which makes it more reasonable to adopt any alternative set of beliefs. The skeptical criticism of natural beliefs establishes no others in their place" (Gaskin (1998) 133). Unlike 'natural beliefs,' we can alter or eliminate reasonable beliefs in light of new evidence or arguments.[45]  In this section, I argue that, according to Hume, religious belief (of any kind) meets this first criterion for 'natural belief'—using Gaskin's terminology, it is non-rational insofar as there is no evidence that the belief is true. First, I argue that, for Hume, religious belief cannot be justified by evidence via revelation. I then argue that,

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[45] See, for example, T 1.3.8.3; 144.

according to Hume, religious belief cannot be justified on the basis of any argument (*a priori* or *a posteriori*).

In the essay "Of Miracles," Hume argues that religious belief cannot be based on evidence in the form of revelation.[46] He claims that religious belief based on revelation relies on believing the testimony of witnesses to the (supposed) miraculous event, or of those who heard the stories of the witnesses, or of someone even farther removed from the event. Hume argues that testimony is never so reliable as to warrant belief in miracles on its basis. He states, "we may establish as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion" (EHU 10.2.35). Religious belief cannot be founded on the testimony of those who (supposedly) have direct evidence.

In both the *Treatise* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume rejects all *a priori* arguments that purport to prove what he calls "matters of fact."[47] "matters of fact" consist of empirical truths such as 'the sun will rise tomorrow.' He argues that since the opposite of any "matter of fact" is conceivable, it is therefore possible that any "matter of fact" might be false. We can conceive that the sun will not rise tomorrow, so it is possible that the sun will not rise tomorrow. No "matter of fact" is necessarily true. Hume argues that only claims which are necessarily true can be demonstrated using an *a priori* argument. *A priori* arguments have premises which are known through reason alone, and reason is the faculty which deals solely with the relations among ideas. But any relation among ideas that is known by reason alone is

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[46] EHU 10.
[47] EHU 4.1.1-2, T 1.2.3; 33ff.

necessarily true. From an argument which simply states necessary truths, one could never prove something that is not necessarily true. The existence of God (as well as the existence of an intelligent designer) is a "matter of fact" since all existence claims are "matters of fact"; *a priori* arguments for God's existence, such as the ontological argument, are rejected by Hume on the grounds that they purport to prove that God exists (a "matter of fact") from premises known through reason alone. Hume reiterates this position in the *Dialogues*:

> I shall begin with observing, that there is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a "matter of fact", or to prove it by any arguments *a priori*. 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. (DNR IX; 91; 189)

It is clear that Hume does not think belief in God (or in any being) can be justified by *a priori* argument (such as the ontological argument).

Hume devotes an entire work—the *Dialogues*—to a discussion of, among other things, the argument from design—one of the two traditional *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence. [48] He also discusses the design argument in Section XI of the first *Enquiry*. It is commonly thought that Hume was skeptical of the soundness of the design argument. According to Kemp Smith, the character in the *Dialogues* that most accurately

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[48] The other is the cosmological argument, which Hume briefly argues against in Part IX of the *Dialogues*.

represents Hume's position is Philo, who is extremely critical of the design argument.[49] Philo mounts many of the most forceful objections to the argument: for example, the analogy between the universe and a machine is weak (DNR II; 46ff.; 144ff.), the argument (at best) allows us to infer an imperfect deity (DNR V; 67ff.; 165ff.), but we would also be justified in inferring a multitude of deities (DNR V; 69ff.; 167ff.), and the argument does not establish that the principle governing order is intelligence, since it could be vegetation or generation (DNR VII; 78ff.; 176ff.). While Kemp Smith's interpretation is not without dissent, it is fairly convincing. I will assume that Kemp Smith is correct in identifying Philo as most closely representing Hume's view. Moreover, Philo's objections to the argument are successful, and are not overcome by any of the remarks of the other characters in the *Dialogues*.

The *Dialogues* as a whole support my claim that belief in monotheism is not supported by empirical argument. Further, the first eleven parts of the *Dialogues* support my claim that Hume does not think belief in invisible intelligent power can be established by the argument from design. However, in Part XII, Philo seems to reverse his position. Philo states:

> No one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind, or pays more profound adoration to the divine Being, as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance and artifice of nature. A purpose, an intention or design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker. (DNR XII: 116; 214)

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[49] For a full account, see Norman Kemp Smith's introduction to *Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 59ff.

While this may seem surprising given the tenor of the rest of the *Dialogues*, Philo qualifies his newly adopted position: "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence" (DNR XII; 129; 227). Because this position does not represent monotheism or polytheism, it does not bear directly on the epistemic status of either. However, it does seem to express belief in an intelligent designer. Several commentators use 'Philo's reversal' as support for the claim that, according to Hume, religious belief is 'natural'.[50]

However, Gaskin argues that in the *Dialogues*, Philo's belief in an intelligent designer is reasonable.[51] He claims:

> He [Philo] concedes that belief in a designer is after all a rational belief: one to which the mind has a strong propensity but which is 'somewhat ambiguous,' probable rather than certain, incapable of rational development or extension, dependent upon an imperfect and very limited analogy, and which commits the believer neither to action nor forbearance from action. (Gaskin (1988) 138)

Gaskin calls this position 'attenuated deism' since it represents the designer as a being who has "the power of an agent together with 'some remote analogy to human intelligence,'" but "cannot be known to have any moral attributes" (Gaskin (1988) 167).

Gaskin believes that Philo represents Hume in the *Dialogues*, and thus claims that Philo's position in Part XII is the same as Hume's. He argues for the reasonableness (as

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[50] See Section 3.6.2 for my analysis of 'Philo's reversal' as evidence of 'natural belief'.

[51] Gaskin (1974) and (1988) 137ff. Gaskin is not the only commentator to suggest this. Pike (1970) argues that the "inference from order in the universe to the existence of God is as much an exercise of reason as is the inference from articulate and sensible speech to the existence of another mind. In both cases, the process of inferring is a rational activity" (229). Capaldi (1970) concedes that Hume "accepted the argument from design" (233), Noxon (1995) claims that Hume accepts that "probably the cause of universal order remotely resembles human intelligence" (70), and Andre (1993) argues that Hume's "limited theism" "emerges from the tatters of the design argument" (156, 159).

opposed to 'naturalness') of belief in an intelligent designer by pointing to the fact that Philo suspiciously does not say that his belief is the result of a natural propensity, but rather insists that his belief is based on reason. Gaskin claims, "it might appear that Hume is here admitting that the belief in God, like belief in an external world, survives the destruction of its supporting arguments: his continued use of the word 'reason' being merely perverse and confusing. He should have used the phrase 'natural instinct'. This is not so" (Gaskin (1974) 290). Gaskin argues that because Philo uses the term 'reason' when discussing the origin of his belief, 'attenuated deism' follows from the argument from design. Its vagueness and qualifications are necessary because the final position is what is left standing when Philo's objections to the design argument are taken into account.

I claim that, according to Hume, Philo's belief is not reasonable. Gaskin believes that 'Philo's reversal' represents the remains of theism which survives Philo's objections against the design argument. As I discuss in Section 3.6.2, the surviving remains are meager at best. As Penelhum explains, "if Hume judged the belief in design to be reasonable, it would be strange for him to leave it stripped of all credentials in this way." (Penelhum (1983) 170). I do not think that the belief, as attenuated as it is, does survive Philo's objections. Throughout the *Dialogues*, Philo (with Demea) attacks the anthropomorphic character of the design argument—through the use of an argument by analogy, one is supposedly able to infer characteristics of the designer from characteristics of his design (the observable universe). Philo consistently argues against attributing any moral or psychological qualities to the deity, and is critical of any sort of

anthropomorphism. Surely attributing intelligence to the designer would be a form of anthropomorphism.

Moreover, in Part VII, Philo introduces the idea that from the observed order in the universe, we would be justified in inferring that the cause (or causes) of such order was not due to an intelligent source (design), but rather was the result of a vegetative or generative principle. If Philo's reasoning is correct, then the conclusion of the design argument would have to be that the cause or causes of order in the universe is either intelligent, or like an animal or a vegetable—the argument from design does not warrant an inference to an intelligent designer. Further, Philo does not confess to believe in intelligent design at the end of Part XII; instead, he says that the cause or causes of order "bear some remote analogy to human intelligence." This statement in no way means that Philo is professing belief in intelligent design, given that he thinks there is an analogy (perhaps a remote analogy) between intelligence and the rotting of a turnip. Consider Philo's statement below:

> I ask him, whether, from the coherence and apparent sympathy in all the parts of this world, there be not a certain degree of analogy among all the operations of nature, in every situation and in every age; whether the rotting of a turnip, the generation of an animal, and the structure of human thought be not energies that probably bear some remote analogy to each other: It is impossible he can deny it. (DNR XII; 120; 219)

Whatever 'Philo's reversal' amounts to, belief in an intelligent designer is not a justified inference from the argument from design.

For Hume, belief in God as well as belief in an intelligent designer is not justified by evidence, or by *a priori* or *a posteriori* argument. Religious belief does meet the first criteria for 'natural belief', since it is a non-rational belief. In the following four sections, I examine the ID naturalist's evidence from the *Natural History* and the *Dialogues*.

## 3.5.    Evidence from the *Natural History*

ID naturalists appeal to claims Hume makes in the *Natural History* to support the view that the belief in intelligent design is a 'natural belief'. This evidence is found throughout the *Natural History*, and can be divided into two types: statements which suggest that the argument from design is a successful argument, and statements which seem to indicate that there is a natural propensity to believe in intelligent design. I discuss each of these types in turn.

The first type of evidence suggests that we are led to the conclusion of intelligent design by considering the argument from design. He claims, "whoever learns by argument, the existence of invisible intelligent power, must *reason* from the admirable contrivance of natural objects, and must suppose the world to be the workmanship of that divine being, the original cause of all things" (NHR 5.2; 150, emphasis added). He echoes this statement just a few pages later: "From the beautiful connexion, say that, and rigid observance of established rules, we draw the chief argument for theism; and from the same principles are enabled to answer the principal objections against it" (NHR 6.2; 154). Moreover, Hume indicates that the argument will result in a single designer: "Were men led into the apprehension of invisible, intelligent power by a contemplation of the works of nature, they could never possibly entertain any conception but of one single

being, who bestowed existence and order on this vast machine, and adjusted all its parts, according to one regular plan or connected system" (NHR 2.2; 138).  It seems, from these claims, that Hume endorses belief in intelligent design. Nonetheless, the best interpretation of the previous three statements is as an apparent endorsement of the *argument* from design—Hume does not speak of a natural propensity as a cause of the belief; instead, he notes that we use reason to infer the existence of a designer. In these passages, Hume endorses the claim that belief in an intelligent designer is based on (unsound) argument. One of the criteria for 'natural belief' requires that the belief is not based on argument of any kind. So, if, as Hume seems to indicate in these passages, the belief in God is justified by the teleological argument, it is not a 'natural belief'.

At this point, one might be tempted to concede that in the *Natural History*, Hume endorses the teleological argument, despite Philo's objections in the *Dialogues*. This would mean that the belief in intelligent design is not 'natural', but reasonable. However, this is not the best way to interpret these statements. Instead, I think we should read Hume, in these moments, as explaining the way in which some people come to believe in an intelligent designer—by believing on the basis of an unsound argument. As I argued in Section 3.4, Hume does not think the argument from design permits an inference to an intelligent designer—there could be multiple designers or the order in the universe could result from vegetation or generation, not invisible intelligent power. Perhaps Hume is cloaking his evaluation of the teleological argument in order to avoid controversy. Richard Wollheim argues that Hume apparently endorsed the argument from design in the *Natural History* as a way of closing off discussion of the justification of religious

belief in order to focus on the main task of that work: the belief's origin in human nature (Wollheim (1963) 18ff). Wollheim's position is supported by a suggestion from Hume:

> Nothing could disturb this natural progress of thought, but some obvious and invincible argument, which might immediately lead the mind into the pure principles of theism, and make it overleap, at one bound, the vast interval which is interposed between the human and the divine nature. But though I allow, that the order and frame of the universe, when accurately examined, affords such an argument; yet I can never think, that this consideration could have an influence on mankind, when they formed their first rude notions of religion. (NHR 1.5; 136)

According to this passage, the argument from design is sound, but Hume does not think that religious belief commonly arises as a result of making an inference on the basis of the design argument. Since the focus of the *Natural History* is to determine what did "have an influence on mankind when they formed their first rude notions of religion," a discussion of the teleological argument is irrelevant, and nominally conceding its soundness is nothing more than a device to avoid the issue. If one wants to discern Hume's attitude toward the argument from design, Hume has devoted an entire work to that discussion: the *Dialogues*. Whatever Hume's reason for seeming to endorse the teleological argument in the *Natural History*, given the force of the objections in the *Dialogues*, it is unlikely that he is sincere in his approval.

However, in the *Natural History*, Hume also makes several comments which better support ID naturalism. In the Introduction, Hume says, "the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and

Religion" (NHR Introduction 1; 134). On one hand, this statement seems to suggest that the belief in intelligent design meets Kemp Smith's third criterion—it is irresistible. On the other hand, Hume mentions rationality and reflection—not characteristics of 'natural beliefs.' One way to read this passage is that Hume claims that 'serious reflection' is responsible for the belief in intelligent design. If this were the case, then belief in intelligent design would not be a 'natural belief'. As I explained in Chapter 2, 'natural beliefs' are not based on reason or reflection, but instead are the result of certain psychological mechanisms.

Yet, there is another way to interpret the passage which is more sympathetic to the ID naturalist's position. What Hume might mean is that even after serious reflection, perhaps about problems with the teleological argument, the enquirer cannot suspend his belief in design—the belief is held despite any skeptical arguments against it. Ferreira argues that Hume's mention of reflection does not automatically rule out the suggestion that belief in design is non-rational and therefore 'natural'. He claims, "the 'reference to its foundation in reason,' which occurs *in the introduction*, does not, as we say, commit Hume to the view that the belief either 'arises' in reason or even that it can be justified by 'argument'; it does not commit Hume to any justification different from that available to natural beliefs" (Ferreira (1994) 576). Ferreira argues that Hume's discussion of other 'natural beliefs' allows for reflection to play a role in belief-formation. The paradigm example of 'natural belief' is belief based on induction. In the *Treatise*, Hume provides a skeptical attack on induction, and shows that it is not supported by reason. While one may entertain doubts about even our beliefs based on induction, we cannot sustain these doubts. In fact, a marker of the status of a 'natural belief' is that it is not rejected, even in

the face of skeptical arguments against it. Ferreira concludes, "its legitimacy for a 'rational enquirer' is, like that of a natural belief, a function of the way in which 'serious reflection' cannot *warrant* its suspension" (Ferreira (1994) 576). With this in mind, we can see how the ID naturalist might interpret Hume's statement above: in the study (perhaps while reading the *Dialogues*), we can doubt the belief in intelligent design, but we cannot suspend the belief for long, since it is a 'natural belief'.

Hume makes several other declarations expressing this sentiment: "All things in the universe are evidently of a piece. Every thing is adjusted to every thing. One design prevails throughout the whole. And this uniformity leads the mind to acknowledge one author" (NHR 2.2; 138). Here, he is not specific about the process by which the belief is acquired, and while the phrase "leads the mind" may seem to indicate that the belief is the result of considering an argument, it can also be interpreted as suggesting that the mind is led by some psychological mechanism. In the Conclusion, he claims:

> Though the stupidity of men, barbarous and uninstructed, be so great that they may not see a sovereign author in the more obvious works of nature, to which they are so much familiarized; yet it scarcely seems possible that any one of good understanding should reject that idea, when once it is suggested to him. A purpose, an intention, a design, is evident in everything; and when our comprehension is so far enlarged as to contemplate the first rise of this visible system, we must adopt, with the strongest conviction, the idea of some intelligent cause or author. (NHR 15.1; 183)

In this passage, the phrase "with the strongest conviction" suggests that our conviction in the belief is certain—is not merely probable—and thus not the result of an empirical

argument. However, Hume's use of "contemplate" might indicate, again, that the belief is formed on the basis of an inference, supported by the teleological argument.

ID naturalists interpret the previous statements as evidence for their position: in these passages, it seems that Hume claims that the belief in intelligent design is irresistible, or in some other way indicates that it is a 'natural belief'. However, this is not the best way to interpret these passages. Hume clearly thinks that the belief in intelligent design is somewhat common—many people believe it, and many people are compelled to believe it on the basis of some psychological mechanism (not on the basis of the argument from design). But the evidence from the *Natural History* is not the only evidence upon which the ID naturalist relies. In the next three sections, I examine the evidence from the *Dialogues.*

## 3.6.    Evidence from the *Dialogues*

### 3.6.1.  Demea and Pampillius

The ID naturalist finds support for his view from each of the characters in the *Dialogues*. Regardless of who best represents Hume in the *Dialogues*, if the ID naturalist can show that each character professes belief in intelligent design, and does so in a way that indicates the belief is 'natural' (claiming that the belief is non-inferential, is the result of a propensity of human nature, is irresistible, etc.), then he has good evidence to suggest that ID naturalism represents Hume's position. Although not normally thought of as an important character, the narrator, Pamphilus, makes a statement which is used as support for the ID naturalist's view:

What truth so obvious, so certain, as the being of a God, which the most ignorant

ages have acknowledged, for which the most refined geniuses have ambitiously

striven to produce new proofs and arguments? What truth so important as this,

which is the ground of all our hopes, the surest foundation of morality, the firmest

support of society, and the only principle which ought never to be a moment

absent from our thoughts and meditations? (DNR Introduction; 30; 128)

The ID naturalist focuses on the fact that, according to Pamphilus, religious belief is

certain. While certainty is not among the criteria for 'natural belief', it does seem to

indicate that the belief is not based on an empirical argument, which would result in a

probabilistic belief of its conclusion and would most likely not be believed by those

living in "the most ignorant ages." Further, it seems to be an indication of Kemp Smith's

third criterion: the belief cannot be questioned.

However, it does not obviously support the ID naturalist's position, since Hume,

in the *Natural History*, contradicts Pamphilus' statement. In the *Natural History*, Hume

makes clear that it is polytheism, not monotheism, which is most likely to be believed by

the ignorant.[52] Moreover, the claim that religion is the "surest foundation of morality"

also conflicts with Hume's view in the *Natural History*. There he argues that polytheism,

not monotheism, results in more morally virtuous followers (NHR 10.2; 163-164).

Pamphilus' statement is not representative of Hume's own view.

The ID naturalist also cites Demea's position: "It is my opinion, I own, replied

Demea, that each man feels, in a manner, the truth of religion within his own breast"

(DNR X; 95; 193). Of course, this seems to indicate that "the truth of religion" is a

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[52] See, for example NHR 1.2ff.; 135ff.

'natural belief', based on feeling rather than argument. In fact, this is the position that Demea emphasizes throughout the *Dialogues*. But Demea's claim does not support ID naturalism. The full context of Demea's profession is as follows:

> Each man feels, in a manner, the truth of religion within his own breast; and from a consciousness of his imbecility and misery, rather than from any reasoning, is led to seek protection from that Being, on whom he and all nature is dependent. So anxious or so tedious are even the best scenes of life, that futurity is still the object of all our hopes and fears. We incessantly look forward, and endeavour, by prayers, adoration, and sacrifice, to appease those unknown powers, whom we find, by experience, so able to afflict and oppress us. (DNR X; 95; 193)

While it is true that Demea admits that the religious belief is not the result of any reasoning, he indicates that the belief is caused by man's hope and fear, coupled with the desire to control his environment. This is precisely the explanation of religious belief Hume provides in the *Natural History*; in this instance, perhaps Demea's position does best represent Hume's. However, in Chapter 4, I argue that belief caused in this way is not warranted according to Hume. I will not elaborate the details here, but if my argument is correct, then Demea's position is not good evidence for ID naturalism.

### 3.6.2. 'Philo's Reversal'

One of the most important pieces of evidence for the ID naturalist is Philo's supposed confession of belief in Part XII of the *Dialogues*, known in the literature as 'Philo's reversal.' In Section 3.4, I discuss 'Philo's reversal' as evidence that Hume accepts 'attenuated deism' on the basis of the teleological argument. I conclude that

Hume does not think belief in intelligent design is a sound conclusion of the argument from design, since, according to Philo, the design argument does not warrant an inference uniquely to an intelligent designer (it could equally warrant an inference to, for example, the conclusion that the universe is the result of vegetation). ID naturalists concur; however, they argue that Philo's position represents one of the instances of the characters in the *Dialogues* who profess irresistible belief in intelligent design—evidence that Hume considered the belief in intelligent design a 'natural belief'. Given Kemp Smith's persuasive argument that Philo best represents Hume's own position, it is not surprising that commentators rely heavily on 'Philo's reversal'. Philo states, "a purpose, an intention, a design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems as at all times to reject it" (DNR XII; 116; 214). It is clear why ID naturalists use 'Philo's reversal' to support their position: belief in intelligent design is affirmed, but not on the basis of argument—even the most "careless, the most stupid thinker" possesses the belief. What is more, the fact that Hume notes that the belief is impossible to reject (at all times) indicates that the belief is held despite skeptical arguments against it.

But at the end of the section, Philo qualifies his newly adopted position: "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence" (DNR XII; 129; 227). This qualification rules out the belief in a single intelligent designer. And as I argued in Section 3.4, it also rules out intelligence or even design. Philo then *further* qualifies the belief:

> If it afford no inference that affects human life, or can be the sources of any action
> or forbearance: And if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no farther

than to the human intelligence; and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability to the other qualities of the mind: If this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition? (DNR XII; 129; 227)

The belief, which near the beginning of Part XII seemed to confirm the existence of an intelligent designer, has, by the end of Part XII, has been qualified to the point that it no longer constitutes a belief.

A proposition which cannot be used as the basis of inference to other beliefs and which does not influence human action does not seem a good candidate for constituting a belief, much less a warranted belief. According to Hume, what separates beliefs from mere opinions or conjectures is "the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind" (T 1.3.7.7; 629). He notes that "that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination" (T 1.3.7.7; 629). He explains that "it is some thing felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination. It gives them [beliefs] more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind; and renders them the governing principles of all our action" (T 1.3.7.7; 629). A belief, for Hume, is something which, unlike the belief assented to by Philo at the end of Part XII, *does* affect human life, and *is* the source of action. Philo's confession cannot be a 'natural belief' because it isn't even a belief according to Hume's understanding of the term.

Moreover, the content of the statement to which Philo consents is minimal. In fact, several commentators agree that the content of the statement is vacuous; assenting to it does not amount to assenting to much of anything. Mossner argues that "the a posteriori argument from design proves only that the being of a God is faintly analogous to human intelligence and this analogy, faint as it is, cannot be transferred to the moral attributes of God. So the conduct of human life remains unaffected. The 'religious hypothesis' is impotent. There is no natural religion" (Mossner (1977) 18). Penelhum claims that "considerations show Philo (that is, Hume) to be genuine in his acceptance of this conclusion of natural theology, in part because it does not seem to him to matter whether one accepts it or not" (Penelhum (1979) 273). This, he argues, is because the content of the assent is empty. He explains, "[it] is, in other words, featureless; its role is to act as a vague and undefined support to virtues which owe their origin and value to quite distinct sources" (Penelhum (1983) 178). Prado, who is sympathetic to the ID naturalists' view, claims that 'Philo's reversal' is pointless: "'If this proposition be not capable of extension…If it affords no inference that affects human life…if the analogy can be carried no farther…' then it is without point. Hume is willing to let the theist have his vague analogy, for it serves no point" (Prado (1981) 154-155). Kail comes to a similar conclusion. He claims that the content is "so vacuous in its contents and consequences that it is scarcely a religion" (Kail (2007b) 190). He explains that even an atheist would have no problem consenting to Philo's proposition:"The remote analogy affords us a certain unknown inexplicable something as the cause or causes or order in the universe, a notion so imperfect, that no atheist will think it worthwhile to contend against it" (Kail (2007a) 64). In sum, 'Philo's reversal' is not a reversal of his critical position.

'Philo's reversal' does not show that belief in intelligent design is reasonable, and it does not show that belief in intelligent design is a 'natural belief'. But it seems like a striking change from the rest of the *Dialogues*, and any interpretation of that work must provide some explanation of it. There are numerous alternative interpretations in the literature, but I will mention just three of the most promising. On one hand, O'Connor argues that 'Philo's reversal' represents a dramatic move in the structure of the dialogue. At the end of Part XI, Demea's character leaves the conversation, since he "did not at all relish the latter part of the discourse" (DNR XI; 115; 213). O'Connor claims that 'Philo's reversal' is a way to "re-establish an amiable and social atmosphere" (O'Connor (2001) 195): Philo attempts to ease the tension by conceding (if in words only) the debate to Cleanthes. This is an interesting view, and I think fits nicely with the other comments Philo makes in Part XII reducing the debate to a verbal dispute. Immerwahr, on the other hand, argues that Hume wants to emphasize the fact that the argument from design cannot be used to justify 'vulgar' monotheistic belief. He claims, "the motive of Philo's confession is not to signal some renewed interest in the argument from design, nor is it to keep the dramatic tension alive; the motive is to emphasize the point that regardless of how one evaluates the argument from design, it gives no aid and comfort to popular religion" (Immerwahr (2002) 32). This suggestion is also interesting insofar as it coheres with Hume's attitude toward popular religion or superstition. Finally, Philo's apparent reversal is arguably a device Hume is using to cloak his own views—Hume did not want to make obvious the force of his objections to the teleological argument. This coincides with Hume's strategies, especially the dialogue format, employed in the *Dialogues*. I

think it is best to treat anything Philo says in Part XII cautiously, and I do not think that it is good evidence for the ID naturalist's view.

### 3.6.3. The 'Irregular Argument'

Perhaps the most powerful evidence in the *Dialogues* supporting the ID naturalist's view is the so-called 'irregular argument' in Part III:

> Some beauties in writing we may meet with, which seem contrary to rules, and which gain the affections, and animate the imagination in opposition to all the precepts of criticism, and to the authority of the established masters of art. And if the argument for Theism be, as you pretend, contradictory to the principles of logic; its universal, its irresistible influence proves clearly, that there may be arguments of a like irregular nature. Whatever cavils may be urged; an orderly world, as well as a coherent articulate speech, will still be received as an incontestable proof of design and intention. (DNR III; 57; 155)

It is in this context that Cleanthes insists: "Consider, anatomize the eye: Survey its structure and contrivance; and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation" (DNR III; 56; 154).

Cleanthes 'irregular argument' is preceded by a discussion of two analogies used to illustrate the kind of move which the observer of the eye makes when he acquires the belief in a contriver: the "articulate voice" and the "vegetable library." First, Cleanthes imagines that an articulate voice is heard in the clouds—a voice louder and more beautiful than a human voice, but spoken to everyone on Earth (in their own language)

simultaneously. He claims that, without hesitation, one hearing the voice would conclude that the voice had an intelligent cause (DNR III; 54-55; 152-153). Second, he describes a library full of books written in a universal language which "perpetuate themselves in the same manner with animals and vegetables" (DNR III; 55; 153). He claims that upon seeing the books, it would be impossible for one to doubt that the original cause of the books "bore the strongest analogy to mind and intelligence" (DNR III; 55; 153).

Logan argues that these analogies are aimed at explaining Cleanthes' position: that the pattern of belief acquisition is the same—immediate and non-inferential. He claims, "there are sufficient similarities between the irregular 'inference' in his illustrative analogies (from an articulate voice to a rational cause, and from living rational books and their original rational cause), and the position he is urging, between a rational effect (the world) and a rational cause (an intelligent designer), that if the imagination is drawn to make the 'inference' in the one case, it will similarly be drawn in the other" (Logan (1992) 489). Logan explains the import of Cleanthes' two illustrations: "The inference is made on the basis of a natural propensity, or irresistible and immediate influence, to instantly ascribe design where order and contrivance are found. Such ascription is non-rational, as it is made in spite of the fact that the items compared are dissimilar and disproportionate" (Logan (1992) 489). Cleanthes seems to imply that the belief in a designer is not founded on an argument by analogy (or at least, does not have to be founded on that argument), but rather is non-inferential. It is caused by a natural, and even irresistible and universal, propensity to ascribe design to observed order.[53]

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[53] In Section 4.6, I name this propensity Cleanthes' propensity and discuss it further.

While this is perhaps convincing evidence that Cleanthes (despite his valiant efforts defending the teleological argument) thinks that the belief in an intelligent designer can be acquired non-rationally, and therefore is a 'natural belief', I do not think this represents Hume's position. For one, Philo, not Cleanthes, is arguably Hume's principal spokesperson, at least prior to Part XII. According to the narrator, upon hearing the 'irregular argument', Philo "was a little embarrassed and confounded: But while he hesitated in delivering an answer, luckily for him, Demea broke in" (DNR III; 5; 155). Philo is a fictional interlocutor: the real beneficiary here was Hume himself; Philo does not object to the 'irregular argument', but neither does he endorse it. This could be but one of many devices – including the dialogue format and the reversal in Part XII – that Hume uses to veil, however thinly, his own views.

In order to decide whether or not Hume endorses the 'irregular argument', or thinks that the belief in intelligent design is 'natural', we must examine his explanation of religious belief. Does Hume indeed maintain that the psychological mechanisms giving rise to belief in God are akin to sensation in constituting a natural and "incontestable" or at least warranted, "proof of design?" In the *Dialogues*, Hume provides no discussion of how we might come to have the belief in intelligent design given that it is not rationally justified. For his naturalistic explanation of religious belief we must look to the *Natural History*. I do this in Chapter 4. In the next two sections, though, I will argue that the ID naturalist's position is defeated insofar as belief in intelligent design does not meet all of Kemp Smith's criteria for 'natural belief'.

3.7.    Skeptical Pressure and Kemp Smith's Third Criterion

Kemp Smith's third criterion for 'natural belief' requires that a 'natural belief' cannot be questioned (even in light of skeptical arguments against it). The ID naturalist attempts to show that belief in intelligent design meets this criterion by pointing out the context in which each of the characters in the *Dialogues* confess his belief. Butler, in particular, argues that it is important that the belief in an intelligent designer is stated by each of the characters of the *Dialogues*—and stated in a particular manner—at points in the discussion where skeptical arguments have put pressure on the belief. He argues that this context is similar to the context in which other 'natural beliefs' (such as the belief in induction[54]) are introduced: after the presentation of skeptical arguments against those beliefs, which nevertheless do not change our interlocutors' minds. This fact indicates that the belief meets one of Kemp Smith's criteria for 'natural belief': Butler claims, "Philo can consistently muster all the rational arguments against design at his command and still maintain that our own nature prevents us from wholly disbelieving the fact of design" (Butler (1960) 87). He notes that Hume often mentions the 'natural belief' in a designer when attempting to stop the reader from questioning God's existence, and instead to focus his attention to questions about God's nature. He argues that the conclusion Hume wants us to draw is that we can know nothing of God's nature—the being in which we claim to believe is one that we know virtually nothing about.

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[54] After explicating the "problem of induction," in Section IV of the *Enquiry*, Hume admits that we cannot be convinced by these arguments. He says, "nor need we fear that this philosophy, while it endeavors to limit our enquiries to common life, should ever undermine the reasonings of common life, and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action, as well as speculation" (EHU 5.1.2). He claims that "nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever. Though we should conclude, for instance, as in the foregoing section, that, in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind, which is not supported by any argument or process of the understanding; there is no danger, that these reasonings, on which almost all knowledge depends, will ever be affected by such a discovery" (EHU 5.1.2).

I do not disagree with Butler about the context in which the apparent statements of 'natural belief' in God arise. However, this does not mean that the belief is warranted according to Hume. It is not uncommon for Hume to give a psychological explanation for a belief which seems problematic. This makes a great deal of sense. If I cling to a belief which is susceptible to skeptical arguments, or which is simply unsupported by evidence, the question arises: Why do I believe this? Providing a causal explanation of the origin of my belief answers the question, but does not necessarily show that the belief is warranted. The fact that there is some explanation for my belief does not guarantee that the belief is a 'natural belief'.

Perhaps an example will help. I am terrified of bees. A few years ago, I was riding in a car with the windows down when a bee flew inside. Panic set in—I yelled for the driver to stop the car. I believed that I was in danger—so much danger that I needed to exit the car immediately, despite the fact that we were traveling on a busy Chicago street, where stopping in the middle of the road would not be something I would generally recommend. And since know that I am not allergic to bees, the danger did not rationally warrant taking such a risk. If asked why I believed I needed to get out of the car, I could not provide a good argument—in fact, I would freely admit that my belief was solely an immediate reaction to feeling afraid. My fear of bees caused me to have the belief that I must exit the car, despite my lacking good evidence for it. This explanation, however, does not in any way lend warrant to my belief that I should get out of the car. Moreover, the fact that my belief was caused in this way, I think, should lead us to conclude that the belief was one which I should reject.

In the *Treatise,* Hume himself distinguishes between beliefs which are based on induction and caused by habit or custom and those which are caused by fear:

> One who concludes somebody to be near him, when he hears and articulate voice in the dark, reasons *justly* and naturally; tho' that conclusion be deriv'd from nothing but custom, which infixes and inlivens the idea of a human creature, on account of his usual conjunction with the present impression. But one, who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of specters in the dark, may, perhaps, be said to reason, and to reason naturally too: But then it must be in the same sense, that a malady is said to be natural: as arising from natural causes, tho' it be contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man. (T 1.4.6.1; 225-226, emphasis added)

In this example, the belief based on custom is just—a 'natural belief'—while the belief based on fear is not.  Not all beliefs which have natural causes are warranted. Their warrant depends on the psychological mechanisms which cause the belief. Simply because the (supposed) confessions of belief in intelligent design occur after the belief has received pressure by way of skeptical arguments does not guarantee that the belief is a 'natural belief'. In order to determine whether or not the belief actually meets Kemp Smith's third criterion, we must determine if it is actually the case that the belief cannot be questioned (or abandoned) despite the skeptical pressure on the belief. I argue that this is not the case in Chapter 4. I also draw on this fact in Section 3.8 below.

3.8.    Universality and Irresistibility

According to Kemp Smith's criteria for 'natural belief', a belief is 'natural' if it is not justified by evidence or argument (either *a priori* or *a posteriori*), it is determined by human nature, it cannot be questioned for a sustainable period (even in light of skeptical arguments against belief), and it is irresistible. Combining the second and the fourth criteria, commentators argue that the 'natural beliefs' are universal. Because 'natural beliefs' are the irresistible result of a psychological propensity (or propensities), determined by human nature, everyone must have the belief. ID naturalists generally agree with this conclusion. For example, Harris claims that "the true sense of what is "natural" <u>cannot</u> belong only to <u>some</u> people" (Harris (1987) 15-16). If a belief is 'natural', it is universal.

But several commentators, such as Gaskin and, most recently, Kail, have argued against the ID naturalist.[55] Their arguments center on the claim that notwithstanding the evidence, the belief in intelligent design, according to Hume, is not universal, nor is it irresistible. The most important piece of evidence for this view is the fact that Hume notes that the belief in intelligent design is not universal. In the Introduction to the *Natural History*, Hume claims, "the belief of invisible, intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places and in all ages; but it has neither perhaps been so universal as to admit of no exception, nor has it been, in any degree, uniform in the ideas, which it has suggested" (NHR Introduction.1; 134). Hume here admits that the 'core concept' is not universal, so belief in intelligent design cannot be universal. Besides Hume's acknowledgement of this fact, it is obviously true: atheists do

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[55] Gaskin (1974), Gaskin (1998) 126ff., Kail (2007b) and Kail (2007a) 67ff.

not believe in invisible, intelligent power. Opponents of ID naturalism argue, if the belief is not universal, then it cannot be a candidate for 'natural belief'.

Tweyman, however, argues that the objection from non-universality can be overcome.[56] He argues that the warrant of 'natural beliefs' depends on the fact that the *propensity* which causes the belief is universal—not the belief itself. In Section 2.3, I argued that Hume grounds epistemic distinctions among beliefs on the basis of the propensities that cause them. Hume claims:

> I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and *universal*; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are received by philosophy, and the latter rejected. (T 1.3.4.1; 225, my emphasis)

For Hume, beliefs caused by universal propensities are warranted, while beliefs caused by "changeable, weak, and irregular" propensities are not.

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[56] Tweyman (1986) 16ff.

Even if the belief in intelligent design is not universal, this does not guarantee that the belief is not a 'natural belief'. Tweyman suggests that in order for certain beliefs to arise, certain conditions must be present. A belief might be 'natural', but not universal, so long as the propensity causing the belief is universal and any unbelievers are not placed in the right circumstances. The paradigm example of 'natural beliefs' are causal beliefs based on induction. While the propensity to form beliefs based on induction is universal, certain individuals might lack those beliefs. For example, if one did not have experience of constant conjunction, one would not form the idea of cause and effect, nor would one form particular causal beliefs (such as fire causes smoke). In general, to gain beliefs based on induction, one must be placed in the correct circumstances: circumstances where one experiences constant conjunction.

Perhaps belief in intelligent design is similar—based on a universal propensity, but not universal because unbelievers do not find themselves in the appropriate circumstances to generate belief. This line of response is promising, but not ultimately successful. To see this, consider that the belief in intelligent design is supposed to arise from observing order in nature (not from the argument from design, but immediately and non-inferentially). But order in nature is everywhere—it is unlikely that all atheists have not noticed the fact that there is apparent *telos* in the works of nature, if not that there is apparent contrivance in the structure of the eye, then at least, for example, that the sun regularly rises and sets.[57]

Moreover, in the *Natural History*, Hume speaks to this point: "The universal propensity to believe in invisible, intelligent power, if not an original instinct, being at

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[57] DNR III; 56; 154.

least a general attendant of human nature, may be considered as a kind of mark or stamp, which the divine workman has set upon his work" (NHR 12.5; 184). He does call the propensity universal, but he immediately says that it is not an original instinct. This means that the belief in the 'core concept' is not irresistible. Hume places "original instincts" in contrast with "secondary principles" In the Introduction to the *Natural History*, he explains:

> This preconception [invisible, intelligent power] springs not from an original instinct or primary impression of nature…first religious principles must be secondary; such as may easily be perverted by various accidents and causes, and whose operation too, in some cases, may, by an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, be altogether prevented. (NHR Introduction.1; 134)

Despite Tweyman's excellent point, it does not seem that the ID naturalist can overcome this objection. Belief in the 'core concept' is not universal, but even if Tweyman is correct that the propensity, not the belief, must be universal, and even if the propensity is universal, it is not a propensity which irresistibly causes belief. Belief in the 'core concept,' it seems, does not meet Kemp Smith's fourth criterion for 'natural belief', and since belief in intelligent design contains the 'core concept', the ID naturalist cannot maintain his position—belief in intelligent design is not a 'natural belief'.[58]

While Gaskin and Kail present important arguments, they are of limited force, since they only apply to Kemp Smith's restricted criteria for 'natural belief'. Irresistibility is not among the criteria for beliefs warranted naturalistically according to other naturalistic accounts: stability theory, proper-function theory, and reliabilism. In Chapter

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[58] I will further discuss Tweyman's proposal in Section 4.6.

4, I argue that belief in intelligent design is not warranted naturalistically according to any of these views.

## 3.9. 'Weak/Quasi Natural Belief'

Given the fact that belief in intelligent design does not meet the irresistibility criterion for 'natural belief', there is a trend in the literature which suggests that belief in intelligent design is not a strict 'natural belief' (in the way that Kemp Smith uses the term), but is rather a 'weak' or 'quasi-natural belief'. This amounts to the claim that belief in intelligent design does not meet all of the criteria for 'natural belief', but is nonetheless 'natural' in some sense since, for example, it is not supernatural, rare, or artificial. Proponents of this view differ in their interpretation as to which criteria belief in intelligent design satisfies, and also what distinguishes a 'quasi-natural belief' from a 'natural belief'. Several interpretations stress the fact that while belief in the 'core content' is not universal, it is nearly so.[59] Some commentators argue that religious belief is 'quasi-natural' insofar as it is not unusual.[60] Interpreters argue that 'quasi-natural beliefs' result from secondary propensities, rather than original instincts (or primary propensities). Commentators vary in their analysis of secondary propensities, but for most, a secondary principle is not completely unavoidable or irresistible—beliefs resulting from the propensity can be resisted.

This position is supported by several comments Hume makes. For example, in the *Natural History*, Hume claims:

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[59] Reich (1998), Yandell (1979), Malherbe (1995), Livingston (1998).
[60] Yandell (1979), Costelloe (2004).

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: But whether this power be supreme or subordinate, whether confined to one being, or distributed among several, what attributes, qualities, connexions, or principles of action ought to be ascribed to those beings; concerning all these points, there is the widest difference in the popular systems of theology. (NHR 4.1; 144)

Here Hume argues that belief in the 'core content' is "almost universal," while other, more complicated religious beliefs vary widely. Reich stresses this point in arguing that "belief in an invisible intelligent power is treated by Hume as a (weakly) natural belief in The *Natural History*. Not every one of us has this belief, but it has certainly been found in almost every nation and age" (Reich (1998) 37).

Yandell argues that belief in intelligent design is natural insofar as it is neither supernatural, rare, nor artificial (Yandell (1979) 104-105). He, along with other commentators, compare belief in intelligent design to the virtue of justice. Costelloe, for example, claims that "religious belief does have features in common with the virtue of justice, and as such the latter provides an appropriate analogy for illuminating the former. First, religious belief does not spring from an 'original principle,' but is neither *unusual* nor *miraculous*, and it depends upon faculties and circumstances supplied by nature" (Costelloe (2004) 177-178). According to these commentators, religious belief is 'quasi-natural' since it is not rare.

Penelhum does not support the 'quasi-natural belief' position in name; rather he claims that belief in intelligent design is "an anomaly in Hume's system" (Penelhum

(1983) 171). But, he does argue that belief in intelligent design is similar in some respects to the natural beliefs:

> I suggest that the minimal deism of Part XII is accepted by Philo as the inescapable conclusion of an argument which he has shown, and knows he has shown, to be a complete philosophical failure—except in the one respect that when we encounter it we cannot help assenting to its conclusion! In this respect minimal deism is like the natural beliefs: we can be momentarily disturbed by skeptical objections, but not seriously shaken from holding it. (Penelhum (1983) 171)

Like 'natural belief', religious belief is not rejected despite numerous skeptical arguments against it.

One of the most important features of 'quasi-natural belief' is its foundation in secondary principles. According to supporters of the 'quasi-natural belief' view, a secondary principle is one which can be resisted. Hume claims that religion is an effect which might not have come to be:

> The first religious principles must be secondary; such as may easily be perverted by various accidents and causes, and whose operation too, in some cases, may, by an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, be altogether prevented. (NHR Introduction; 134)

For Hume, an important feature of beliefs caused by secondary principles is that they are not unavoidable. Commentators have emphasized this point. Reich, for example, argues that "Hume holds that this belief is not something that we are compelled to have by nature, by primary instinct" (Reich (1998) 37).

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Yandell argues that one feature which distinguishes secondary principles from original instincts is the fact that the effects of secondary principles vary. He claims that "as he [Hume] takes religious belief to be nearly but not altogether universal in scope and astonishingly diverse in object, he supposes the principle, or cause, of such belief to be secondary in the sense that its operation is (so to say) defeasible and its product diversified" (Yandell (1979) 94). Several interpreters argue that one of the most important features distinguishing secondary from primary principles is the fact that beliefs based on secondary principles can be avoided. Yandell explains, "there are 'religious first principles' built into human nature, though not so indelibly and lucidly imprinted that they may not be blurred or erased" (Yandell (1995) 40). McCormick, who does not conclude that religious belief is 'quasi-natural,' still notes that "Hume calls the *propensity* to believe in God universal. But it seems that it is a propensity which is easier to resist than is the propensity to believe in the external world" (McCormick (1993) 111). One feature of 'quasi-natural belief,' then, is its ability to be thwarted.

But commentators note that it is not easily resisted. This is one feature which makes it a 'quasi-natural belief.' Malherbe puts the point nicely:

Religion cannot be held as a primitive instinct or idea imprinted by the Creator into the human mind; and it can be said to be dependent on various accidents or causes which, 'in some cases' 'by an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances' may prevent it. But, inversely, religion necessarily (except in these very particular circumstances) follows from human nature: 'these are the general principles of polytheism founded in human nature and little dependent on caprice and accident.' (Malherbe (1995) 266)

Religious belief can be prevented, but not easily. Livingston expresses a similar view: "We may think of belief in divinity not as a natural belief on the order of belief in self, world, and society but as a virtually natural belief deeply embedded in participation in common life but more variable and more vulnerable to reflection" (Livingston (1998) 65). Religious belief is variable, and can be resisted, but is nonetheless common.

Falkenstein argues that what distinguishes secondary principles from original instincts is the fact that beliefs based on secondary principles are dependent on particular circumstances. He claims:

> Hume stressed that the causes of religious belief are secondary, unlike the cause of our belief in, say, the connection between causes and effects (NHR, Introduction.1; 134). What makes them secondary is that they need to be evoked by particular circumstances. Those who are not placed in the requisite circumstances will not experience the passions or the imaginative impulses necessary to induce religious beliefs of the sort Hume identified. (Falkenstein (2003) 18-19 n8)

This does not mark a true distinction between primary and secondary principles. As I argued in Section 3.8, even 'natural beliefs' are only caused if the believer is placed in the appropriate circumstances.

For these interpreters, the consensus remains that belief in invisible, intelligent power is 'quasi-natural': caused by secondary principles, but similar to 'natural beliefs' in several aspects. Hume claims that religious belief is caused by secondary principles and, for Hume, religious belief is, in some sense, 'natural' — it is not unusual, nor is it supernatural. But, I do not endorse the 'quasi-natural belief' view since there is no value

in this designation. One thing 'quasi-natural beliefs' might have in common with 'natural beliefs' is that they have natural causes. If the proponent of the 'quasi-natural belief' view means only that religious belief has natural causes, then their view is pointless, since all beliefs have natural causes. Of course, the proponent of the view will stress that religious belief is not akin to 'natural beliefs' in only that sense, but insofar as it is nearly universal, or difficult to suppress.

The introduction of a category of 'quasi-natural belief' is gratuitous, and carries no epistemic import. As Gaskin explains:

> No evidence can be found to show that Hume wants to make any allowance for a category of quasi-natural beliefs. What is more were he to make such allowances, it would be unclear which of the full-blown criteria for natural beliefs would have to be modified (and with what justification) and whether quasi-natural beliefs would still be entitled to the all-important exemption from rational justification which is allowed to natural beliefs. (Gaskin (2008) 139-140)

The point he is trying to make is similar to my own. There is no significance to the category of 'quasi-natural beliefs.' Because the propensities they are caused by are secondary, they are akin to the "changeable, weak, and irregular" propensities of which Hume disapproves, calling them "opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning," and noting that they "may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are received by philosophy, and the latter rejected" (T 1.3.4.1; 225). While religious belief may be near universal, it is of no import. Even if we interpret Hume as claiming that religious belief is 'quasi-natural' (about which I am doubtful), this does not in any way indicate that the belief is warranted.

3.10. Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that belief in intelligent design is not a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smith's strict sense. Because the 'core concept' is not an irresistible belief, neither intelligent design nor any religious belief can be 'natural' in Kemp Smith's sense. This, however, does not mean that religious belief is not natural in the broader sense of the term defined in Section 2.6. While each of the characters in the *Dialogues* may profess a strong urge to believe in an intelligent designer, despite the skeptical arguments against that belief; and while this belief may be based on non-inferential grounds or a natural psychological propensity, this does not prove that the belief is a 'natural belief', understood broadly. In order to determine that, we must look to Hume's discussion of the causes of religious belief, found primarily in his *Natural History of Religion*. The *Natural History*, not the *Dialogues*, focuses on the origin of religious belief in human nature. In Chapter 4, I argue that religious belief is not warranted by naturalistic means. I examine the mechanisms which cause it and the conditions in which those mechanisms are operating, as discussed by Hume in the *Natural History*. To show that religious belief is not warranted by naturalistic means, I examine the mechanisms which cause it and the conditions in which those mechanisms are operating. I then compare these mechanisms to similar ones Hume discusses in the *Treatise* where in several instances Hume provides a naturalistic explanation for a belief, though indicating that the belief is not warranted. On these occasions, he uses language which indicates an epistemic problem with the beliefs caused by the same or similar mechanisms, or mechanisms operating in the same circumstances which cause religious belief

Chapter 4

The Epistemic Status of Religious Belief

4.1.    Introduction

In Chapter 2, I argued that Hume provides a naturalistic response to any generalized skepticism. For Hume, the fact that some beliefs are not justified by evidence or argument (*a priori* or *a posteriori*) does not necessarily entail that the beliefs are not warranted. Rather, there are instances of beliefs that are warranted naturalistically. A belief is 'natural' if it is one which cannot be justified by *a priori* or empirical argument, but is nonetheless warranted on the basis of the psychological mechanisms which cause it. According to the four viable naturalistic theories of Hume's epistemology, the psychological mechanisms which lend warrant to belief must be: common to all humans and produce beliefs which are unavoidable or irresistible (Kemp Smith); properly functioning and aimed at the production of true beliefs (proper-function theory); reliably productive of true beliefs (reliabilism); generally productive of stable beliefs (stability theory).

In Chapter 3, I argued that religious belief is not a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smith's strict sense. The evidence from the *Dialogues* and the *Natural History* is insufficient to establish that, for Hume, religious belief is 'natural'. Moreover, Hume claims that religious belief is not irresistible. In order to decide whether or not Hume

endorses Cleanthes' 'irregular argument' in *Dialogues* III, or thinks that the belief in intelligent design is 'natural', I argue that we must examine his explanation of religious belief. Does Hume indeed maintain that the psychological mechanisms giving rise to religious belief are akin to sensation in constituting a natural and "incontestable" or at least warranted, "proof of design?" In the *Dialogues*, Hume provides no discussion of how we might come to have the belief in intelligent design given that it is not rationally justified. For his naturalistic explanation of religious belief we must look to the *Natural History*.

In the *Natural History*, Hume explains the psychological process by which religious belief has developed. He argues that the belief passes through three stages: polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism. Polytheism is the belief in many gods. Typically, these gods are anthropomorphized, imperfect, and control particular areas of nature or aspects of life (such as the sea or the harvest). Henotheism is an intermediate stage between polytheism and monotheism. Although the henotheist believes in multiple gods, he or she has a "favorite"—a god either that is in control of all the other gods (Hume uses examples from Greek mythology), or one that is elevated as the main god active in a particular location (tribe, country, etc.). Monotheism is the belief in an all-perfect creator God.

In this chapter, I survey Hume's genetic account of religious belief. I show that, according to Hume, religious belief is caused by five propensities of the imagination: the propensity toward a system that provides satisfaction, the propensity to anthropomorphize, the propensity to attend to visual objects, the propensity to adulate, and the galley principle. I argue that religious belief is not founded on a psychological

propensity to believe in a designer triggered by the apparent order in nature. I then consider the mechanisms responsible for religious belief, noting Hume's evaluation of them in both the *Natural History*, as well as the *Treatise*. I argue that religious belief is not warranted according to any theory which provides a naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology, since none of the mechanisms responsible for religious belief meet the criteria for 'natural belief' understood broadly. I conclude by arguing that, in fact, for Hume, monotheism is epistemically inferior to polytheism.

## 4.2.    The Origin of Polytheism and the 'Core Concept'

Hume claims that polytheism arises when human beings have a limited understanding of nature and are unable to foretell things that will happen to them. He provides several examples of the forces of nature acting in what may seem to be inconsistent ways—and claims that early man sees nature as a "constant combat of opposite powers" (NHR 2.3; 139), making it extremely difficult to predict what will happen in the future. He argues that this situation causes people to be hopeful, but also afraid. He says:

> No passions, therefore, can be supposed to work upon such barbarians, but the ordinary affections of human life; the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries. Agitated by hopes and fears of this nature, especially the latter, men scrutinize, with a trembling curiosity, the course of future causes, and examine the various and contrary events of human life. And in this disordered scene, with eyes still more disordered and astonished, they see the first obscure

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traces of divinity. (NHR 2.5; 140)

Vacillating between hope and fear, concerned for their future, men begin to examine the causes of the natural events which bear on their welfare.  Hume claims that, desperate in his situation, man strives to form a determinate idea of the invisible powers influencing his welfare:

> We hang in perpetual suspence between life and death, health and sickness, plenty and want; which are distributed amongst the human species by secret and unknown causes, whose operation is oft unexpected, and always unaccountable. These *unknown causes*, then, become the constant object of our hope and fear; and while the passions are kept in perpetual alarm by an anxious expectation of the events, the imagination is equally employed in forming ideas of those powers, on which we have so entire a dependence. (NHR 3.1; 140-141)

Hume notes that the focus on the unknown causes of fortune and misfortune is initially a focus on something which is obscure, but since man is not comfortable ascribing these powers to something unknown, he attempts to form some clear idea of them.

Hume suggests that, in reality, the causes of fortune and misfortune are "the particular fabric and structure of the minute parts of their own bodies and of external objects" (NHR 3.1; 141). However, he claims, early man is not in a position to understand this. He claims:

> But this philosophy exceeds the comprehension of the ignorant multitude, who can only conceive the unknown causes in a general and confused manner; though their imagination, perpetually employed on the same subject, must labour to form some particular and distinct idea of them. The more they consider these causes

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themselves, and the uncertainty of their opinion, the less satisfaction do they meet

with in their researches; and, however unwilling, they must at last have

abandoned so arduous an attempt, were it not for a propensity in human nature,

which leads to a system, that gives them some satisfaction. (NHR 3.1; 141)

Attempting to form a determinate idea of the causes of their fortune and misfortune, early

man is led to this idea not by reason, but by a propensity of the imagination. The first

propensity, which causes belief in invisible powers, is the propensity toward a system

that provides satisfaction.

In forming the idea of the invisible powers that affect man's situation, Hume

argues, man will personify the invisible causes. He claims that there is a "universal

tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every

object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are

intimately conscious" (NHR 3.2; 141). Man enhances his idea of the unknown causes

which are responsible for his happiness and suffering by crediting those powers with

human characteristics such as sentiment and intelligence. Hume clarifies:

No wonder, then, that mankind, being placed in such an absolute ignorance of

causes, and being at the same time so anxious concerning their future fortune,

should immediately acknowledge a dependence on invisible powers, possessed of

sentiment and intelligence. The unknown causes which continually employ their

thought…are all apprehended to be of the same kind or species. (NHR 3.2, 142)

The second mechanism causing polytheism—the propensity to anthropomorphize—leads

to a conception of invisible, intelligent powers or gods which are responsible for our

happiness and misery.

The first occurrence of belief in the 'core concept' occurs as polytheistic belief. In explaining the origin of polytheism, Hume also explains the origin of belief in invisible, intelligent power. Hume claims:

> As the causes, which bestow happiness or misery, are, in general, very little known and very uncertain, our anxious concern endeavours to attain a determinate idea of them; and finds no better expedient than to represent them as intelligent voluntary agents, like ourselves; only somewhat superior in power and wisdom. (NHR 5.9; 152)

Ignorant and fearful, the propensity toward a system that provides satisfaction causes man to form a determinate idea of the causes of his happiness and misery, and the propensity to anthropomorphize is responsible for man ascribing intelligence to the invisible powers. The propensity to anthropomorphize also leads man to ascribe additional human characteristics to the gods. Hume explains, "nor is it long before we ascribe to them thought and reason and passion, and sometimes even the limbs and figures of men, in order to bring them nearer to a resemblance with ourselves" (NHR 3.2; 142).

It is important to note the role that fear or anxiety plays in the development of polytheistic belief. Initially, fear is operant insofar as it leads man to examine the causes of his fortune and misfortune. Because man is afraid of these unknown causes, the imagination is fixed on finding a determinate idea of them. Although Hume states that "any of the human affections may lead us into the notion of invisible, intelligent power; hope as well as fear, gratitude as well as affliction," he makes a point to emphasize the role that fear plays in forming the original religion of man. He notes that even if we

examine our own lives, we will see that "men are much oftener thrown on their knees by the melancholy than the agreeable passions" (NHR 3.4; 143).

The propensity toward a system and the propensity to anthropomorphize, operating in conditions of hope and especially fear, provide the foundation for polytheistic belief and the first appearance of the 'core concept'. Ignorant of the true causes of natural events which play such an important role in his daily life, primitive man lives in a constant state of fluctuating hopes and fears. He strives to form a determinate idea of the causes of his fortune and misfortune and then likens these causes to himself— he thinks of them as intelligent and later ascribes additional human-like characteristics to the gods. The two natural propensities (toward a system and to anthropomorphize) are responsible for the belief in invisible, intelligent power, as well as more complex polytheistic belief-systems—systems of gods with numerous human characteristics.

## 4.3.    The Propensity Toward a System that Provides Satisfaction

One of two psychological mechanisms responsible for polytheism, as well as for the first occurrence of the 'core concept,' Hume describes as "a propensity in human nature, which leads to a system, that gives them some satisfaction" (NHR 3.1-2; 141). The propensity is responsible for the belief in invisible powers which are understood as the causes of natural events. The exact nature of this propensity is not immediately obvious. Yandell argues that the propensity describes a mechanism by which man attempts to understand the causes of the course of nature. He claims that the propensity toward a system is a propensity to understand; or a propensity to seek an explanation for natural events. He states, "afflicted by events they find threatening, people experience

such emotions as hope and fear that together with these events activate this propensity to seek a satisfactory explanation" (Yandell (1990) 15).

Yandell's is not the correct interpretation of the propensity toward a system—the propensity toward a system is not a propensity to seek a satisfactory explanation of the course of nature. Instead, the propensity which leads to a system that provides some satisfaction is akin to wish-fulfillment. In forming the idea of invisible powers, man's primary objective is not to seek out a satisfactory explanation for the events which affect his fortune or misfortune; rather, his primary goal is directed towards securing happiness. In particular, man seeks a means to control his own destiny. The satisfaction provided by the system is not the satisfaction a curious person might find when he gains understanding; instead, it is the satisfaction a desperate person might find when he gains some control over his own life.

Other commentators concur. Jones, for example, claims that "firstly, Hume considers the notion of God as an explanatory cause, and rejects it; secondly, he considers the notion of God as the name of a private sentiment, and whilst not rejecting the notion, emphasizes that it has no explanatory power" (Jones (1972) 322). Ferreira argues that the propensity toward a system is directed at controlling the course of natural events which play a large role in man's fortune or misfortune; in particular, he argues, early man attempts to form a determinate idea of the invisible powers affecting him in order to influence those causes in his favor. Hume points out that man, especially during times of distress, attempts to control his fate by appeasing the gods. He claims, "the mind, sunk into diffidence, terror, and melancholy, has recourse to every method of appeasing those secret intelligent powers, on whom our fortune is supposed to depend" (NHR 3.4; 143).

Ferreira claims that "the propensity toward a system is first and foremost a propensity toward *determinacy* precisely because such determinacy generates loci of address and, more importantly, of manipulation" (Ferreira (1995) 595). He argues that the propensity functions as a means of coping with the situation in which man finds himself—terrified and dependent on the world around him:

> The fear we experience in our state of impotent, ignorant dependence gives rise to the wish to be able to protect ourselves from, or otherwise deal with, the world in which we live; we wish, in other words, to attain some measure of control and security, and this implicit appeal to wish and wish-fulfillment is an implicit reference to the role of imagination in general. The work of imagination in a formal sense is to provide a system of determinate ideas through which we can cope with events and conditions which cause anxiety. (Ferreira (1995) 596)

The propensity toward a system leads man to feel as though he has some control over his own destiny. He fears the unknown causes of calamitous natural events; he hopes that the course of nature will unfold in such a way to keep him safe, secure, and well-fed. By positing that nature is controlled by intelligent powers somewhat like man, he has gained the belief that he has a means of controlling them. For example, he can provide sacrifices or complete other rituals in order to please the intelligent powers. If the powers which control natural events are placated, then perhaps his hopes will be answered and his fears quelled.

In forming the idea of invisible, intelligent powers, man does provide an explanation of the course of nature—whatever natural events that bear on human welfare is the result of these powers. But postulating the existence of invisible, intelligent powers

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does not soothe man's curiosity for knowledge: he may believe that floods are caused by the river-god, or that drought is brought on by the rain-god (insofar as he chooses not to make it rain), but it is not curiosity about the causes of floods or droughts which drives man to posit invisible, intelligent powers; rather, it is anxiety about his own future and the way in which floods or drought may affect his welfare. The propensity toward a system does not primarily provide a means to understand the natural world; instead, it provides man a means to attempt to control the natural world to whatever extent is possible, by praying, or offering sacrifices, etc. to the invisible causes. Ferreira puts the point as follows:

> What Hume sees at work in the origin of religion is not a search for such an explanation, even a crude one. Rather, on Hume's view the only curiosity at work is a curiosity about how to cope: the propensity to a system is the propensity to the kind of determinacy which is expedient for control, and the only satisfaction the system provides is on in terms of coping which is independent of truth-seeking as any kind of ultimate aim. (Ferreira (1995) 594)

In other words, man's primary concern is not discovering why there are floods or droughts. Man in his ignorant position, according to Hume, cannot discover the true causes of such natural events. Instead, man's primary concern is how to prevent them. Postulating invisible, intelligent powers provides him something to which he can pray, beg, or otherwise attempt to control his own destiny.

The satisfaction gained in postulating beings to which he can direct his attention is the reduction of anxiety produced by ignorance and lack of control. The propensity toward a system is not directed at providing the satisfaction of having an explanation;

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instead, it is aimed at happiness. Hume allows that it is man's "anxious concern for happiness, which begets the idea of these invisible, intelligent powers" (NHR 2.5; 140). It is in this way that the first propensity which causes polytheism is akin to wish-fulfillment. Wish-fulfillment is a psychological mechanism which produces beliefs that produce happiness or comfort. One example of a belief founded on wish-fulfillment is belief in a spouse's faithfulness despite evidence to the contrary. Suppose that Shannon has been coming home late, has been taking mysterious phone calls, and has been acting suspiciously. Lauren has noted this behavior, and knows that Shannon has committed adultery in the past, but refuses to believe that Shannon is having an affair. Instead, she forms the belief that Shannon is very busy and overwhelmed with work. This belief is based on the psychological mechanism of wish-fulfillment. It does provide an explanation for Shannon's odd behavior, but the main motivation for forming the belief that Shannon is busy with work is not to provide an adequate explanation; rather it is to make Lauren feel better. Lauren is afraid to lose Shannon, and believing that she is busy at work eases her mind.

The propensity toward a system has much in common with the psychological mechanism of wish-fulfillment. Both operate in conditions where the believer is afraid, and both relieve the believer of anxiety. In both cases, an explanation is believed, but the explanation is not the goal of believing—the details of the explanation do not matter, nor does it matter how well the explanation explains, or fits, the relevant data; instead, the purpose of forming belief is to provide happiness or to relieve anxiety. The propensity toward a system that provides satisfaction is not a propensity which has explanation as its primary goal; rather, its primary goal is to provide a determinate idea of the causes of

natural occurrences so that man can have someone to whom he can direct his hopes, and therefore provides satisfaction insofar as it relieves the anxiety produced by man's ignorant, dependent condition.

Polytheism, as well as the first instantiation of belief in the 'core concept' is caused by two propensities of the imagination: the propensity toward a system which provides satisfaction and the propensity to anthropomorphize. I argue that the first propensity is not one which has as its primary goal explanation, but instead provides a reduction of anxiety insofar as man gains a determinate idea of the causes of natural evens which affect his destiny and therefore a means, however inept, to control his future. This, however, does not mark the end of Hume's explanation of the causes of religious belief. He not only provides an explanation of polytheism, but also of henotheism and monotheism. In the next two sections, I will explicate Hume's account of the causes of henotheism and monotheism. In Sections 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10, I evaluate the epistemic status of polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism.

## 4.4. The Transition to Henotheism

Henotheism is an intermediary between polytheism and monotheism. This system remains polytheistic insofar as different gods are identified with different invisible powers. In this system, however, one god is favored over the rest.

The simple polytheistic belief describes a system of *invisible* powers. But, as Hume notes, men also have a natural tendency to prefer to think about visible things. In order to remedy this situation, man begins to identify the invisible powers with material objects. Hume explains, "however strong men's propensity to believe invisible,

intelligent power in nature, their propensity is equally strong to rest their attention on sensible, visible objects; and in order to reconcile these opposite inclinations, they are led to unite the invisible power with some visible object" (NHR 5.2; 150). This unification usually occurs in two ways: by identifying the invisible power with a part of nature (the sun, the wind, various animals, etc.), or by locating it in some man-made object (such as a fountain, statue, or other icon). Hume claims that "the vulgar polytheist… defies every part of the universe, and conceives all the conspicuous productions of nature, to be themselves so many real divinities" (NHR 5.2; 150). The propensity to attend to sensible objects is the third propensity at work in Hume's explanation of religious belief.

Besides identifying the gods with visible objects, man begins to tell elaborate stories about the divinities. Hume explains:

When a god is supposed to preside over any passion, event, or system of actions, it is almost unavoidable to give him a genealogy, attributes, and adventures, suitable to his supposed powers and influence; and to carry on that similitude and comparison, which is naturally so agreeable to the mind of man. (NHR 5.3; 151)

Men begin to supplement the initial idea of the gods with further details. As Hume explains, this is something that comes easily; the vulgar and the educated alike participate in this practice. Still, Hume criticizes even the best allegories: "Since the ancient mythologists fall into mistakes so gross and palpable, we have no reason surely to expect such refined and long-spun allegories, as some have endeavoured to deduce from their fictions" (NHR 5.4, 151). Giving more examples, he notes the lack of truth and consistency not only in the allegories of the most vulgar nations, but even the most refined. He laments, "what degree of reason must we expect in the religious belief of the

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vulgar in other nations; when Athenians and Areopagites could entertain such gross misconceptions?" (NHR 5.8; 152).

This does not mark the end of the henotheistic stage. The henotheist assigns a particular god to a particular location, such as a city; or assumes that one god has providence over a particular aspect of nature, such as the harvest. Because the gods have limited power, they are not capable of controlling all of nature, or of wielding their power over the entire population. Hume explains, "the limited influence of these agents, and their great proximity to human weakness, introduce the various distribution and division of their authority; and thereby give rise to allegory" (NHR 5.9; 152). Hume argues that assigning particular locations to specific gods also contributes to the mythology depicting the deities: "Distribution also of distinct provinces to the several deities is apt to cause some allegory, both physical and moral, to enter into the vulgar systems of polytheism" (NHR 5.3; 150).

There are two potential reasons for this phenomenon, and both depend on the circumstances in which men are living: "They may either suppose, that, in the distribution of power and territory among the gods, their nation was subjected to the jurisdiction of that particular deity; or reducing heavenly objects to the model of things below, they may represent one god as the prince or supreme magistrate of the rest" (NHR 6.5; 154-155). In many human societies, people are ruled by princes or kings or chiefs; power and territory are often distributed, with one leader responsible for a certain location (as a mayor, for example, is in charge of a town). Choosing one god as a favorite or ultimate leader, men further personify the gods in a way that is most familiar to them. It is natural to construe this phenomenon as caused by the same principle which causes

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the original polytheistic belief: the propensity to anthropomorphize. Telling stories about the gods, assigning them particular provinces, providing genealogies, people further personify the gods—they provide them a home, a family, a history. As time goes on, men continue to further personify the gods and eventually elevate one god above all others. This god becomes the one to whom the believer directs his focus, his prayers, and his worship.

Hume claims that henotheists (as well as polytheists) tend to prefer a certain kind of description of the gods. Men are living in a state of terrible uncertainty, fearing future calamity and hoping for good fortune. Unfortunately, their hopes are often unfulfilled. Thus, men tend to see the gods as terrible, vengeful beings. Hume elaborates:

> The primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events; and what ideas will naturally be entertained of invisible, unknown powers, while men lie under dismal apprehensions of any kind, may easily be conceived. Every image of vengeance, severity, cruelty, and malice must occur, and must augment the ghastliness and horror, which oppresses the amazed religionist. (NHR 13.1; 176)

Fear, in conjunction with the propensity to personify and the facts of men's situation, leads men to depict the invisible powers as nasty and brutish. Further application of this propensity under conditions of fear eventually leads men to depict the gods as horrifying:

> A panic having once seized the mind, the active fancy still farther multiplies the objects of terror; while that profound darkness, or, what is worse, that glimmering light, with which we are environed, represents the 116pecters of divinity under the most dreadful appearances imaginable. (NHR 13.1, 176)

The personifying propensity is skewed by its application in fearful circumstances, with the result that the gods are depicted in a negative light. In the henotheistic stage, man, affected by the propensity to attend to visual objects, tends to associate the gods with natural or manmade objects. The propensity to anthropomorphize causes him to further personify the gods, providing them a history, a power structure, and a dominion. Just as in Hume's explanation of the origin of polytheism, fear plays an important role in the explanation for henotheistic belief.

4.5.    The Transition to Monotheism

The end of the henotheistic stage is reached when man has elevated one god above the rest. Although he may still believe in the existence of other gods (lesser gods or gods of different regions), he directs his prayers and worship to the favorite god. After reaching this point, man is in a position to gain monotheistic belief. Hume claims that man has a tendency to raise the favorite god higher and higher, as he finds more ways to persuade him to help him avoid misfortune and gain success. He explains, "his votaries will endeavor, by every art, to insinuate themselves into his favor; and supposing him to be pleased, like themselves, with praise and flattery…in proportion as men's fears or distresses become more urgent, they still invent new strains of adulation" (NHR 6.5; 155).

It is odd, Hume notes, that a religion which stems from fear and originally depicts the gods as terrible beings would eventually lead to a system where one god is elevated to infinity. However, Hume explains this with an appeal to another, contrary principle of human nature: the adulation propensity. He notes that, despite the fact that men originally

fear the gods and depict them as cruel, in attempting to ensure the favor of their favorite god, they end up exalting him above the rest. He summarizes, "here therefore is a kind of contradiction between the different principles of human nature, which enter into religion. Our natural terrors present the notion of a devilish and malicious deity: Our propensity to adulate leads us to acknowledge an excellent and divine. And the influence of these opposite principles are various, according to the different situation of the human understanding" (NHR 13.3; 176-177). Man, still overcome with hope and fear, attempting to control his future by pleasing the god which controls the natural events which bear on his fortune or misfortune, chooses one god among many and worships him exclusively. The adulation principle causes man to elevate this god above the others, not only increasing his power, but his good qualities as well.

The operation of the adulation propensity is strongly influenced by man's desire to relieve anxiety. In this way, it is similar to the propensity toward a system—by raising one god to infinity, man hopes to better control his destiny. Hume claims, "the same anxious concern for happiness, which begets the idea of these invisible intelligent powers, allows not mankind to remain long in the first simple conception of them; as powerful, but limited beings; masters of human fate, but slaves to destiny and the course of nature" (NHR 8.2; 159). The propensity to adulate is influenced by fear. Hume claims, "it appears certain, that, though the original notions of the vulgar represent the Divinity as a limited being, and consider him only as the particular cause of health and sickness; plenty or want; prosperity or adversity; yet when more magnificent ideas are urged upon them, they esteem it dangerous to refuse their assent" (NHR 7.1; 157). Not wanting to offend the god that so influences man's livelihood, especially given the assumption that

god can be cruel and indifferent, man will shy from rejecting any compliment of him.

From the initial propensity to raise one god above the others, the henotheist persists in this course, and eventually attributes all perfections to the favorite god. Hume states: "Men's exaggerated praises and compliments will swell their idea upon them; and elevating their deities to the utmost bounds of perfection, at last beget the attributes of unity and infinity, simplicity and spirituality" (NHR 8.2; 159). And so man arrives at a belief in a "perfect being, the creator of the world" (NHR 6.5; 155).

Here we encounter another mechanism that contributes to the belief in an all-perfect god: the psychological galley principle. Hume describes this propensity in the *Treatise* when discussing the vulgar belief in body, insofar as it causes the vulgar to believe in the continued existence of external objects. He describes the propensity as follows: "The imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and, like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse" (T 1.4.2.3; 198). In developing the idea of a perfect deity, this principle seems to be in effect. The henotheist gets carried away in his adulation, adding more and more positive qualities to his favorite god until he reaches perfection.

Monotheistic belief arises out of henotheism by the application of two psychological mechanisms: the propensity to adulate and the galley principle. It is important for Hume that monotheism is not a separate belief-system, unconnected to polytheism. Rather, it is the culmination of a process of belief-transformation, beginning with polytheism and ending finally in monotheism. Over time, man is led from polytheistic belief to monotheistic belief by various psychological mechanisms. For Hume, monotheistic belief is causally connected to polytheism. He emphasizes the role

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that fear plays in the development of each stage of religious belief; he argues that several religious beliefs are adopted insofar as they play a role in relieving anxiety by giving man a means to gain control over his destiny.

## 4.6.    Cleanthes' Propensity—Religious Belief: A Response to Order? Or Chaos?

As I explained in Section 3.3, ID naturalists argue that the belief in intelligent design is not the result of appreciating the teleological argument; rather, it is the result of a natural propensity to ascribe design where order is found. Several commentators argue for this position.[61]  While the ID naturalist argues that the belief in intelligent design is a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smith's strict sense, any commentator who argues that the belief in intelligent design is 'natural', where 'natural' is understood broadly (as defined in Section 2.6), must argue that the belief in intelligent design is the result of a natural propensity to believe in a designer, or, more generally, to believe in an intelligent cause of known order—the belief cannot be warranted on the basis of any argument (*a priori* or *a posteriori*). I call this supposed propensity Cleanthes' propensity, since the best evidence for this view is found in Cleanthes' 'irregular argument' of *Dialogues* Part III, where he claims that upon admiring the structure of the eye, the "idea of a contriver" will "immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation" (DNR III; 56; 154). According to this passage, instead of forming the belief in intelligent design by making an inference on the basis of the teleological argument, man seems to form the belief in an intelligent designer non-inferentially. While the particular propensity responsible for the

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[61] Logan (1992) and Tweyman (1986) argue for a similar conclusion. Yandell claims that the propensities which cause religious belief "operate on being triggered by such stimuli as recognition of the (at least apparent) order of nature," though he also notes that the propensities are also triggered by ignorance, hope, and fear (Yandell (1979) 96-97).

belief is not mentioned in the *Dialogues*, presumably this propensity would be triggered by the apparent order in nature. In discussing the 'irregular argument', Cleanthes uses two analogies (the articulate voice in the clouds and the vegetative library) to explain the 'irregular inference' one might make when, for example, noting the apparent structure in the eye (DNR III; 54-55; 152-153). It seems, in this section, that Cleanthes might appeal to a propensity of the imagination to believe in design, triggered by noticing apparent order, to explain the three 'irregular' inferences we would make upon hearing the articulate voice in the clouds, seeing the vegetative library, and noticing the contrivance in the eye.

In Section 3.8, I considered an objection to the ID naturalist: the belief in intelligent design is not universal; if belief in intelligent design is not universal then it is not a 'natural belief'. There I address Tweyman's response to this objection. He argues that in order for an individual to form a belief, not only must the individual possess the appropriate belief-forming mechanism, but that mechanism must be triggered by the appropriate circumstances. Thus, he argues, 'natural beliefs' do not have to be universal, so long as the propensity which causes them is universal and the existence of non-believers can be attributed to the fact that the individual was not placed in the appropriate circumstances. So, Tweyman concludes, belief in intelligent design could still be a 'natural belief', despite the fact that it is not a universal belief, so long as non-believers are not placed in circumstances which would cause belief in design.

Tweyman makes an important point—instead of focusing on the properties of beliefs in determining whether or not a belief is 'natural', he focuses on the propensities which cause belief. However, in Section 3.8, I argued that his response is unsuccessful:

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because there is an abundance of apparent order in nature, it is unlikely that all atheists have not been placed in the appropriate circumstances to gain belief in design. Tweyman, however, might object as follows: Cleanthes' particular argument stems from an examination of the human eye. While early man would certainly be in the appropriate circumstances to observe eyes, he might not be in a situation to appreciate the apparent contrivance there—without understanding that the eye is made up of small parts that work together to perform the function of sight, early man might not be in a position to notice the apparent *telos* in the eye's construction. Even worse, Hume admits that early man, constantly worried about his uncertain future, "has no leisure to admire the regular face of nature" (NHR 1.6; 136).

At this point, it might seem that the belief in intelligent design could be warranted naturalistically. Hume might allow that belief in design is based on a natural propensity triggered by apparent order in nature (Cleanthes' propensity); and the existence of non-believers could be accounted for by the fact that they are not in a position to appreciate the order in nature. But, nowhere in Hume's writings does he claim that religious belief is founded on a psychological mechanism triggered by apparent order. In his "Letter Concerning the *Dialogues*," written to Gilbert Elliot, Hume notes that Cleanthes' propensity must be different from the propensity to anthropomorphize:

> I cou'd wish that Cleanthes Argument could be so analys'd, as to be render'd
> quite formal & regular. The propensity of the Mind towards it, unless that
> Propensity were as strong & universal as that to believe in our Senses &
> Experience, will still, I am afraid, be esteem'd a suspecious [sic] Foundation. We
> must endeavour to prove that this Propensity is somewhat different from our

Inclination to find our own Figures in the Clouds, or Face in the Moon, our

Passions and Sentiments, even in inanimate Matter. Such an Inclination may, &

ought be control'd, & can never be a legitimate Ground of Assent. (Grieg (1969)

155)[62]

However, in his explanation of religious belief, Hume does not appeal to Cleanthes'

propensity, as distinguished from the propensity to anthropomorphize.

Moreover, in the *Natural History*, Hume makes a point to show that the

psychological propensities which first generate religious belief are not triggered by the

observation of apparent order found in nature. Regardless of the circumstances in which

man finds himself, religious belief results as a response to disorder. Hume claims that

man's first religious belief is a response to chaos. He describes early man as seeing nature

as being composed of combative powers. And, he claims, "in this disordered scene, with

eyes still more disordered and astonished, they see the first obscure traces of divinity"

(NHR 2.5; 140). Hume makes clear that "the first ideas of religion arose not from a

contemplation of the works of nature, but from a concern with regard to the events of life,

and from the incessant hopes and fears, which actuate the human mind" (NHR 2.4; 139).

He explicitly denies that religious belief is triggered by regular natural occurrences. What

is more, he denies that man is interested in the ultimate origin of the universe. He

elaborates:

But an animal, compleat in all its limbs and organs, is to him an ordinary

spectacle, and produces no religious opinion or affection. Ask him, whence that

animal arose; he will tell you, from the copulation of its parents. And these,

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[62] Reprinted in Hume (1993) 25-28; this passage at 26.

whence? From the copulation of theirs. A few removes satisfy his curiosity, and set the objects at such a distance, that he entirely loses sight of them. Imagine not, that he will so much as start the question, whence the first animal; much less, whence the whole system, or united fabric of the universe arose. (NHR 1.6; 136-137)

Hume claims that the more ordered nature's workings, the less man will attend to its causes. Instead of wondering about the causes of the sun's regular rising and setting, for example, early man's enquires concerned the irregularities they witnessed in nature—flash floods, freak injuries, etc. He explains:

The more regular and uniform, that is, the more perfect nature appears, the more is he familiarized to it, and the less inclined to scrutinize and examine it. A monstrous birth excites his curiosity, and is deemed a prodigy. It alarms him from its novelty; and immediately sets him a trembling, and sacrificing, and praying. (NHR 1.6; 136)

In fact, Hume goes so far as to deny that the propensity to believe design where order is found is in operation when man forms religious belief:

It must, necessarily, indeed, be allowed, that, in order to carry men's attention beyond the present course of things, or lead them into any inference concerning invisible intelligent power, they must be actuated by some passion, which prompts their thought and reflection; some motive, which urges their first enquiry. But what passion shall we here have recourse to, for explaining an effect of such mighty consequence? Not speculative curiosity, surely, or the pure love of truth. That motive is too refined for such gross apprehensions; and would lead men into

enquiries concerning the frame of nature, a subject too large and comprehensive

for their narrow capacities. No passion, therefore, can be supposed to work upon

such barbarians, but the ordinary affections of human life. (NHR 2.5; 140)

The belief in intelligent design is not founded on Cleanthes' propensity, since religious

belief does not arise as a non-inferential response to apparent order in nature; it is not the

result of Cleanthes' propensity as distinguished from the propensity to anthropomorphize.

Holley concurs with this position. He claims that "in *the Natural History of Religion*,

he [Hume] claims that the origin of religious belief is to be found, not in a reasoned

contemplation of the world, but in a passionate response to an environment that humans

find threatening" (Holley (2002) 85). It is clear, I think, that the propensities which lead

man to his first conception of invisible, intelligent power is not, according to Hume,

triggered by an appreciation of the order in nature. Instead, he thinks that the belief in the

'core concept' is caused by the propensity toward a system and the propensity to

anthropomorphize, as a response to the apparent disorder man finds in nature.

4.7.    Polytheism: The Original Religion of Man

It might be objected that while the polytheist's belief is the result of a propensity

that is triggered by chaos, as opposed to order, this has nothing to do with belief in

intelligent design—belief in intelligent design is usually understood as monotheistic. But,

one might argue, the belief in a single intelligent designer might still be warranted

naturalistically so long as it is caused by Cleanthes' propensity, and so long as Cleanthes'

propensity is one which is properly functioning, tends to reliably produce true belief, or

tends to produce stability in belief. Perhaps it is the case that belief in intelligent design

arises independent of polytheism. But Hume does not allow for this. He does not admit that there is such a propensity at work in the transition to henotheism or monotheism. As I explained in Section 4.4, henotheism is caused by a propensity to attend to visual objects and further application of the personifying propensity. Monotheism is caused by the propensity to adulate and the galley principle. Moreover, Hume wants to rule out the possibility that belief in a single intelligent designer could have arisen prior to polytheistic belief. He makes a point to show that any belief in monotheism is causally dependent on polytheism insofar as he argues that polytheism is the original religion of man. Since Hume denies the existence of Cleanthes' propensity, and he argues that monotheism is dependent on polytheism, he rules out the possibility that the belief in intelligent design could arise outside of the transition from polytheism to monotheism.

Hume calls polytheism "the primary religion of men" (NHR 1.1; 135) as he thinks it represents the oldest form of religious belief. He claims, "it is a matter of fact incontestable, that about 1700 years ago all mankind were polytheists" (NHR 1.2; 135). In arguing that polytheism is the original form of religious belief, Hume is (in part) responding to a claim of the natural theologians of his time who claimed that *anyone* could form the belief in an intelligent designer simply by contemplating the beauty and order of the natural world. He explains:

> Shall we assert, that, in more ancient times, before the knowledge of letters, or the discovery of any art or science, men entertained the principles of pure theism? That is, while they were ignorant and barbarous, they discovered truth: But fell into error, as soon as they acquired learning and politeness. (NHR 1.3; 135)

In other words, the natural theologians claimed that anyone capable of reasoning normally would appreciate the argument from design. But Hume disagrees. He claims that if man would have formed religious belief as a response to the design argument, he would not have reverted back to polytheism. He claims, "if men were at first led into the belief of one supreme being, by reasoning from the frame of nature, they could never possibly leave that belief, in order to embrace idolatry" (NHR1.7; 137) Thus, Hume denies that the observation of apparent order led to religious belief. He claims, "but though I allow that the order and frame of the universe, when accurately examined, affords such an argument; yet I can never think, that this consideration could have an influence on mankind, when they formed their first rude notions of religion" (NHR 1.5; 136).

Worried about possible counter-examples of ancient monotheistic religious belief, Hume points out that "the doubtful and skeptical principles of a few philosophers, or the theism, and that too not entirely pure, of one or two nations, form no objection worth regarding" (NHR 1.2; 135). Hume does not seem to think that a few examples of ancient monotheistic belief are enough to establish that monotheism was the primary religion of man. He supports the contention that polytheism is the primary religion of men by drawing attention to the fact that, with no exception, all of the less advanced civilizations of which he is aware also practice polytheism. He claims, "but in this assertion you not only contradict all appearance of probability, but also our present experience concerning the principles and opinions of barbarous nations. The savage tribes of America, Africa, and Asia are all idolaters" (NHR 1.4; 135).

In his "The Argument of the *Natural History*," Webb argues that Hume must have had an ulterior motive in arguing that polytheism, as opposed to monotheism, was the primary religion of man, since "the empirical evidence available to him [Hume] did not warrant a decision one way or another" (Webb (1991) 146). Webb claims that it was important for Hume to argue that theism is causally connected to polytheism. He says:

> By attempting to establish polytheism as the original religion, he [Hume] hopes to depict the generally considered more noble and sober theism of his day as the *progeny* of polytheism: as the majority of his audience considered polytheism a corrupt descendent of theism, as well as silly and unworthy of serious belief…Hume is implicitly suggesting that—once shown its true ancestry—traditional theism should *also* be viewed in like manner. (Webb (1991) 146)

Webb emphasizes the fact that Hume, in arguing that monotheism is the offspring of polytheism, attempts to influence his audience's evaluation of monotheism by connecting it to polytheism. Hume summarizes: "We may conclude, therefore, upon the whole, that, since the vulgar, in nations, which have embraced the doctrine of theism, still build it upon irrational and superstitious principles, they are never led into the opinion by any process of argument, but by a certain train of thinking, more suitable to their genius and capacity" (NHR 6.4, 154). According to Webb, Hume hopes that the same criticisms his audience has of polytheism will, since the two are causally connected, be relevant to monotheism as well. While I agree with this statement in general—Hume does want to show that monotheism is the progeny of polytheism, and he wants his audience to apply their criticisms of polytheism to monotheism—I place a different emphasis on the

connection. Webb emphasizes Hume's moral critique of monotheistic belief; I emphasize the epistemic critique.[63]

I have already argued that the original development of the 'core concept' occurs as polytheistic belief. While religious belief does undergo changes, the 'core concept' remains embedded in monotheistic belief. While one might argue that it is possible that belief in intelligent design arises separately from polytheistic belief, caused by Cleanthes' propensity, I argue in Section 4.6 that this is not the case—Hume denies that there is any such propensity. He continues to deny the existence of such a propensity in his explanation of religious belief, and rejects the claim that the belief in intelligent design could arise outside of the transition from polytheism to monotheism. Since the only way in which the belief in intelligent design could arise naturally is within the context that Hume describes, its warrant must come from the propensities Hume describes in his explanation of religious belief. In the following sections, I examine the propensities responsible for religious belief. I argue that, since the propensities do not meet the criteria for propensities which produce 'natural beliefs,' understood broadly, the belief in intelligent design is not warranted. I also argue that any form of religious belief is unwarranted, and finally conclude that monotheism is epistemically inferior to polytheism.

## 4.8.    The Epistemic Status of Polytheism and Henotheism

In Chapter 3, I argue that the ID naturalist is unsuccessful in showing that the belief in intelligent design is a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smith's strict sense. However,

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[63] I discuss Webb's position in more detail in Section 5.1.

this does not guarantee that the belief is not a warranted 'natural belief'. Depending on which view of naturalized epistemology best represents Hume's own, the belief may be warranted if it is the result of proper functioning mechanisms aimed at truth formation, the result of mechanisms which reliably produce true beliefs, or the result of mechanisms which tend to produce stability in belief. In order to determine whether or not belief in intelligent design is warranted naturalistically, I argue that we must examine the mechanisms responsible for the belief. According to Hume, polytheism is caused by the propensity toward a system and the propensity to anthropomorphize. The propensity toward a system leads to belief in invisible powers that are responsible for natural occurrences. The propensity to anthropomorphize causes man to ascribe human characteristics, including intelligence, to the invisible powers.

The first propensity responsible for polytheism is the propensity toward a system. The propensity toward a system is not a propensity which meets any of the criteria for a propensity which produces 'natural belief' (understood broadly). In Section 4.3, I argued that the propensity toward a system is akin to wish-fulfillment. The propensity toward a system allows man to feel that he has some means of controlling the course of nature. Kail, for example, argues that "the belief [in invisible, intelligent powers] is adopted because it removes the anxiety that the thinker's ignorance, impotence, and investment in controlling nature engenders" (Kail (2007a) 11). The propensity is primarily directed at producing beliefs which remove anxiety insofar as they provide the polytheist with loci of address, and therefore provide the means to control their destiny. If this is correct, then

it is clear that beliefs caused by this propensity are not warranted naturalistically according to the proper-function theorist or the reliabilist.[64]

According to the proper-functionalist, a belief is warranted if it is formed by a properly-functioning propensity aimed at producing true belief. According to the reliabilist, a belief is warranted if it is formed by a propensity which reliably produces true beliefs. The propensity toward a system produces belief which provides early man a determinate idea of the causes of his fortune and misfortune; further, it provides him with an agent to whom he can direct his prayers and for whom he can make sacrifices. This provides man with the illusion that he can control his destiny, and in turn, relieves anxiety man has about his future. Since I argue that the goal of the propensity is to relieve anxiety, I will grant that it is properly-functioning. But a propensity which leads to a belief that relieves anxiety is not a mechanism which is directed at the production of true belief.

As I argued in Section 4.3, the propensity toward a system is not directed at explaining the true causes of natural events which bear on man's welfare. Truth is not relevant at all. One might argue that a propensity which is not aimed at the production of true belief might still, by some happy accident, reliably produce true belief. Hume, however, denies that the beliefs produced by the propensity toward a system are true. He explicitly notes that polytheistic belief is false. As I explained in Section 4.2, he argues that man is ignorant of the true causes of natural occurrences (NHR 3.1; 141). Postulating invisible intelligent powers as responsible agents is just that—a postulate. In fact, Hume frequently calls polytheists "superstitious" (e.g., NHR 3.3, 4.2, 4.5). He claims that "the

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[64] I argue that polytheism is not warranted according to the stability theorist at p. 136ff.

same principles naturally deify mortals, superior in power and courage, or understanding, and produce hero-worship, together with fabulous history and mythological tradition, in all its wild and unaccountable forms" (NHR 5.9; 152). He says that "even the philosophers, who discourse of such topics, readily assented to the grossest theory" (NHR 4.12; 149). Certainly, the 'core concept' as it emerges in the polytheist is not warranted, since it not based on truth-indicating grounds.

The propensity toward a system is not the only propensity at work in causing polytheist belief. The propensity to anthropomorphize is responsible for man's ascribing intelligence to the invisible powers which control natural occurrences. Moreover, it is the propensity at work when man adds other human characteristics to his conception of the gods. Hume describes the personifying principle as a "universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves" (NHR 3.2; 141). One might argue that beliefs based on this propensity are 'natural beliefs' even in Kemp Smith's strict sense—unavoidable and irresistible. While it might seem that Hume thinks this propensity to anthropomorphize is something which we cannot control, since it is, as he says, universal, this is not in fact the case. He writes: "we find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds, and by a natural propensity, *if not corrected by experience and reflection,* ascribe malice or good-will to every thing, that hurts or pleases us" (NHR 3.1; 141, emphasis added). It is clear that Hume thinks that the tendency to personify *can* be avoided—with the proper attention and care, of course. He gives an example, noting that in poetry, "mountains and streams are personified, and the inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment and passion" (NHR 3.2; 141). For the educated person, these personifications are not taken as truths—we do not believe, on the poet's word, that there is, in fact, a

river god. However, Hume notes, the river-god "may sometimes enter into the real creed of the ignorant vulgar" (NHR 3.2; 141). And though this tendency is sometimes avoided, Hume makes a point to emphasize that it is not done so easily. He claims, "philosophers cannot entirely exempt themselves from this natural frailty as they are guilty themselves of ascribing human affections to the vacuum" (NHR 3.2; 141).

In the *Treatise,* Hume discusses the philosopher's use of this propensity with an even more disapproving tone. In discussing the ancient philosophers' (in particular, the Peripatetics) ideas of "sympathies, antipathies, and horrors of a vacuum," he claims that, "there is a very remarkable inclination in human nature to bestow on external objects the same emotions, which it observes in itself; and to find every where those ideas, which are most present to it" (T 1.4.3.11; 224). Hume has in mind the same personifying propensity referred to in the *Natural History*. Here again, as in the *Natural History*, even if the propensity is universal or near universal, Hume claims that it can be easily avoided, and does not think that it causes warranted beliefs. He explains, "this inclination, 'tis true, is suppress'd by a little reflection, and only takes place in children, poets and the antient [sic] philosophers" (T 1.4.3.11; 224). Although he thinks it understandable that children personify the stones that hurt them, and poets, everything, he is not so ready to free the philosophers from blame. He asks, "we must pardon children, because of their age; poets, because they profess to follow implicitly the suggestions of their fancy: But what excuse shall we find to justify our philosophers in so signal a weakness?" (T 1.4.3.11, 225).

As I argued in Chapter 2, the paradigm example of a belief which gains warrant by naturalistic means is a belief based on induction. But in the *Treatise* Hume takes care to distinguish beliefs caused by the personifying propensity from beliefs caused by the

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causal propensity. He notes, "it maybe be objected that…I am unjust in blaming the antient [sic] philosophers for making use of that faculty [the imagination], and allowing themselves to be entirely guided by it in their reasonings" (T 1.4.4.1; 225). Hume, of course, does not think that he is unjust. He differentiates between principles of the imagination that are "permanent, irresistible, and universal; *such as the customary transition from causes to effects*" and those that are "changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just now taken notice of [the propensity to anthropomorphize]" (T 1.4.4.1; 225, emphasis added). The latter, he claims are "neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition" (T 1.4.4.1; 225). Finally, he refers to these principles as a defect, and contrasts them with those that "arise only from the solid, permanent, and consistent principles of the imagination" (T 1.4.4.2; 226). Polytheism is caused by a principle that Hume contrasts, negatively, with the inductive propensity; thus, Hume thinks polytheism is epistemically inferior to beliefs founded on induction.

This is enough to show that the propensity to anthropomorphize is not a propensity which satisfies the criteria for 'natural belief' (understood broadly) according to the reliabilist or the proper-function theorist. Since the paradigm examples of 'natural beliefs' (understood broadly) are beliefs based on induction, and Hume contrasts beliefs caused by the propensity to anthropomorphize with belief based on induction, it would be unlikely that beliefs based on the personifying principle would be warranted. Nonetheless, Hume also makes clear that the propensity is not directed at the production

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of true belief and does not reliably produce true belief. He says that beliefs produced by the propensity to anthropomorphize—beliefs such as finding faces in the moon or armies in the clouds—are absurd. In the *Treatise*, Hume calls beliefs based on the propensity "fictions" (T 1.4.3.11; 224). He says that this is also the case when this propensity causes religious belief: "The absurdity is not less, while we case our eyes upwards; and transferring, as is too usual, human passions and infirmities to the deity" (NHR 3.2; 141). Thus, the propensity to anthropomorphize is not a properly-functioning mechanism *aimed at truth*, nor does it reliably produce true belief. Beliefs based on the personifying principle are not warranted naturalistically. Polytheism, for Hume, is not a 'natural belief' according to the proper-function theorist, the reliabilist, or Kemp Smith.

As I argued in Section 4.4, on Hume's view, henotheism stems from polytheistic belief, and is caused primarily by further application of the personifying propensity. Since I argue that beliefs based on the propensity to anthropomorphize are not warranted according to the proper-function theorist or the reliabilist, insofar as henotheism is caused by the propensity to anthropomorphize, henotheism will have the same epistemic status of polytheism. In its application which leads to henotheism, the tendency to anthropomorphize is influenced by two different background conditions: the current political structure and fear. The political circumstance of the believer, because it is arbitrary, certainly does not lend any warrant to the belief. Moreover, I will show in Section 4.10 that propensities operating in fearful conditions do not produce warranted beliefs.

The other propensity at work in the development of henotheistic belief is the propensity to attend to visible objects. This propensity resolves the difficulty man has in

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thinking about invisible powers, insofar as it causes man to identify the gods with visible objects, for example by locating the gods in icons, such as statues, or by associating them with a particular aspect of nature, such as the wind (NHR 5.2; 150). The propensity, operating alone, does not seem to be problematic, and Hume does not have much to say (negative or positive) about this propensity. He does note, however, that in the case of the henotheist, it is problematic. For example, he claims:

> Lucretius was plainly seduced by the strong appearance of allegory, which is observable in the pagan fictions. He first addresses himself to Venus as to that generating power, which animates, renews, and beautifies the universe: But is soon betrayed by the mythology into incoherencies, while he prays to that allegorical personage to appease the furies of her lover Mars: An idea not drawn from allegory, but from the popular religion, and which Lucretius, as an Epicurean, could not consistently admit of. (NHR 5.5; 151)

Note that Hume claims Lucretius was *seduced* into believing *fictions* that lead to *inconsistencies* between the identification of the gods with the planets and his own Epicurean beliefs. It is clear that, at least in the case of the development of religious belief, the propensity to attend to visible objects does not, for Hume, generate true religious beliefs.

I have shown that polytheism is not warranted naturalistically according to the reliabilist or the proper-function theorist. For the stability theorist, a belief is warranted naturalistically if it is caused by mechanisms which tend to produce stability in belief. The propensity to anthropomorphize does not meet this criterion. Instead, it produces beliefs which are easily "subverted by a due contrast and opposition" (T 1.4.4.1; 225). A

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bit of reasoning is all it takes to show that there are not faces in the moon, nor armies in the clouds. And a belief which is so easily subverted is not one which is infixed in the manner in which, for example, causal inference is. Moreover, the propensity toward a system leads to the belief in invisible powers. But, Hume claims, there is an equally strong propensity to attend to visible objects (NHR 5.2; 150, also see Section 4.4). These two propensities produce conflicting beliefs (powers that are invisible and powers that are visible), and therefore neither tend to produce stability in belief. Thus, for Hume, polytheistic or henotheistic belief is not warranted naturalistically, on any naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology.

## 4.9.    The Epistemic Status of Monotheism

It is clear that polytheistic belief is not warranted naturalistically. Neither is belief the 'core concept'—belief in invisible, intelligent power—at least as it emerges in polytheistic belief. However, this is not a surprising result. In fact, most ID naturalists argue that it is the belief in a single intelligent designer which is a 'natural belief'. Traditionally, the move toward monotheism has been seen as a refinement of polytheism; so that at this juncture, it may seem a live hypothesis that Hume's *Natural History* will follow this tradition.   Further, there is some evidence to suggest that Hume sees monotheism as a refinement of polytheistic belief. Hume opens the *Natural History* with the following:

> It appears to me, that, if we consider the improvement of human society, from
> rude beginnings to a state of greater perfection, polytheism or idolatry was, and

necessarily must have been, the first and most ancient religion of mankind. (NHR 1.1; 135)

When discussing the transition from polytheism to monotheism, Hume says that "the mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior: By abstracting from what is imperfect, it forms an idea of perfection" (NHR 1.5; 136).

I think that much of Hume's discussion of the superiority of monotheism centers on the content of the belief, and does not signify any epistemic improvement. Hume explains that the polytheistic gods are inferior to the monotheistic God: they are limited in power, they are like humans in many ways, and they are confined to certain locations. Further, he argues, "nor was it only on their first origin, that the gods were supposed dependent on the powers of nature. Throughout the whole period of their existence they were subjected to the dominion of fate or destiny" (NHR 4.13; 149). Hume also notes that the polytheist's gods are not the creators of the world: "To ascribe the origin and fabric of the universe to these imperfect being never enters into the imagination of any polytheist or idolater" (NHR 4.7; 149). The monotheistic God, on the other hand is a perfect being. The content of monotheistic belief is of a more superior being than contained in the content of polytheistic belief.

In order to fully examine the epistemic status of monotheistic belief (including the belief in the 'core concept' as it is expressed in monotheism), we must turn to Hume's explanation of the origin of monotheism. As I argued in Section 4.5, according to Hume, monotheism is caused by the adulation propensity, which causes man to elevate the favorite god, praising him in all things, and to add numerous positive qualities to his

description (NHR 13.3; 176-177). The henotheist is carried away by the galley principle to continue to adulate until he has gained the idea of a perfect God.

In the *Natural History,* Hume expresses a negative attitude towards the propensity to adulate. He notes that it is this very propensity which often leads toward contradictions within religion. He gives many examples in which the propensity leads to conflicting beliefs: the Catholic's worship of Mary as a person equal to God, Homer's occasional tendency to honor Oceanus and Tethys as the original parents of things, and at other times bestow that honor on Jupiter, etc (NHR 6 7-11; 156ff). He laments, "rather than relinquish this propensity to adulation, religionists, in all ages, have involved themselves in the greatest absurdities and contradictions" (NHR 6.10; 156). This seems to indicate that the propensity to adulate is not directed at forming true beliefs. In fact, the propensity to adulate leads man to attribute false praise to the favorite god. Man must approve of what normally would be considered negative behavior or characteristics. Hume explains:

> They must then be careful not to form expressly any sentiment of blame and disapprobation. All must be applause, ravishment, extacy [sic]. And while their gloomy apprehensions make them ascribe to him measure of conduct, which, in human creatures, would be highly blamed, they must still affect to praise and admire that conduct in the object of their devotional addresses. (NHR 13.6; 178)

Hume also claims that the propensity to adulate leads to "exaggerated praises and complements" (NHR 8.2; 159). It is clear that, according to Hume, the propensity to adulate does not reliably produce true belief; instead, it produces beliefs which are exaggerated or simply false. This shows that beliefs based on the adulation propensity are not warranted according to the reliabilist. I will argue in Section 4.10, that the adulation

propensity, in forming monotheistic belief, is not properly-functioning insofar as it is influenced by fear, and so monotheism is not warranted according to the proper-function theorist.

While the propensity to adulate leads the henotheist to attribute numerous positive qualities to his favorite god, it is the galley principle that causes belief in an all-perfect God. Commentators disagree about the status of beliefs founded on the galley principle. It might be the case that the galley principle produces warranted beliefs when it causes us to apply and re-apply a psychological mechanism which normally produces warranted beliefs. For example, in the *Treatise,* the belief in the continued existence of external bodies results in part from the galley principle. Hume describes the principle as follows:

> As the mind is once in the train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat [sic] as possible. The simple supposition of their continu'd existence suffices for this purpose, and gives us a notion of a much greater regularity among objects, than what they have when we look no farther than our senses. (T 1.4.2.7; 198)

Even if the galley principle were to generate warrant when it supplements a mechanism that produces warranted belief on its own, as some commentators (such as Kemp Smith) argue is the case in the belief in external objects, it does not do so when supplementing a mechanism that alone produces unwarranted belief. So, when the galley principle supplements the adulation propensity to produce monotheism from henotheism, this does not produce a warranted belief, according to any naturalistic theory of Hume's epistemology.

Furthermore, the monotheistic belief is not one which can be maintained by the vulgar—it is not a stable belief, and therefore is not warranted naturalistically according to the stability theorist. As Hume points out, the fact that the monotheistic God is thought of as incorporeal, enigmatic, simple, and infinite is due primarily to the adulation principle: it is not flattering to God to limit his power, to give him human qualities like jealousy, or to give him a vulgar body. However, the propensity to personify is strong. Hume elaborates, "the feeble apprehensions of men cannot be satisfied with conceiving their deity as a pure spirit and perfect intelligence; and yet their natural terrors keep them from imputing to him the least shadow of limitation and imperfection. They fluctuate between these opposite sentiments" (NHR 8.2; 160). Thus, man has a tendency to oscillate between polytheism and monotheism. Hume says, "it is remarkable, that the principles of religion have a kind of flux and reflux in the human mind, and that men have a natural tendency to rise from idolatry to theism, and to sink again from theism into idolatry" (NHR 8.1; 158-159). In fact, Hume argues that "so great is the propensity, in this alternate revolution of human sentiments, to return back to idolatry, that the utmost precaution is not able effectually to prevent it" (NHR 8.2; 160).

So far, I have shown that monotheistic belief is not warranted naturalistically, according to the stability-theorist and the reliabilist. In order to show that it is not warranted according to the proper-function theorist, I must now examine the role that fear plays in Hume's explanation of religious belief.

4.10.    The Role of Fear in Hume's Account of Religious Belief

Fear plays a starring role in Hume's account of the origin of religious belief. It is primarily fear which causes man to first examine the causes of his fortune and misfortune (NHR 2.5; 140). Because man is afraid of these unknown causes, the imagination is fixed on finding a determinate idea of them. Fear influences the operation of the propensity toward a system: the beliefs generated by this propensity relieve some of man's anxiety insofar as it provides him with a means to attempt to control his environment. But, man's hopes are often unfulfilled. Afraid of the beings which cause calamitous natural events, men tend to see the gods as horrible beings. As Hume notes, the fact that man is afraid will cause him to fear dissenting to any positive characterization of the gods. Thus, the propensity to adulate is also influenced by fear. Throughout Hume's explanation of the genesis of religious belief, he consistently emphasizes the fact that the propensities causing both polytheism and monotheism operate in individuals wrought with terror.

According to Hume, even a propensity that normally produces warranted beliefs can produce unwarranted ones when operating in fearful circumstances. In the *Treatise,* he argues:

> In almost all kinds of causes there is a complication of circumstances, of which some are essential, and others superfluous…Now we may observe, that when these superfluous circumstances are numerous, and remarkable, and frequently conjoin'd with the essential, they have such an influence on the imagination, that even in the absence of the latter they carry us on to the conception of the usual effect. (T 1.3.13.9; 148)

He goes on to provide an example, in which fear is the superfluous circumstance:

Let us consider the case of a man, who being hung out from a high tower in a cage of iron cannot forbear trembling…tho' he knows himself to be perfectly secure from falling, by his experience of the solidity of the iron, which supports him; and tho' the ideas of fall and descent, harm and death, be deriv'd solely from custom and experience. The same custom goes beyond the instances, from which it is deriv'd, and to which it perfectly corresponds; and influences his ideas of such objects as are in some respect resembling, but fall not precisely under the same rule. (T 1.3.13.10; 148)

Hume concludes that the man's belief that he is safe is epistemically superior to his belief that he will fall to his death. He explains:

The circumstance makes not a part of the efficacious cause, however frequently conjoin'd with it. But as this frequent conjunction necessarily makes it have some effect on the imagination, in spite of the opposite conclusion from general rules, the opposition of these two principles produces a contrariety in our thoughts, and causes us to ascribe the one inference to our judgment, and the other to our imagination. The general rule is attributed to our judgment; as being more extensive and constant. The exception to the imagination; as being more capricious and uncertain. (T 1.3.13.11; 149)

Thus, even inductive reasoning can go wrong when the reasoner is afraid. I submit that since the propensities responsible for religious belief also operate in men pervaded by fear, we must draw a similar conclusion as Hume does when the inductive propensity is operating in a frightened individual—beliefs generated by those mechanisms cannot be warranted naturalistically.

This line of reasoning also shows why, according to the proper-function theorist, religious belief is not warranted. None of the psychological propensities which are operating in fearful conditions can be considered properly-functioning. I argue that the propensity toward a system is not aimed at producing true beliefs. But even if it were, since it is operating in fearful individuals, it is not a properly-functioning mechanism. The personifying principle, which already does not produce warranted beliefs, therefore goes terribly astray when it operates under conditions of fear. Even if the propensity to adulate, by itself, were not problematic, it would produce problematic beliefs if operating under unfavorable conditions. So, belief in polytheism as well as monotheism is not a 'natural belief' according to the proper-functionalist.

Hume's explanation of monotheism centers on the vulgar conception of a single god. I claim that vulgar monotheistic belief is clearly not a 'natural belief' understood broadly. For Hume, the vulgar belief is causally connected to polytheism; moreover, it is caused by propensities of the imagination contrasted with the propensity which leads us to form beliefs on the basis of induction. But belief in a single intelligent designer is not a 'natural belief' either. The only way to acquire a non-vulgar monotheistic belief would be either by appealing to philosophical argument, or by Cleanthes' propensity. But, as I argue in Section 3.4, belief in an intelligent designer is not warranted by any philosophical argument. Moreover, as I argue in Sections 4.6 and 4.7, Hume denies that anything like Cleanthes' propensity is operating in the acquisition of religious belief. Thus, for Hume, monotheism in any of its forms is not warranted.

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4.11.    Monotheism Epistemically Inferior to Polytheism

As I argue in Section 4.7, it is important to Hume that polytheism is the original religion, and monotheism is its progeny. For one, Hume hopes that the same criticisms his audience has of polytheism will be relevant to monotheism as well. However, I argue that Hume also uses this strategy to show that monotheism is epistemically inferior to polytheism. This parallels Webb's thesis, insofar as he argues that, for Hume, monotheism is morally inferior to polytheism (Webb (1991) 150ff).[65] While monotheism may have additional propensities responsible for its formation, its ultimate causes are also those propensities which are responsible for polytheism. The problems with warrant that arise in polytheistic belief also infect monotheistic belief. At best, monotheism stands on the same epistemic ground as polytheism. But monotheism requires the application of additional propensities of the imagination, including the propensity to adulate. Even if polytheism were warranted, monotheism would not be warranted, since it is caused by the application of additional propensities that do not generate warrant. Whereas polytheism is caused only by the propensities toward a system and to anthropomorphize, monotheism results from an additional problematic psychological mechanism, also operating in fearful conditions.

After describing the transition to monotheism, Hume asks, "how much more natural, therefore, is it, that a limited deity, who at first is supposed only the immediate author of the particular goods and ills in life, should in the end be represented as a sovereign maker and modifier of the universe?" (NHR 6.6; 155). I take it that this is a rhetorical question. In fact, Hume seems to indicate the opposite:

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[65] I will discuss Webb's thesis in more detail in Section 5.1.

If we examine, without prejudice, the ancient heathen mythology, as contained in the poets, we shall not discover in it any such monstrous absurdity, as we may first be apt to apprehend. Where is the difficulty in conceiving, that the same powers or principles, whatever they were, which formed this visible world, men and animals, produced also a species of intelligent creatures, of more refined substance and greater authority than the rest? That these creatures may be capricious, revengeful, passionate, voluptuous, is easily conceived; nor is any circumstance more apt, among ourselves, to engender such vices, than the licence of absolute authority. And in short, the whole mythological system *is so natural*, that, in the vast variety of plants and world, contained in this universe, it seems more than probable, that, somewhere or other, it is really carried into execution. The chief objection to it with regard to this planet, is, that it is not ascertained by any just reason or authority. (NHR 11.1; 165, emphasis added)

For Hume, polytheism is more natural than monotheism. Moreover, while it is not true—our planet is not imbued with multiple invisible, intelligent beings—it is "more than probable" that polytheism is true somewhere.

Since polytheism describes a possible or even likely system, even though it does not accurately describe the world, it is judged to be epistemically superior to monotheism, according to Hume. He claims that monotheism, especially as believed by the vulgar, is at odds with philosophical reasoning. Hume expresses a negative view about the monotheistic belief as held by the vulgar, noting that the belief is not well understood. He explains, "we may observe, that the assent of the vulgar is, in this case, merely verbal, and that they are incapable of conceiving those sublime qualities, which

they seemingly attribute to the Deity. Their real idea of him, notwithstanding their pompous language, is still as poor and frivolous as ever" (NHR 7.1; 157). The vulgar conception of the perfect God is unclear, and corrupted by the propensity to anthropomorphize. But, it is not just the propensity of the imagination which corrupts monotheistic belief and produces contradictions; it is also corrupted by philosophy. Hume argues, "it [monotheism] is thus a system becomes more absurd in the end, merely from its being reasonable and philosophical in the beginning" (NHR 11.4; 166). Hume elaborates:

> But where theism forms the fundamental principle of any popular religion, that tenet is so conformable to sound reason, that philosophy is apt to incorporate itself with such a system of theology…But as these appearances are sure, all of them, to prove deceitful, philosophy will soon find herself very unequally yoked with her new associate; and instead of regulating each principle, as they advance together, she is at every turn perverted to serve the purposes of superstition. For besides the unavoidable incoherences, which must be reconciled an adjusted; one may safely affirm, that all popular theology, especially the scholastic, has a kind of appetite for absurdity and contradiction. (NHR 11.3; 166)

As Hume explains, the vulgar monotheistic belief is corrupted—it strays far from what might be inferred by the teleological argument:

> What a noble privilege is it of human reason to attain the knowledge of the Supreme Being; and, from the visible works of nature, be enabled to infer so sublime a principle as its supreme Creator? But turn the reverse of the medal. Survey most nations and most ages. Examine the religious principles, which have,

in fact, prevailed the world. You will scarcely be persuaded that they are any thing but sick men's dreams: Or perhaps will regard them more as the playsome whimsies of monkies in human shape, than the serious, positive, dogmatical assertations of a being, who dignifies himself with the name of rational. (NHR 15.6; 184)

For Hume, the vulgar monotheistic belief is not serious or rational; moreover, philosophical reasoning only makes monotheism more problematic. In the passage above, Hume compares the vulgar belief to the conception of God held by philosophers and traditional theologians. It might seem that Hume here argues that the belief in God that is entailed by the teleological argument is superior to the vulgar monotheistic belief. But, as I argued in Section 3.6.2, the belief that is legitimated by the design argument is vacuous. It might be the case that, for Hume, a vacuous belief is better than a corrupted one; however, this does not mean that, in the passage quoted above, Hume endorses the monotheistic philosophical belief. Moreover, whereas polytheism, though false, is a system which Hume says is possible, monotheism is inconsistent with it. Thus, monotheism is epistemically inferior to polytheism.

## 4.12. Conclusion

Hume's attitude about the epistemic status of monotheism is clearly negative, especially when contrasted with Hume's attitude about beliefs based on induction. The mechanisms that generate polytheism do not meet Hume's approval, and the mechanisms leading to monotheism are more suspect. Any version of a naturalistic theory of warrant we attribute to Hume must take this into account. While I agree that Hume provides a

naturalistic response to any generalized skepticism, I deny that his naturalism comes to

the aid of religion.

Chapter 5

The Role of Naturalistic Explanation in Hume's Critique of Religious Belief

5.1.     Hume's Non-Epistemic Goals in the *Natural History*

Hume's stated goal of the *Natural History* is to determine religion's "origin in human nature" (NHR Introduction.1; 134). Insofar as he explains the causes for the occurrence of religious belief of various forms—polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism—he provides a naturalistic explanation of religious belief. As I explained in Sections 4.2, 4.4, and 4.5, Hume argues that religious belief is grounded in psychological propensities of the imagination: the propensity toward a system, the propensity to anthropomorphize, the propensity to attend to visual objects, the propensity to adulate, and the galley principle. In addition, he explains the circumstances in which these propensities operate: the initial emergence of the 'core concept' (belief in invisible, intelligent power) is triggered by the apparent disorder in nature, and Hume emphasizes the role that fear and ignorance play in the origin of religious belief. Thus, he attempts to achieve his goal of determining religion's origin in human nature.

Since the *Natural History* provides a naturalistic explanation of religious belief, it is not surprising that commentators see the work as an important part of his overarching

philosophical project, which he began in the *Treatise*: to "introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects."[66] Badia Cabrera, for example, argues that:

> The *Natural History of Religion* exhibits one of the overriding motives of Hume's philosophical inquiry—the Newtonian ambition to frame universal laws which may be able to explain the greatest possible number of facts by reducing them to their simplest and fewest causes. Accordingly this work is a *natural* history because it is the culmination of that 'attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects.' It is an integral part of the general science of human nature. (Badia Cabrera (1995) 78)

It is clear that the *Natural History* fits nicely into Hume's overall philosophical project. Religious belief is an important and integral part of numerous individual's lives, and his explanation of the origin of religious belief is both comprehensive and based on a few near-universal tendencies of the imagination.

But it is likely that merely expanding the science of man, by providing a genetic account of religious belief, was not Hume's only goal in writing the *Natural History*. Hume's opus contains much discussion of religious belief. For example, in the *Treatise*, he considers the origin of the idea of the monotheistic god (e.g. T 1.3.14.9; 159ff, T 1.4.5.31 ff.; 249ff); the first *Enquiry* contains essays on miracles and on particular providence (EHU 10 and 11); and the *Dialogues* is an entire work devoted to a discussion of natural theology, where Hume not only considers numerous arguments for the existence of God, but also the problem of evil, among other relevant topics. His interest in religion is undeniable. Moreover, Hume's opinion of religion is largely negative. As I

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[66] From the subtitle of the *Treatise*.

argued in Section 3.4, Hume claims that religious belief cannot be warranted on the basis of any evidence or *a priori* or empirical argument. In many of his writings, Hume laments the false or superstitious elements of religious belief. And in both the *Dialogues* and the *Natural History*, Hume criticizes the moral components of traditional religion. It would be surprising if Hume's only goal in the *Natural History* were to add to his investigation of the science of man.

In his "The Argument of the *Natural History*," Webb argues that Hume's goal in the *Natural History* is to convince his audience to abandon traditional Christian practice; in particular, he contends that the arguments in the *Natural History* purport to show the moral inferiority of popular religion, in part by showing that polytheism is morally preferable to monotheism (Webb (1991) 150ff). He claims that "the *Natural History* is principally a moral critique aimed at severing allegiance to traditional religion" (Webb (1991) 149). Webb's account not only coheres with Hume's criticisms of religion—in particular, with several of the comments made by Philo in *Dialogues* part XII—but also presents an excellent interpretation of parts IX through XV of the *Natural History*. Webb argues that "one of the central criticisms of the *Natural History* is that religion either renders its practitioners indifferent or even in opposition to proper moral distinctions on the one hand, or fails to seriously affect moral behavior in any appropriately positive manner on the other" (Webb (1991) 145). Critiquing the effect on morality caused by popular religion was certainly important to Hume.

While I agree that the moral critique plays an important role in Hume's goals in the *Natural History*, I do not think that Webb's interpretation is entirely accurate. He argues that "while the work purports to be a natural history of religious beliefs and

practices, suggesting something of a 'scientific' examination of a 'natural' phenomenon, that feature of the work clearly is intended by Hume to facilitate his moral critique of traditional religious belief" (Webb (1991) 145). Webb claims that Hume's account of the causes of religious belief is merely the means to an end—the end of severing allegiance to traditional religious practice. I do not think this is the case. For one, the examination of the origin of religious belief is an important aspect of the science of man. An investigation of religious belief must surely be a part of any comprehensive study of mankind. Moreover, I will argue that Hume has several other purposes in explaining the origin of religious belief. While I do agree that Hume's moral critique of religious belief is an important aspect of the *Natural History*, I am not convinced that Hume's account of the causal origin of religious belief is merely in the service of this goal.

Throughout his writings, Hume's disapproval of religious belief is not solely oriented around a moral critique. In fact, much of Hume's discussion of religious belief centers on epistemic concerns. In many of his writings, he criticizes the content, the truth, and the warrant of religious belief. While the *Natural History* provides his most explicit moral critique of traditional religion, it is clear that his explanation of religious belief is also motivated in part by the difficulties surrounding the epistemic status of religious belief. In this dissertation, I argue that, for Hume, no religious belief, even the supposed 'attenuated deism' of Philo in *Dialogues* Part XII, is warranted. What is more, it is clear that Hume thinks that popular religious belief systems are patently false: he frequently refers to them as superstitious or absurd. One of Hume's goals, then, in writing the *Natural History*, is to explain why superstitious or false belief-systems exist, especially given that they have existed for so long and are so prevalent.

Falkenstein puts this point nicely:

When a belief is presumed to be very widespread, and to have persisted for a number of centuries, it is seldom enough to show that it is unjustified. It is also important to explain how so many people could be so wrong for so long. And it has been said that this is just what 'The natural history of religion' does for the belief in a supremely wise, powerful, and benevolent being who designed the world as a fit place for human habitation, who laid down a set of moral precepts for us to follow, and who will ensure that those who obey these precepts are justly rewarded and those who violate them justly punished. (Falkenstein (2003) 1)

Falkenstein argues that Hume's goal in the *Natural History* is to provide an explanation of superstitious religious belief. This makes a great deal of sense. Hume thinks that much religious belief is obviously false, and many of his writings on religion are devoted to showing that religious belief is not supported by any sound arguments, *a priori* or *a posteriori*. Hence, questions naturally arise: Why do people believe what is obviously false? If religious belief is not justified by evidence or argument, on what basis do people hold the belief? Given that Hume's main philosophical project is to understand human nature, it is clear that he is interested in answering these questions.

Moreover, this represents a pattern in Hume's methodology: he frequently provides causal explanations for beliefs which are false or otherwise problematic. For example, he provides an explanation of the ancients' beliefs in "sympathies, antipathies, and horrors of a vacuum," (T 1.4.3.11; 224), the belief in material substance (T 1.4.3.5; 221), as well as immaterial substance (T 1.4.5.10ff; 235ff). It is not surprising, then, that

Hume would dedicate an entire work (or at least a large portion of it) to explaining the causes of religious belief.

Falkenstein, however, argues that in the *Natural Hist*ory, Hume explains *only* false or superstitious religious belief. He claims that "'The natural history of religion' is really just a natural history of superstition" (Falkenstein (2003) 7). This leaves open the possibility that there are other forms of religious belief—true forms, called 'genuine theism' by Falkenstein—which are not explained by the psychological propensities Hume details in the *Natural History*. Falkenstein bases his argument on the claim that, in the *Natural Histo*ry, Hume does not account for enthusiasm. According to Falkenstein, the enthusiast is brought to religious belief by the feeling of the divine presence, or by direct revelation from God (Falkenstein (2003) 7). He claims that Hume does not consider this possibility in his account of the origin of religious belief. He states, "rather than critically engage the possibility that the first religious beliefs may have been caused by revelation, 'The natural history' discretely ignores the possibility" (Falkenstein (2003) 5). Falkenstein claims that 'genuine theism' might well be the result of a direct revelation from God; therefore, he argues:

> If I am right, 'The natural history' should not be read as a contribution to a philosophical critique of 'genuine theism,' or as an alternative to the fundamentalist account of the historical origins of 'genuine theism.' It is primarily a psychological study of the causes of certain naturally occurring forms of *false* religious belief, and a theoretical study of the effects these false religions well typically have on society and the course of history. (Falkenstein (2003) 4)

Falkenstein is not alone in his interpretation. Costelloe argues that "the target of Hume's critical remarks on religion, it is then emphasized, are forms of 'false' religion, which arise from the corrupting influence of passion, hypocrisy, bigotry, enthusiasm, and superstition" (Costelloe (2004) Abstract). Costelloe presents a very different argument for his view, which centers on his claims that, for Hume, religious belief may be a 'natural belief', and, more importantly, according to Hume, "religion of some sort is both a necessary and a desirable part of any flourishing society" (Costelloe (2004) 181). This interpretation, regardless of the argument on which it stands, is not an accurate representation of Hume's aims in the *Natural History*. Of course, Hume does want to provide an explanation of 'false' religious belief. He is concerned with providing an explanation of beliefs which are not warranted on the basis of any evidence or argument. It is my view that Hume considers all religious belief to be unwarranted in this way.

Falkenstein rests his argument on the contention that Hume ignores enthusiasm in the *Natural History*. But this is not the case. In his argument that polytheism is the original religion, Hume attempts to show that *original* religious belief was not caused by divine revelation. In Section 4.7, I summarized Hume's argument for his claim that polytheism was the original religion of man. For Falkenstein, 'genuine theism' founded on enthusiasm is monotheistic and represents God as a loving, caring being. In arguing that polytheism is the primary religion of man, Hume therefore rules out any supposition that original religious belief was based on divine revelation. For one, the original religion is not monotheistic; additionally, the gods are represented as horrible and vengeful. Moreover, Hume provides an alternative explanation for the origin of religious belief— one grounded in psychological propensities of the imagination and in man's ignorant and

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anxious condition. While he does not explicitly say that belief was not caused by revelation, it is clear that he disagrees with this claim, since he offers an alternative account of the origin of religious belief.

This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that subsequent to the polytheistic stage, there exists a 'genuine theism' based on revelation. Again, Hume seems to rule this out by providing an alternative explanation of the origins of monotheistic belief. As I argue in Section 4.6, the most likely candidate for a religious belief that Hume might find unproblematic is the belief in intelligent design, and the most likely (warrant-producing) cause for this belief would be Cleanthes' propensity, not divine revelation. Of course, I argue that Hume does not think Cleanthes' propensity is responsible for religious belief, since he provides an alternative explanation for its origin. Similarly, I think that in ignoring the possibility of enthusiasm, Hume is not endorsing it as a likely candidate for true religious belief; rather, he ignores it because he thinks that it is not the actual cause of religious belief.[67]

Costelloe provides a quite different argument for the conclusion that Hume attempts to explain only false or superstitious religious belief in the *Natural History*. Costelloe's argument is partially based on his claim that, for Hume, religious belief may be 'natural' in some sense. I will not repeat my arguments against this claim; I think that it is clear that for Hume, religious belief is not a 'natural belief' in any sense which gives that belief warrant. Costelloe's other contention supporting his thesis is the claim that, for Hume, religion of some sort is desirable. Costelloe bases this assertion on some

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[67] In his "Understanding Hume's Natural History of Religion," Kail also argues against Falkenstein. See Kail (2007b) 205ff for his very persuasive argument.

comments Hume makes in his *History of England*, where he "writes sympathetically of the civilizing influence of Christianity of the early Saxons," "comments on the role of ecclesiastics who…encouraged the progress of jurisprudence" and argues that their office is useful and necessary (Costelloe (2004) 181-182).[68] Though it may be the case that occasionally Hume speaks favorably of the influences of religion and of religious officials, it is clear that Hume, in general, disapproves of religious belief and practice. If Webb is correct, which I think, in this respect, he is, Hume's scathing critique of the moral worth of religion seems to rule out Costelloe's contention.

What is more, Hume himself does not present his genetic account in the *Natural History* as an explanation of simply false or superstitious belief. In the Introduction, Hume states his purpose in the *Natural History*: "What those principles are, which give rise to the original belief, and what those accidents and causes are, which direct its operation, is the subject of our present enquiry (NHR Introduction.1; 134). Hume does not specify what "the original belief" is. But he does say that "the belief of invisible, intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places and in all ages;" (NHR Introduction.1; 134), though he admits that "no two nations, and scarce any two men, have ever agreed precisely in the same sentiments" (NHR Introduction.1; 134). As I argue in Section 3.2, Hume sets out to explain all religious belief insofar as he provides an explanation of the 'core concept'—the belief in invisible, intelligent power—which is contained in any religious belief, including the supposed

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[68] Costelloe cites, in turn, The History of England, From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688, with the author's last corrections and improvements, 6 vols. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Classics, 1983) I 51-52; II 14, and III 134-136.

'genuine theism' Falkenstein and Costelloe purport is not Hume's target in the *Natural History*.

In the *Natural History*, Hume provides an explanation of all religious belief. This is, perhaps, not surprising, given that, for Hume, much religious belief is obviously false; moreover, no religious belief can be warranted by any evidence or argument. If a belief is false or problematic, but widespread, it is natural to want to provide a causal explanation for that belief, especially if one is committed to the scientific study of human nature.

Hume's non-epistemic goals in the *Natural History* are three-fold. First, he expands the study of human nature insofar as he offers an explanation for the existence of religious belief. In detailing psychological propensities of the imagination responsible for religious belief, Hume adds to the project he began in the *Treatise*. Second, the *Natural History* contributes to Hume's moral critique of religion. He argues that traditional religious practice either causes indifference to appropriate moral distinctions or completely fails to positively affect moral behavior. Third, Hume provides an explanation for a class of beliefs which he argues (in other writings) are not warranted on the basis of evidence or philosophical argument. Providing a psychological explanation for the occurrence of religious belief not only makes a great deal of sense, it is consistent with Hume's treatment of numerous beliefs, such as those based on induction. While some commentators claim that Hume's genetic account of religious belief provides explanation for only false or superstitious religious belief, leaving room for a 'genuine theism' of which Hume approves, I argue that in the *Natural History*, Hume provides an explanation for all religious belief: he thinks that all religious belief is problematic; moreover, this represents a better interpretation of Hume's own stated aims and arguments in the

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*Natural History*. In writing the *Natural History*, Hume fulfills several non-epistemic goals.

5.2.     Hume's Epistemic Goals in the *Natural History*

In providing a causal explanation for the occurrence of religious beliefs, Hume's project in the *Natural History* mirrors his treatment of, for example, beliefs based on induction. As I argue in Section 2.3, while Hume does think that beliefs based on induction are not justified by evidence or philosophical argument, this does not entail that the beliefs are not warranted. Rather, I argue, for Hume, beliefs based on induction have positive epistemic status. Hume's psychological explanation of beliefs based on induction provides the evidence for differing naturalistic interpretations of Hume's epistemology— Kemp Smith's theory of 'natural beliefs,' reliabilism, stability theory, and proper-function theory. What all of these interpretations have in common is that they argue that, for Hume, beliefs which are not warranted by the evidence or philosophical arguments gain warrant on the basis of the psychological mechanisms which cause them.

Given that Hume provides a naturalistic explanation for religious belief in the *Natural History*, some commentators argue that religious belief, like beliefs based on induction, is warranted naturalistically. The most common thesis of this type I call ID naturalism, as it states that, for Hume, the belief in intelligent design is a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smiths' strict sense. However, in Chapters 3 and 4, I argued that belief in intelligent design is neither a 'natural belief' in Kemp Smith's sense, nor is it warranted naturalistically according to any viable naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology. Moreover, I argue that no religious belief, including polytheism and

traditional monotheism, are 'natural beliefs,' understood broadly—religious belief is not warranted on the basis of the psychological mechanisms which cause it.

Thus, Hume's naturalistic explanation of religious belief in the *Natural History* has epistemic consequences. While he argues in the *Dialogues* (and in other works) that religious belief is not warranted on the basis of evidence or philosophical argument, this is not enough to show that religious belief is not warranted. He must show that the psychological mechanisms responsible for religious belief are not warrant-producing. In Sections 4.8 through 4.10, I argued that the psychological propensities responsible for religious belief, in Hume's account in the *Natural History,* are not warrant-producing. The *Natural History* is an important part of Hume's overall critique of religious belief— the conclusion of which is that religious belief of any kind is not warranted in any way. Other commentators argue that Hume's account of the genesis of religious belief has epistemic consequences, and therefore plays a role in Hume's attack on the warrant of religious belief. Holley, Immerwahr, and Kail, for example, offer different interpretations of the *Natural History*; each of which contend that Hume's causal account of religious belief has negative epistemic consequences.

In his "The role of anthropomorphism in Hume's critique of theism," Holley argues that Hume's causal explanation for religious belief emphasizes the fact that religious belief is based on the propensity to anthropomorphize. He focuses on Hume's problems with the concept of God generated by anthropomorphizing. He argues:

> By raising various problems of meaning and justification, Hume attempts to destabilize the precarious balance, pushing the theist toward conceptions of God that are excessively anthropomorphic or toward conceptions in which divine-

human comparisons have been qualified to the point where the theist's belief is

indistinguishable from the atheist's. (Holley (2002) 84)

In the *Natural History*, Hume shows that the propensity to anthropomorphize is responsible for attributing human characteristics to the gods. This propensity not only causes man to ascribe intelligence to the invisible powers which he supposes cause natural events, but also leads man to ascribe additional human characteristics to the gods. Moreover, even once the belief in a perfect God is reached, man's conception of God is not stable: influenced by the propensity to anthropomorphize, man tends to slide back to a more polytheistic system. Holley explains, "so internal to theistic religion is the urge to move beyond anthropomorphism and the pull towards it, and these conflicting urges result in a continual unstable fluctuation in concepts of the divine" (Holley (2002) 87).

In the *Dialogues*, both Demea and Philo criticize Cleanthes' conception of god insofar as Cleanthes tends to anthropomorphize the divine. By attempting to infer characteristics of God from his effects (the visible universe), Cleanthes attempts to show that the creator of the order and goodness in the world must be intelligent, powerful, and morally good. The main thrust of Philo's arguments in the *Dialogues,* however, shows that inferences about the characteristics of God from observations of the natural world are not justified. Instead, he claims, all that is justified on the basis of the argument from design is that "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence" (DNR XII; 129; 227). As I explained in Section 3.6.2, Philo qualifies the belief such that it cannot be used as the basis of inference to other beliefs and does not influence human action. Thus, I argue, it does not seem a good candidate for constituting a belief, much less a warranted belief. As Holley explains,

"there comes a point where removing anthropomorphic elements can remove everything that seems vital to theistic religion" (Holley (2002) 83). So, Holley argues:

> The choice for the theist laid out by Hume in the *Dialogues* is between the path of Demea, using pious phrases without meaningful content, and the path of Cleanthes, using words with specific meanings, but leading, as Hume tries to show, to an anthropomorphism that is both religiously problematic and philosophically unacceptable. (Holley (2002) 93)

Holley claims that the anthropomorphized concept of God is not caused by a proper inference (as Cleanthes purports to do by way of the argument from design); instead, he claims that "the tendency to think we know more about God than we actually do was attributed to a kind of anthropomorphic projection" (Holley (2002) 91). He concludes that the *Natural History* shows that the propensity to anthropomorphize, not any philosophical argument, is responsible for ascribing any meaningful properties to God; in reality, "there is no basis at all for importing human characteristics or motivation," so "we must content ourselves with admitting that we know virtually nothing about the nature of [the divine]" (Holley (2002) 91).

While Holley's position sheds light on the connection between the *Dialogues*, especially 'Philo's reversal', and the *Natural History*, he does not fully appreciate the role of the propensity to anthropomorphize in Hume's epistemic critique of religious belief. Holley is right that in the *Dialogues*, Philo shows that ascribing human characteristics to God is not justified by the argument from design. What is more, Holley is correct in his claim that Hume, in the *Natural History*, provides an explanation for our tendency to ascribe human characteristics to God. But this is not enough to show that

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anthropomorphism should be rejected. Since, one may argue, if the propensity to anthropomorphize is similar to the psychological propensity to infer the effect of a known cause after experiencing a constant conjunction between cause and effect, then it might be the case that anthropomorphism is legitimate. Of course, this is not the case—as I argue in Section 4.8, Hume explicitly contrasts the propensity to anthropomorphize with the propensity responsible for beliefs based on induction. Holley thinks that the problem with anthropomorphism is that it is not legitimized by the design argument—as I argued in Section 3.6.2, the only just inference on the basis of the design argument is a vacuously empty belief. This is true, but that is not the only problem—additionally, beliefs caused by the propensity to anthropomorphize are "neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition" (T 1.4.4.1; 225). This gives independent reason to reject belief in an anthropomorphized God, especially given Hume's naturalized epistemology.

Immerwahr argues that Hume has two methods in his overall critique of religious belief: "One method is to anatomize and criticize the sources of religious belief. The goal is to undercut the foundations of religious belief so that only the most attenuated and benign forms will survive" (Immerwahr (2002) 25). This, Immerwahr argues, is accomplished primarily in the *Dialogues*, where Hume shows that religious belief is not justified by philosophical arguments, especially the argument from design. He claims that Hume's "second approach is to show the incompatibilities between different forms of religious belief" (Immerwahr (2002) 25). Immerwahr argues that Hume accomplishes

this task in both the *Dialogues* and the *Natural History*. Insofar as Hume shows the incompatibility between different religious views, "his goal is not to argue for one religious view over another, but rather to rob them all of their force and probability" (Immerwahr (2002) 25).

Immerwahr focuses on the incompatibility between what he calls empirical theology—in which "our main access to the existence and nature of God is through empirical investigation, specifically the argument from design" and popular religion—in which "the most common source of the vulgar belief is a desire to explain the unknown. The gods are postulated as the forces behind otherwise inexplicable events" (Immerwahr (2002) 27). He argues that in the *Natural History*, Hume explains the origin of vulgar religious belief, and shows that it is based on a response to disorder in nature, whereas empirical theology is based on an appreciation of the order found in nature. This parallels my argument of Section 4.6. Immerwahr contends, "inexplicable and unlikely events are counterparts to natural theology. The situation is exactly the reverse from the point of view of popular religion" (Immerwahr (2002) 28). He argues that since popular religious belief and empirical theology are grounded in opposite features of the natural world, neither belief can be correct. He claims, "the evidence that leads the vulgar to accept popular religious belief is, if true, a counterargument to natural theology. Likewise, the chief factors that produce belief for the natural theologian are destructive of popular religion" (Immerwahr (2002) 28).

Immerwahr notes that the evidence for popular religious belief is irregularity in nature and misery: "It is unhappiness that drives men to superstitious faith in the deity" (Immerwahr (2002) 28). However, it is order and happiness that consists of evidence for

the natural theologian: "We can only conclude that God is good if we observe goodness in what he has created, the universe around us" (Immerwahr (2002) 28-29). Moreover, he argues that the grounds of belief for popular religion undermine the natural theologian's position. He states, "the miserable state of human life, the chief argument for popular religion, is regarded by the natural theologian as an argument for atheism" (Immerwahr (2002) 29). For Immerwahr, Hume's goal in the *Natural History* is to show that popular religious belief is founded in the misery of the human condition and the apparent chaos of the natural world. In so doing, Hume disintegrates support for the claim of the natural theologian—that the belief in God is founded on the basis of the apparent order and moral goodness in the observable universe. Thus, the *Natural History* provides an important role in advancing the incompatibility project, and therefore, is imperative in Hume's attack on the warrant of religious belief—both vulgar and philosophical.

I am sympathetic to Immerwahr's thesis. As I argue in Section 4.6, one of Hume's goals in the *Natural History* is to show that religious belief, apart from any supposed inference from design, is a response to chaos. Moreover, his view fits nicely with Hume's interest in skepticism, insofar as it is a common skeptical tactic to destroy the warrant of beliefs by showing that they are incompatible. However, it is not simply the fact that popular religious belief is incompatible with empirical theology that provides grounds to deem religious belief unwarranted. The causal account Hume provides in the *Natural History* directly bears on the epistemic status of religious belief. Hume's goal in the *Natural History* is not simply to show that the grounds of popular religious belief are incompatible with the grounds of empirical theology; additionally, it provides direct epistemic reasons against all religious belief.

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In his "Understanding Hume's *Natural History of Religion*," Kail argues that Hume's genetic account of religious belief has direct negative epistemic consequences. In particular, he argues that Hume's account is destabilizing—by learning the causes of religious belief, we have reason to suspend judgment about them. He claims:

> NHR [*Natural History*] provides a reason to suspend religious belief which does not rest on showing that there are no positive grounds in favour of it. That is to say, the reason to suspend the belief does not depend on attacking the soundness of some argument in favour of the belief or showing there is no evidence in its favour. The reason to suspend the belief stems instead from a correct understanding of its *causes.* (Kail (2007b) 195)

Moreover, he argues that Hume's account applies to all religious belief—not just vulgar belief, since all religious belief contains the 'core concept' (belief in invisible, intelligent power). He states, "the account, in showing the origins of the core content for religious belief, provides a reason to suspend beliefs employing this content. Since this content is necessary and sufficient for any religious belief, the suspense in doubting applies to all religious belief" (Kail (2007b) 194).

Kail focuses on the original instantiation of the 'core concept,' found in polytheistic belief. He claims that "the belief is adopted because it removes the anxiety that the thinker's ignorance, impotence, and investment in controlling nature engenders" (Kail (2007a) 11). This parallels my argument in Section 4.3, where I argue that the propensity toward a system (partially responsible for polytheism) is akin to wish-fulfillment. Kail contends that belief in the 'core concept' is based on a propensity which is not aimed at the production of true belief. He claims:

Awareness of such causes provides a reason to suspend the belief, because rather than being vindicatory or merely neutral, such causes work against the epistemic aim of belief, namely, representing correctly how things stand in the world. This aim (truth) is subverted if the mechanisms that infix belief are biased, in an effort to avoid what the evidence would otherwise suggest. (Kail (2007b) 199)

Insofar as Kail argues that religious belief ought to be suspended in light of the fact that its causes are not aimed at truth-production, his argument parallels the proper-function theorist. However, as I argue in Chapter 2, there are alternative naturalistic interpretations of Hume's epistemology. Arguing that the propensities which cause religious belief are not aimed at truth is not enough to guarantee that, for Hume, religious belief is not warranted, since other interpretations of his epistemology are possible. This is what I argued in Sections 4.8 through 4.10.

Kail further argues that Hume's account of the causes of religious belief is best understood as a response to the rational fideist, who rejects, for example, Clifford's claim that it is "wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (Clifford (1877) 346). Instead, the fideist "holds that one can be a rational agent while maintaining religious belief in the absence of any reasons or evidence which speak in its favour" (Kail (2007b) 195). Despite the success of Hume's contention that religious belief is not justified by evidence or philosophical argument, the fideist can maintain that religious belief ought not be rejected. There are numerous forms of rationalist fideism. Notably, William James argues that it is permissible to believe when there is no evidence in favor of a belief so long as the belief is a "genuine option" and the decision to believe is based on our "passional nature" (James (1948) 88ff). More

recently, Plantinga has argued for a version of fideism, claiming that so long as belief in God is "properly basic," it is warranted (Plantinga (2000) 167ff). Finally, the ID naturalist can be interpreted as holding a version of fideism—if religious belief is a 'natural belief', then we ought not reject it, despite the fact that there are no arguments or evidence in its favor.

Kail argues that Hume's *Natural History* threatens the fideist position: "If fideists acknowledge that Hume's account is the best explanation of religious belief, they therefore have a reason to suspend the belief" (Kail (2007b) 196). According to Hume, religious belief is not supported by evidence or philosophical argument. However, this will not be enough to convince the fideist to suspend it. For the fideist, belief may be warranted by other means. I argue that, for Hume, the best possible candidate for generating warranted religious belief is Cleanthes' propensity. But Hume does not think that religious belief is based on a natural propensity to believe in design. It may be the case that some theists (especially those of a philosophical mind) gain belief by an *inference* based on the premises of the design argument, but this Hume has shown is not a justified inference. Moreover, gaining religious belief on the basis of a philosophical argument is of no import to the fideist position. Religious belief not acquired on the basis of philosophical argument, according to Hume, is caused by propensities of the imagination which do not lend warrant to belief. Kail argues that if Hume can convince the fideist that his explanation of religious belief is correct, then the fideist will have no choice but to suspend religious belief.

Insofar as Kail argues that Hume's account of the causes of religious belief has epistemic consequences, I support his position. Further, I agree with the contention that Hume's causal account of religious belief provides an explanation of religious belief which undermines the fideist's position. However, Kail argues that the epistemic import of Hume's genetic account of religious belief provides a reason to suspend religious belief, not to reject it. He states:

> Understanding the origins of the core content of religious beliefs provides a reason to suspend them. The account *destabilizes* them, because although we are provided with a reason to suspend belief in invisible intelligent power, it does not follow from this that belief cannot be justified in some other way. (Kail (2007b) 194)

Kail suggests that, after learning the pernicious causes of religious belief, we have reason to suspend our belief. Then, we must determine whether belief is justified in some other way: we must examine the evidence and arguments both in favor of and against religious belief.

It is this point at which our accounts diverge. I suggest that reflecting on the causes of religious belief, as found in the *Natural History,* is not what destabilizes belief. Rather, belief is destabilized upon reflecting on Hume's arguments in the *Dialogues* and in Hume's other writings on religion: attacks on the rationality or reasonableness of theism. There is no reason to examine the causal explanation of a belief which is unjustified, for only *after* we have discovered that the belief isn't reasonable does it make sense to examine its origin. This point is made clear by Butler's contention that the supposed confessions of religious belief in the *Dialogues* come at points where there is

pressure on the argument. He argues that this context is similar to the context in which other 'natural beliefs' are introduced: after the presentation of skeptical arguments against those beliefs. [69] Hume does not normally provide genetic accounts of belief unless he has shown that the belief is not warranted evidentially. As I previously argued, this makes a great deal of sense: a causal explanation of belief is not necessary if it can be shown that belief is justified on the basis of evidence or arguments in its favor. While there may still be a natural cause for belief, the cause will not normally affect the belief's warrant. Only if the belief is not warranted on the basis of evidence or philosophical argument does the naturalistic explanation for belief play a role. As I argued in Section 3.10, the fact that Hume provides a naturalistic explanation for religious belief does not entail that belief is warranted. The details of the explanation matter. Depending on which naturalistic interpretation of Hume's epistemology one accepts, a belief which is not warranted by evidence or philosophical argument is warranted only if the psychological propensities causing the belief meet the appropriate criteria.

I contend that the Hume's causal explanation of religious belief thus provides grounds to reject religious belief. His account provides an explanation of a belief which is not warranted by evidence or philosophical argument. For Hume, religious belief is founded on psychological propensities of the imagination which do not lend warrant to belief, according to any theory which interprets Hume as allowing for 'natural beliefs' understood broadly. Religious belief is not warranted by evidence in its favor, and, in the *Natural History*, Hume provides what he thinks is the only other viable explanation for religious belief. However, on this account, religious belief is not a 'natural belief'

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[69] See Section 3.7 for a summary of this argument.

(understood broadly). This suggests that we ought to reject the belief. Hume's naturalistic explanation therefore plays an important role in his critique of religious belief. In his other works, Hume argues against a foundation in reason for religious belief. In the *Natural History*, Hume shows that religious belief is based not on a propensity to believe in design triggered by the apparent order in nature (Cleanthes' propensity), nor by any other warrant-generating principle; rather, he claims that religious belief is based on five psychological propensities (toward a system, to anthropomorphize, to attend to visual objects, to adulate, and the galley principle) which do not generate warrant. Thus, the *Natural History* provides reason to reject religious belief.

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