

Interpretation

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David Hume's Theology of Liberation

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Liberal political philosophy attempts to reform government and society by separating religion from politics, accomplishing this by curbing the moral pretensions of politics. Liberalism rejects the traditional conception of the purpose of government as the achievement of the complete good life. Instead, it limits government to the purpose of securing the rights of life, liberty, and property, the necessary but by no means sufficient conditions of the good life. Limiting government to securing the prerequisites of the good life means leaving its final attainment as a matter of individual effort. Included in what is left to each individual must be the very definition of what it means to be a good human being. The distinction between the conditions and the fullness of the complete good life more or less defines the distinction between the public and the private. Religion, with its concern for ultimate purposes, falls within the sphere of private right, outside the sphere of public authority. It has for its object, as Hegel explains, "the highest, the absolute, that which is absolutely true or the truth itself." This is to be found in "the region in which all the riddles of the world, all contradictions of thought, are resolved, and all griefs are healed, the region of eternal truth and eternal peace, of absolute satisfaction, of truth itself."¹ Religion belongs in the sphere of the private because it attempts to define the context within which the question of the nature of the complete good life can be resolved.

The separation between religion and politics in liberal political philosophy involves, along with the innovations in politics, a transformation of religion. Implicit in liberalism is a hostility towards traditional religion. It rejects the traditionalist social and political order, in which religion is at the center of society, defining its purposes, giving it shape, and setting it in motion. The traditionalist social order is founded on the opinion that society is divinely ordained. This opinion, in turn, is based on the view, characteristic of traditionalist religious belief, that there is a divine superintendence of human affairs. At the same time, there is implicit in liberalism a kind of religious teaching of its own. If only indirectly, it affirms a conception of the complete good life, what it intends to achieve in political practice through the separation of religion and politics. This means that at least tacitly there is in liberalism a conception of the divine according to which the complete good life can be determined. The religious implications of liberalism's new political science are

elaborated by the liberal philosophers in a number of works, now largely ignored if not entirely forgotten, on the subject of religion.² These works are neglected because the issues with which they deal are no longer alive politically, a measure of the liberal philosophers' success in convincing the world that religion is an essentially private affair, having nothing to do with politics.

Probably the most artistic, if not necessarily the most artful, treatment of religion in liberal political philosophy is David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.³ For Hume, the *Dialogues* was an extremely important work. He labored on it off and on for over twenty years, from first draft in 1751 to final revision a short time before his death in 1776. He was occupied during the last weeks of his life in arranging for its publication. Hume apparently also considered the *Dialogues* to be an extremely dangerous work. Not only did he delay its publication until after his death, but he failed even to mention it in the short autobiographical sketch that he published just before he died. This is all the more interesting because he was willing to publish during his lifetime and in his own name works of religious scepticism including the *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, the *Natural History of Religion*, and his essays on "Superstition and Enthusiasm," "The Sceptic," "Miracles," "Suicide," and "The Immortality of the Soul." Further, many of the most provocative arguments of the *Dialogues* are drawn from these other works. While Hume nowhere explicitly states his intention in writing the *Dialogues*, it is clearly intended to be something more than a mere catalogue of his arguments on religion. The book has a unity and integrity of its own. It is this that accounts for the *Dialogues*' importance, and its danger, for Hume. The unity and integrity of the *Dialogues* are to be found in its development of what might be called liberalism's theology of liberation.

I

The separation of religion and politics is crucial to the success of the project of liberal political philosophy, the realization of what it conceives as man's natural freedom through the liberation of mankind from its traditional bondages. Human beings from the beginning have sought to subjugate and dominate one another. This is a nasty consequence of their subjection to nature: the narrowness of their natural endowment compels them to make use of one another to at least partially relieve themselves of the cruel necessities that press down on them. The enjoyment of human beings of their natural freedom, what liberalism articulates as their natural rights of life, liberty, and property, is threatened by the malevolence of man and the enmity of nature, the former represented by war, and especially civil war, the latter by famine, plague, pestilence, and the other cataclysms of nature. Liberalism attempts to solve both these problems, either directly or indirectly, through its invention of the political system of nonpartisan, representative government.

The traditional understanding of man's thralldom to man and to nature is reflected in Aristotle's teaching in the *Politics*. Aristotle begins his teaching on politics with the claim that the ultimate moving force in human life is a longing for the good. "Everyone," he asserts, "does everything for the sake of what is held to be good." It is this desire for the good that leads human beings into association with one another. The most comprehensive form of association is the political community, which aims at the most comprehensive of goods, the complete good life. It contains within itself, and perfects, all other forms of association. These are subordinate to the political community because they have as their objects only the various partial goods that contribute to the achievement of the good life. There is an order to the elements that make up the political community. While perhaps all make contributions that are necessary for the accomplishment of the common purpose, some make contributions that are more nearly sufficient for it. The latter have a claim to political precedence over the former. The political community is, then, an hierarchically structured whole made up of heterogeneous parts, organized in the light of some conception of the complete good life.⁴

Government, for Aristotle, is inherently partisan, the rule of some part of society over the whole, on behalf of some particular conception of the good life. For analytical purposes, Aristotle refers to the groups in society as the one, the few, and the many. Whichever group comes to predominate in a community gives that community its tone, shape, or order, what Aristotle calls its regime. Regimes differ not only with respect to who rules in them, but also with respect to the purposes for which rule is exercised. Every group in society conceives of the common good in the light of its own specific interests. Again for analytical purposes, Aristotle distinguishes between regimes in which rule is for the good of both the rulers and the ruled, and regimes in which rule is for the good of only the rulers. The former are good regimes, the latter bad. There are, then, many different regime forms. Aristotle includes six in his theoretical taxonomy: monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity, and democracy. Even the good, however, exhibit something of the particular interest of the ruling part, just as even the bad exhibit something of the universal aspiration for the good life (see Bk. III, esp. 1278b6– 1281a11).

It is the partisanship of government that is, for Aristotle, the cause of the fundamental problem of politics. All the groups in society want to be treated justly, to have their special contributions recognized and their specific needs filled. While all agree that justice is giving equal things to equal people, they all disagree about the equalities and inequalities of people and things that must be taken into account in doing justice. Every part of society is led, then, to assert its own right to rule, on behalf of its own conception of the good life. Political practice is defined by the competition of the various parts of society for the right to rule over the whole. This competition, which Aristotle calls faction, can, if it gets out of hand, become extremely destructive. While Aristotle suggests a number of strategies to contain the problem of faction, he

understands that it can never be eliminated from politics. Faction is inherent in the very nature of political society (see Bk. V).

Aristotle's teaching on politics leads to the conclusion that there is no release for mankind from the age-old bondages of man to man and man to nature. At least there is no hope for universal progress or a general improvement in the human condition. With its aim of actualizing the complete good life, politics is an expression of the yearning of human beings for the fullness, completion, or perfection of their existence. This yearning shows itself in politics, however, principally in the particular claims to rule that are raised by the various parts of society. The assertion of these claims to rule leads to the disruptiveness of factional struggle. In politics, efforts to make things better are inevitably accompanied by conflicts that might well make them worse. The political struggle leads to the replacement of the rule of one part of society with its own particular conception of the common good by the rule of some other part with a similarly partial view. At best the new government is a marginal improvement over the old. The domination of man by man, however, continues unchanged. Political practice moves, then, within more or less fixed limits. These limits represent the forces that, from above, hold human beings in subjection. They make manifest the domination of man by nature. Consideration of the problems of politics leads to the conclusion that what is most needful for human beings is an understanding of the limits that define their existence. This involves reflection on the nature of man, the place of man in the order of things, and the power or powers that give man his being. The highest expression of the longing for completion is, therefore, to be found in the activity of contemplation. There is in this activity a kind of transcendence of the limits that define the life of man. Only the relatively few individuals, however, who have the leisure, inclination, and ability necessary for the contemplative life can obtain this freedom.

Liberalism's project for the emancipation of mankind from its traditional bondages receives its most comprehensive exposition in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. The premise of Hobbes's teaching is his denial that human beings can be understood as being moved by the longing for the good. This is the most important point of the materialist psychology that he elaborates in his first chapters.⁵ Hobbes concludes from his psychology that "there is no such *Finis ultimis*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers." In its place, he proposes as "a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death." The cause of this ceaseless striving for power is that man "cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more" (Ch. 1, pp. 160–61). Politics does not, then, grow out of the longing for completion, fullness, or perfection. Rather it grows out of the competition for power understood as not so much the prerequisite as the substitute for the good. This is expressed in the doctrine of the state of nature. In the natural condition the competition for power is unre-

strained. As a result, there is no security for men in the enjoyment of their natural rights to life and what conduces to life, liberty, and property. The life of man in the natural condition is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short." Human beings form political society, according to Hobbes, not to achieve the complete good life but only in order to escape the horrors of the state of nature (see Chs. 13–14).

Government when properly organized—that is, in accordance with Hobbes's new science of politics—is nonpartisan. The exclusion from the public sphere of the question of the nature of the complete good life makes it impossible for any part of society to assert, on the basis of its special merits, a right to rule over the rest. Given that there is no publically accepted and enforced conception of the good, there is no foundation on which to rest such a claim to political power. More importantly, the depoliticization of the question of the nature of the good life has the effect of abolishing, at least for the purposes of politics and government, the qualitative distinctions among the different parts of society. With no public definition of the good, there is nothing to make any individual or group in any way special in the political order. This means that, at least from the point of view of politics and government, all human beings are equal. This in turn implies that, since there is no one who enjoys any natural or divine right to rule, all human beings are by nature free. The only legitimate basis for government authority is the consent of the governed. The governed presumably will give their consent to the formation of a government that will limit itself to the purpose of securing them against the dangers to life, liberty, and property of the state of nature. All legitimate government is, then, representative in character, embodying both the consent and the interests of the whole of society. According to Hobbes, this is the case regardless of the form—monarchic, aristocratic, or democratic—in which it is organized (see Chs. 13, 17, and 19).

Hobbes in his invention of nonpartisan government attempts what is, according to the traditional understanding, the impossible: not merely to control but to solve the problem of factionalism. The cause of faction is the partisanship of government. The political system of representative government attacks factionalism at the level of its causes by replacing the partisan government of traditional society, in which a part rules over the whole in the name of some particular conception of the complete good life, with an essentially nonpartisan form of government, in which the whole rules over itself on behalf of goods that, while in themselves only partial, are universally desired. It is impossible, under representative government, for human beings to raise in public the question of the nature of the good life. It is therefore impossible for them to come into conflict politically over the great issues that arise from this question, the issues of who should rule and for what purposes. From the point of view of representative government, all opinions about the good life are false because they all imply something of a natural or divine right to rule. It would be the

height of folly, then, to fight in politics over these opinions. Little is left to be struggled over in the public sphere, and what is left is not such as to engage men's most powerful passions. Politics is reduced to the struggle over who gets what of the essentially instrumental goods of society. It is almost, but not quite, subsumed by economics. In this situation human beings will retreat into their private affairs, which do engage their passions, and involve themselves in the public arena only when moved by threats to or opportunities for the advancement of their special interests. There is little danger that this kind of politics will ever get out of hand and endanger the peace of society. This would be the last thing that its participants, animated primarily by essentially economic concerns, would want to see happen. Prosperity accompanies peace. In Hobbes's new arrangement of political society, the stirring but frequently destructive clash of great parties is replaced by the unexciting but generally nondisruptive struggle of interest groups (see Chs. 21 and 24. On the topic of great and small parties, see Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part II, Ch. 2, "Parties in the United States.).

The resolution of the problem of factionalism in Hobbes's new science of politics prepares the way for the general improvement of the human condition. The solution to the problem of faction involves a drastic narrowing of the purposes of government, from the achievement of the complete good life to the security of the instrumental goods of life, liberty, and property. Ironically, this narrowing opens up hitherto unimagined possibilities for progress in society. Factionalism is an evil thing because it threatens the enjoyment by men of their natural rights, both directly, in the violent conflict that it only too frequently touches off, and indirectly, in the way that it interferes with the progress of modern natural science in its effort to conquer and master nature for the relief of man's estate. One aspect of the competition for political power among the various factions in society is a tension between the few wise, the philosophers or scientists, and the many unwise, the nonphilosophers or nonscientists. Through his system of nonpartisan government, which makes it impossible for either the few scientists or the many nonscientists to claim a right to rule over the other, Hobbes reconciles these two parts of society, guaranteeing to the few the freedom from interference by the many that they require for their investigations, while assuaging the fears that the many might harbor towards the few on account of the power that they have at their command. Peace is good not only as an end in itself but also as a necessary means for the achievement of a greater end, the emancipation of mankind from the bondage of natural necessity through the conquest of nature by modern science. On its deepest level, Hobbes's system of nonpartisan government is a means by which human beings can ally together to more effectually make war on nature.

The conclusion of this alliance, according to liberal political philosophy, requires the separation of religion and politics. The establishment of the system of nonpartisan government requires the exclusion from the public sphere of the

essentially religious question of the nature of the complete good life. This exclusion takes the institutional form, in Hobbes's thought, of secular absolutism. Its more successful institutional form, however, is Locke's system of religious toleration. Involved in the question of the nature of the complete good life are issues of cosmic dimensions: the organization of the universe, man's place in the order of creation, the power or powers weaving together the whole. Traditional society, which places the question of the nature of the good life at the center of its politics, is profoundly religious. This is expressed in its fatalism, its submission to the given. The religious character of traditional society is expressed even more forcefully in its adherence to the contemplative ideal. Liberalism, by removing the question of the nature of the good life from politics, secularizes society. It releases society from its traditional fatalism while supplanting its traditional admiration for the contemplative life with a taste for action. Liberalism not only unites but sets in motion traditional society. Through the separation of religion and politics liberalism intends to bring about a revolutionary change in the way men are governed, and out of that a radical transformation of the human condition. The political system of representative government abolishes the domination of man by man, and makes possible the abolition of the domination of man by nature. Liberalism is eminently sober in its politics; its sobriety, however, is in the service of a kind of madness, the scientific conquest of nature. There is something divine, at least Dionysian, in the liberal project. The works on religion of the liberal political philosophers, including Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, articulate this Dionysian dimension of liberalism.

II

Hume's adoption of the dialogue form in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* is a rarity in modern philosophy. One of the characters in the work asserts that "though the ancient philosophers conveyed most of their instruction in the form of dialogue, this method of composition has been little practiced in later ages, and has seldom succeeded in the hands of those who have attempted it." Modern philosophy aims at the development of comprehensive systems, beginning with indubitable first principles and moving by unbroken chains of reasoning and evidence to arrive at sure final conclusions. It therefore tends to slip into a "methodical and didactic" mode of exposition (p. 3). Modern philosophy is systematic because of its intention or purpose to master and conquer nature: it reforms nature in theory in preparation for its reconstruction in practice. Its principal instrument in this project is modern natural science. Hume does not, in his own name, explain his choice of the dialogue form for his treatment of natural religion. He indicates by his choice, however, that there is a limit to how far modern philosophy can be made systematic. Natural religion

is the set of beliefs about God that supposedly can be derived, without the aid of divine revelation, by reasoning on the observation or experience of the universe. It concerns, then, the cause or ground of all being. Choosing the dialogue form to present his teaching on natural religion, Hume implies that there is a problem in the metaphysical foundations of systematic modern philosophy. This, in turn, implies a problem for the conduct of the modern project of the scientific conquest of nature. Hume's purpose in the *Dialogues* is to define and, to the extent possible, to resolve this problem in the theory and practice of modernity.

Hume masks his intentions in the *Dialogues* by never speaking in his own voice. He accomplishes this by adopting the literary device of a narrator who introduces the discussion, makes unobtrusive comments on the arguments and the actions of the interlocutors, and concludes by rendering judgment on the debate.⁶ The narrator, the youth Pamphilus, records for his friend Hermippus a conversation that he recently overheard on the subject of religion among three older men, Cleanthes, Philo, and Demea. This conversation is of interest not only because of the topic with which it deals but also because of the extraordinary differences in the characters of its participants. Pamphilus contrasts "the accurate philosophical turn of Cleanthes" with the "careless scepticism of Philo" and the "rigid inflexible orthodoxy of Demea" (p. 4). At the close of the conversation, Pamphilus, "upon a serious review of the whole," decides that "Philo's principles are more probable than Demea's, but that those of Cleanthes approach still nearer to the truth" (p. 95). This verdict seems curiously obtuse. Philo is the dominant, or at least the most vocal, participant in the conversation. Many of his arguments are left unanswered. He states the conclusions of the discussion. If Cleanthes really is the victor in the confrontation with Philo, he must win by stealth or even fraud rather than by force. It is possible, however, that Pamphilus is not a fit judge for the debate. He is young. He is likely to be partial towards Cleanthes, his friend and teacher (see pp. 4–5). Perhaps he underrates the arguments of Demea and Philo while overlooking problems with Cleanthes' arguments. At the same time, it is necessary to note the remarkably reserved character of Pamphilus' judgment: Cleanthes' principles are not simply true, but "nearer to the truth" than Philo's.

Pamphilus takes up in his introduction the question of the purpose of writing dialogues. He claims that the dialogue form is appropriate whenever the issue is not only "so *obvious* that it scarcely admits of dispute," but also "so *important* that it cannot be too often inculcated," the freshness of the presentation making up for the hackneyed character of the topic. The dialogue form is also appropriate when the issue is "so obscure and uncertain that human reason can reach no fixed determination" on it. In this case the play of "opposite sentiments, even without any decision" offers "an agreeable amusement." The reader enters into a kind of community of interest and sympathy with the interlocutors. In this way the dialogue "unites the two greatest and purest pleasures of human life—

study and society” (pp. 3–4). The subject of natural religion combines all these circumstances: there is no topic so obvious but important as the being of God, no topic so obscure and uncertain as the nature of God (p. 4). How the dialogue form might be utilized to “unite study and society” is indicated in a comment by Philo on Galileo’s *Dialogue of the Two Principal Systems of the World*. In this book, Galileo has his characters discuss the common or received opinion that terrestrial and celestial substances are distinct in their nature and behavior. The dialogue form allows him to meet the “full force of prejudice” by turning his “arguments on every side in order to render them popular and convincing” (p. 24). Galileo’s intention in the *Dialogue*, of course, is to demolish the metaphysical foundations of the Ptolemaic conception of the universe and to provide the metaphysical foundations for the new Copernican conception. Galileo’s revolution in astronomy contributed, however, to the demise of the traditional world and the creation of the modern world. Galileo uses the dialogue form, then, to “unite study and society” by refounding society on the basis of the truths that he has discovered through study.

Hume reveals his intention in the *Dialogues*, to the extent that he does reveal it, in the dramatic structure of the work. This involves, in addition to the characters’ arguments, their actions and designs. The arguments are so absorbing that it is easy to overlook the other elements of the drama. The characters conceal, or at least do not loudly proclaim, their intentions. They are subdued in their actions, generally speaking showing themselves in nothing but facial expressions and tones of voice, commented on apparently in passing by Pamphilus. This is altogether appropriate for the situation and the setting: a conversation among a few old friends, on a topic of general rather than immediate practical interest, carried on in the genial surroundings of the library of one of the participants. The discussion among Cleanthes, Philo, and Demea on the subject of natural religion, however, is no idle chat but a rhetorical contest, a kind of war, with Pamphilus’ soul as the prize for the victor. The older men debate the principles that ought to guide the young men’s education. It begins as a dispute between traditionalist piety and modernist activism. It quickly becomes a dispute between two fundamentally different conceptions of modernist activism, however. Demea proposes to Cleanthes a plan, ultimately borrowed from the ancient moralist Plutarch, for educating Pamphilus. Apparently he is troubled by the way Cleanthes is handling the youth’s education, imparting to him the “useful” elements of the arts and sciences. For Demea, the point of education is not action but contemplation. His plan culminates in the study of “the nature of the gods.” Before the subject of theology is broached, however, the mind of the student must be well seasoned with piety. This is accomplished through a kind of sceptical attack on human reason, by continually pointing out during the study of the other sciences the failures of man’s natural powers of thought.

Philo, complimenting Demea on his plan of education, agrees that religious

faith must be based on scepticism about the capabilities of human reason. "Those who enter a little into study and inquiry," he claims, all too often come to believe that nothing is beyond the reason of man; then, "presumptuously breaking through all fences," they "profane the inmost sanctuaries of the temple." Human beings move beyond the reach of their intellectual abilities when they speculate on religious subjects, in particular the creation of the universe. The only defense against presumptuousness is to set before them the limits of human reason, including "the insuperable difficulties which attend first principles in all systems" and "the contradictions which adhere to the very ideas of matter, cause and effect, extension, space, time, motion" (p. 6). Human beings are better off when they confine their speculations to this-worldly topics, including trade and politics (p. 9). Cleanthes admits the use of a moderate scepticism that considers "each particular evidence apart," and proportions its "assent to the precise degree of evidence which occurs." This is the basis for "all natural, mathematical, moral, and political science." He insists that "theological and religious" science can and must be built up using this same kind of reasoning. He follows Locke in affirming that "*faith* [is] nothing but a species of *reason*," that "religion [is] only a branch of philosophy," and that "all the principles of theology" are established by "a chain of arguments" similar to those employed in "morals, politics, or physics" (p. 11–13). Based on the observation of design in the universe, Cleanthes argues that the "Author of nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man" (p. 17). Demea is scandalized and Philo somewhat amused by the comparison between the divine and the human. All three of the participants in the conversation are, then, sceptics of one sort or another. They derive very different practical and theoretical conclusions from their scepticisms, however. Demea is led to the piety and rationalist theorizing of traditionalist religiosity. Philo comes to a kind of moderate modern scientific empiricism. He distinguishes between heavenly and earthly matters and restricts the quest for scientific understanding to the latter, while consigning the former to perpetual doubt and uncertainty. Cleanthes is a thoroughgoing scientific empiricist, who applies the methods of modern science to the study of all beings, both on the earth and in the heavens (see p. 26). In spite of their differences, Demea and Philo are able to ally together to combat Cleanthes, with Philo bearing the heat of the battle, subjecting his arguments to a barrage of sceptical criticisms.

Two separate conflicts then, shape the drama of Hume's *Dialogues*. The first, of course, is the confrontation between the traditional rationalist Demea and the modern empiricist Cleanthes. The second, and more interesting, is the confrontation between the two modern empiricists, Cleanthes and Philo. These separate conflicts are intermingled, however, as a result of the alliance concluded between Philo and Demea against Cleanthes. The drama has as its central motif, then, the rise and fall of the alliance between the modernist sceptic and the representative of traditionalist orthodoxy. Formed at the beginning of

Part I, it suffers stresses and strains throughout the dialogue, and finally disintegrates at the end of Part XI. It falls apart under the pressure of Philo's relentless sceptical questioning, particularly when he touches on the issue of evil in the world and what it might or might not imply for the benevolence of the Deity. The alliance's fate is the result of the fundamental differences between the two allies. These differences are clearly recognized by Cleanthes at the time of its formation. He smiles at what he perceives as satire when Philo proclaims his approval of Demea's approach to education (p. 7). Demea and Philo come together on the basis of what appears as their mutual scepticism about the reach of human reason. They differ profoundly, however, over the practical use to which the theoretical critique of human reason should be put. For Demea, the use of scepticism is to tame the mind to "a proper submission and self-diffidence" (p. 5). It supports traditionalist piety, with its resignation to the given. For Philo, however, scepticism is useful as a discipline for the mind in its struggle to understand and ultimately to control the world. It leads the mind to be cautious in its reasonings, especially on the most abstruse topics, and to base all of its conclusions on the solid foundation of experience. It induces the mind to restrict its speculations to the sphere of common experience, leaving alone such transcendent questions as "the two eternities, before and after the present state of things," the "creation and formation of the universe," and the "powers and operations of one universal Spirit existing without beginning and end, omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, infinite, and incomprehensible" (pp. 9–10). Scepticism supports, then, the modern project of the scientific mastery and conquest of nature.

The differences between Demea and Philo are summed up in the distinction introduced by Cleanthes, between vulgar and philosophic scepticism.⁷ Vulgar sceptics "reject every principle which requires elaborate reasoning to prove and establish." This sustains "traditional superstition" while precluding the advancement of scientific knowledge. Vulgar sceptics "firmly believe in witches, though they will not believe nor attend to the most simple proposition of Euclid." Philosophic sceptics push their speculations into recondite subjects but refrain from drawing any conclusions except from hard evidence. They are led by their theoretical scrupulousness, however, to assume that the highest questions, in particular theological questions, are beyond the reach of human reason. For Cleanthes, men of philosophy or science should be willing when investigating matters of religion to make the same kind of empirically based judgments that they do with respect to matters of a more mundane character (p. 11). Philo, in contrast, compares philosophers or scientists dealing with religious questions to "foreigners in a strange land to whom everything must seem suspicious, and who are in danger every moment of transgressing against the laws and customs of the people with whom they live and converse." So far from common experience, all arguments look equally reasonable, or rather equally unreasonable. "The mind," Philo claims, "must remain in suspense

between them,” and this “suspense or balance” is “the triumph of scepticism” (p. 10).

Philo and Cleanthes are both partisans of modernity, with its project for the scientific conquest of nature. They agree on its superiority to the pious religiosity and rationalist theorizing of traditionalism. This area of agreement is obscured by the rhetorical concessions that Philo makes to Demea, required by the alliance between the two. Philo and Cleanthes disagree powerfully, however, in their understandings of the theoretical foundations of modern science. They differ over the question of whether modern science pertains to only “earthly” or to both “earthly” and “heavenly” matters—that is, whether it presupposes a specific theology or metaphysics. This theoretical disagreement has practical consequences for the conduct of the modern project. If modern science has no theology or metaphysics of its own, then there is no necessary conflict between it and traditional belief, and reconciliation between modernity and traditionalism is at least possible. This is Philo’s position. It is reflected in the alliance he forms with Demea in Part I. If, however, modern science has its own theology or metaphysics, then conflict between it and traditional belief is inevitable, and there is no possibility of a reconciliation between modernity and traditionalism. This is Cleanthes’ position. It is reflected in the withering attack he makes on Demea’s a priori argument on the nature of God in Part IX. Indicatively, Philo backs away from a frontal assault on Demea in Part IX. He criticizes Demea’s a priori argument, but only on practical grounds. It is unlikely, he claims, to convince anyone except “people of a metaphysical head who have accustomed themselves to abstract reasoning.” Cleanthes is, then, more intransigent or radical in his modernism than Philo. It is Philo, not Cleanthes, who attempts to compromise with traditionalism. Cleanthes’ radicalism can easily be overlooked, however, because of his own reserve and because of Philo’s argumentative pyrotechnics (see p. 44).

Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* presents dramatically the confrontation of two different practical approaches to the modern project of the scientific conquest of nature, based on two very different conceptions of the theoretical foundations of modern natural science. The crucial practical problem is the relationship between modernity and tradition: can the modern project be pursued within the intellectual, social, and political framework of traditionalism, or does it require the overthrow of traditionalism? The decisive theoretical issue is the place of theology or metaphysics in the structure of modern natural science: can modern natural science be constructed on the basis of thoroughgoing scepticism about the highest questions, or does it presuppose a certain theology or metaphysics? In the *Dialogues*, Hume indicates his answers to these questions in the movement of the drama. The alliance between the “careless sceptic” Philo and the “rigidly orthodox” Demea breaks down, despite all of Philo’s efforts to placate Demea (see, e.g., p. 19). Eventually Demea sees Philo as perhaps “a more dangerous enemy than Cleanthes himself,” the result

of his “running into all the topics of the greatest libertines and infidels” (p. 80). He is so deeply offended that he leaves the conversation. Perhaps Philo carelessly allows himself to be lured or goaded on in his questioning by Cleanthes (see, e.g., pp. 44, 71). At any rate it turns out to be simply impossible for him to sustain his cooperative relationship with Demea. Science ultimately cannot recognize the distinction between “earth” and “heaven.” In the end, Philo is left with Cleanthes, reconciled to him. And even though it is Philo who states the conclusions of the dialogue, those conclusions are essentially Cleanthes’ Philo limns out a theology or metaphysics based on the understanding that “the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence” (p. 94; compare p. 17). Hume would undoubtedly agree with his Pamphilus in judging the outcome of the conversation. He is as intransigent or radical in his modernism as his character Cleanthes. The fact that Hume writes the *Dialogues*—along with so many other works on religion—indicates that he agrees with the position espoused by Cleanthes. He conveys in the *Dialogues* a revolutionary teaching. It is disguised, however, by the reserve of his character Cleanthes and the apparent radicalism of his character Philo. Hume adopts the dialogue form in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* in order to “unite study and society” on the basis of his radical conception of the theoretical foundations and practical consequences of the modern project of the scientific conquest of nature.

III

Hume in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* develops what has been called his theology of liberation out of the dialectical confrontation of Demea, Philo, and Cleanthes. No one of these characters simply speaks for Hume. All at least on occasion use distinctively Humean arguments (see e.g., pp. 20–21 [Philo]; 30–32 [Demea]; 58–59 [Cleanthes]). From Hume’s point of view, however, they all err in important ways. Demea goes astray in his rejection of modern empirical science. Philo is wrong on the fundamental practical and theoretical issues pertaining to the modern project: modernity cannot come to terms with traditionalism because it presupposes its own profoundly anti-traditional theology or metaphysics. While Cleanthes is right on the fundamental practical and theoretical issues, he appears to be overly optimistic about the prospects for the modern project. The conclusions Cleanthes seems to want to draw from the relationship between the human mind and the cause of order in the universe, for example concerning the benevolence towards man of the first cause, Philo shows by his questioning to be unwarranted (see, e.g., p. 55). If Hume has a spokesman, it is Pamphilus, who introduces the discussion, comments on the characters and actions of the participants, and judges the outcome of the debate.⁸ Hume, however, does what he can to hide this by raising doubts

about Pamphilus' judgment, making him young and potentially biased. At the end of the discussion, Philo sums up what seem to be its conclusions. "*The cause, or causes of order in the universe,*" he claims, "*probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.*" This proposition, however, does not allow for "extension, variation, or more particular explication." The analogy between the mind of man and the cause of order in the universe applies only to man's intelligence and cannot be transferred to "the other qualities of the mind," by which he means its moral attributes. Finally this proposition "affords no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance" (p. 94). This cold, even frigid, theology provides the foundation for the project in liberal political philosophy for the liberation of man from his traditional bondages to man and to nature.

The pious traditionalist Demea plays a crucial, albeit ironic, role in the development of the *Dialogues'* theology. He of course initiates the discussion of the subject of religion. This is only the beginning of his influence on the discussion portrayed in the dialogue, however. Demea time and time again changes the direction of the argument by raising objections to what he senses are its unorthodox implications. He cuts off the discussion at sensitive points. At the same time, and apparently without a clear understanding of what he is doing, he turns it in new and fruitful directions. This first occurs at the beginning of Part II, when Demea rebukes Cleanthes for the tenor of his remarks on the empirical foundations of religion, taking him to imply that it is necessary to defend the thesis of the existence of God. Asserting that the existence of God is something that no man of common sense can doubt, he insists that the debate be about the nature rather than the being of God. This, he avers, is altogether incomprehensible to the finite human mind. Cleanthes responds with his design argument. The next time Demea gets stirred up is at the beginning of Part VI. Cleanthes' design argument leaves too much in doubt. It leads to a religion that is altogether useless for the purposes of life, positing a Deity who is no possible object of trust, worship, or obedience. Demea demands an account of the nature of God that allows human beings to repose their confidence in Him.

In Part IX Demea, having seen some of the problems with a posteriori arguments concerning the nature of God, tries his hand at an a priori argument. To this Cleanthes delivers a devastating critique, demonstrating the impossibility of a priori proof of any matter of fact, including not just the nature but the very existence of God. Rebounding from this criticism, Demea at the beginning of Part X attempts his own a posteriori argument. He asserts that the truth of religion is established not by abstract reasoning but by the sentiments. Human beings are compelled by the fear of death, pain, and the rest of life's woes to seek protection from a Supreme Being. Offended by the inferences which Philo draws out of the reality of human misery, suffering, and sorrow, Demea withdraws from the conversation at the end of Part XI. After Demea departs, Philo delivers his judgments on the questions of the existence and nature of God,

which are left by Cleanthes to stand as the conclusions of the whole discussion. Demea's eruptions, then, move the argument through its various themes, giving it a kind of hidden order or structure. They divide it into three major sections, each devoted to a single theme or topic. This perhaps accounts for the peculiar plural in the title of the *Dialogues*, which to all outward appearances portrays a single continuous conversation. Thanks to Demea, while the argument seems to wander more or less aimlessly, it actually examines the most important teachings of traditional or orthodox theism, the omniscience, omnipotence, and benevolence of God. It reformulates these teachings in the light of the empiricism of modern philosophy and science. Its reformulations of the traditional teachings on the nature of God comprise a kind of theology of modernity. The absence of Demea when the conclusions of the argument are stated serves to underscore the profoundly unorthodox or antitraditional character of this new theology.

The omniscience of God is the theme of the first section—Part II through Part V—of the *Dialogues*. God, for Demea, is the “supreme Mind,” but due to the infirmities of human reason He is altogether incomprehensible to the mind of man (p. 15). Philo agrees that the only way for “reasonable men” to think about the Deity is to assume that He is unknowable. Since nothing can exist without a cause, there must be a cause of the universe; the universe's cause, “whatever it be,” human beings call God. They piously impute to Him all perfection, including thought. Since what they conceive as perfection is relative to their own experience, however, what they say about the Divinity indicates nothing about His real nature. Infinitely above the limited understanding of human beings, the Supreme Being is “more the object of worship in the temple than of disputation in the schools” (p. 16). Ignoring what he calls Philo's “pious declamations,” Cleanthes argues that the nature of the Deity can be deduced from the evidence of design, “the curious adapting of means to ends,” throughout the universe. The resemblance of design in God's world to design in man's works allows for the inference, “by all the rules of analogy,” that there is some similarity between the mind of man and the “Author of nature” (p. 17). Demea objects to Cleanthes' argument because, based on experience rather than abstract reasoning, it gives only a probable and not a necessary proof of the existence and nature of God. Philo objects not because the argument is based on experience, nor even because it makes use of analogy, but because the analogy it appeals to is weak. The differences between the universe and man's creations are too great for any legitimate comparisons to be made between their causes. Philo's concessions to Cleanthes outrage Demea, however, and in order to placate his ally he restates and strengthens his criticism. The crux of his argument is that since there are many “springs and principles of the universe,” it is impossible to trace the origin of the universe to any one of them. No conclusion about the cause of the whole can be derived from observation of the causes of change in any part. It is as unreasonable for human beings to make

their own thought the model for the organization of the universe as it would be for a peasant to make “his domestic economy the rule for the government of kingdoms” (p. 22).

Cleanthes rejects Philo’s dissociation of human and divine intelligence as fatal to the progress of science. He reminds Philo, who just before had been discussing Galileo’s *Dialogues*, that “Copernicus and his first disciples,” obviously referring to Galileo, were compelled to demonstrate “the similarity of the terrestrial and celestial matter, because several philosophers, blinded by old systems and supported by some sensible appearances, had denied this similarity.” Philo’s argument is no better than the “abstruse cavils” of the Eleatics, who hold that the universe is unchanging, a whole without parts (p. 26). Philo’s argument implies that the universe is nothing but change, parts without a whole. In neither case is speech or reason about the universe possible. Reasoning about the universe involves connecting parts with the whole. This seems to require, for Cleanthes, assuming some kind of intention or purpose as the first cause of the whole. It is necessary, in order to think about the behavior of the beings that make up the universe, to impute to them some kind of purpose. The purposiveness of the parts will then be reflected in the structure of the whole. From Cleanthes’ point of view, human beings, to reason about the universe, have no choice but to make their “domestic economy” the “rule for the government” of the whole. The analogy between the universe and the works of man is self-evident: they involve “the same matter” and “a like form.” He clinches his point with two illustrations, an intelligible voice from the clouds and a library of naturally propagating books. Both these circumstances would allow the inference of a superhuman reason or intelligence. There is more evidence of design in the works of nature, however, than in any speech or any book. He demands, then, that Philo “assert either that a rational volume is no proof of a rational cause or admit of a similar cause” to the universe. “Whatever cavils may be urged,” Cleanthes affirms, “an orderly world, as well as a coherent, articulate speech, will still be received as an incontestable proof of design and intention.” This argument, according to Pamphilus, leaves Philo embarrassed and confounded (pp. 26–29).

Philo apparently accepts Cleanthes’ argument. When he returns to the discussion after a long period of silence—perhaps the longest in the whole conversation—he shifts, decisively, the point of his attack. He does not return to his earlier position, that no conclusion regarding the cause of the universe can be derived from its visible order. He tacitly accedes to Cleanthes’ essential point, concerning the theoretical necessity of what Cleanthes’ calls his “hypothesis of design in the universe” (p. 41; see also pp. 66, 70, 82). Philo is rescued from his embarrassment by his ally Demea, who picks up the argument with Cleanthes. God is incomprehensible to man, according to Demea, because man is a compound being and God is One. The mind of man, according to Demea, is a “composition of various faculties, passions, sentiments, ideas.” This is incom-

patible with the “perfect simplicity” of the Deity (pp. 31–32). Cleanthes readily admits that a perfectly simple being is incomprehensible. Those who conceive of the Deity as perfectly simple are “complete mystics” (p. 32). Mystics, of course, do not reason about the universe and its causes. Cleanthes’ design argument implies that the first cause of all things is not simple but compounded. It is a whole with parts. The order of the beings in the universe is a reflection of the order of the elements in the first cause. To reason about the universe and its causes ultimately means to attempt to find an account of the hidden order of the causes that displays within itself the manifest order of the universe. When Philo returns to the discussion, he makes this the point of his criticism of Cleanthes’ argument.⁹ He restricts himself to pointing out the “inconveniences” of what he calls Cleanthes’ “anthropomorphism.” It leads to a multiplicity of possible causes. There are, in accordance with the “hypothesis of design in the universe,” many Dieties, many possible orderings of the first cause (p. 41). Philo admits to Cleanthes that “a man who follows your hypothesis is able, perhaps, to assert or conjecture that the universe sometime arose from something like design”; beyond that, however, “he cannot ascertain one single circumstance, and is left afterwards to fix every point of his theology by the utmost license of fancy and hypothesis” (p. 40). Cleanthes views Philo’s arguments not with “horror” but with “pleasure” (p. 41). There is, then, a rational design or order to the universe; it is up to human beings, however, as part of their effort to understand scientifically the universe, to say just what that rational design or order might be.

This raises a question about the omnipotence of God. This is the theme of the second major section of the *Dialogues*, from Part VI through Part VIII. The relationship between the themes of the omniscience and the omnipotence of the Deity is indicated in the structure of the dialogue in two ways. Philo takes up the argument in the second section explicitly as an extension of one of his most important points in the first section, that Cleanthes’ design argument is based on the premise that “like effects arise from like causes” (p. 42). More importantly, Demea’s attempt in Part IX at an a priori argument on the nature of God, so out of place in the dialogue as a whole, effectively brackets together the first and second sections. Philo points out that, on Cleanthes’ premise of “like effects—like causes,” it is possible to conceive of the universe as an animal, since it has many of the properties of animals, including the orderly connection of parts to the whole. This makes the Deity the soul of the universe, “actuating it, and actuated by it.” Cleanthes demurs, but only slightly, to suggest that the analogy is even stronger to plants. Both animals and plants have their own internal principles of order and change. Philo argues, then, that it is plausible to “ascribe an eternal inherent principle of order in the world, though attended with great and continual revolutions and alterations.” This, he claims, is “a theory that we must sooner or later have recourse to, whatever system we embrace.” In the world of Philo’s theory, there is no room for chance (pp. 42–

46). There are, however, many principles of motion in the universe, including reason, instinct, generation, and vegetation. It is possible, he asserts, for human beings to choose any one of these as the basis for a “system of cosmogony.” Any account of the whole involves a choice about first principles or causes. He illustrates his point by referring to Greek and Hindu cosmologies (pp. 49–51). This argument conceals a fallacy, however, which Cleanthes at least dimly perceives (see p. 51). The fallacy is in Philo’s claim that there is no room for chance in the universe. Chance exists, if nowhere else, in the choice of first principles by human beings. This is by no means an inconsequential matter, as is indicated by the examples of the Greek and Hindu cosmologies. Human beings create great civilizations through the cosmologies they pose for themselves. These civilizations, in turn, shape the ways of life of their peoples. This means that human beings in effect create themselves through their choices of first principles. The first cause of all things is, then, some kind of combination of necessity and chance. These two together are perhaps omnipotent. While they are immutable, however, they allow for the mutability of human history, its movement reflecting the combination of the fundamental principles of chance and necessity. The first cause is, then, essentially the transhistorical ground of history, expressing itself and its power particularly in the self-making, historical activity of human beings.

The question of the benevolence of the Deity is taken up in the last section of the *Dialogues*, in Parts X and XI. This issue arises out of a consideration of evil in the world. Nature, according to Demea, has kindled a “perpetual war” among all living creatures. Human beings can protect themselves from at least some of nature’s threats by uniting in society. Philo points out, however, that this only creates new evils for them. By coming together in society they are able to surmount all their “real enemies” and make themselves masters of “the whole animal creation”; at the same time, however, they raise for themselves “imaginary enemies,” the “demons” of their imagination, who haunt them with “superstitious terrors and blast every enjoyment of life.” Society also sets human beings against each other. Afflicting one another with “oppression, injustice, contempt, contumely, violence, sedition, war, calumny, treachery, fraud,” they would quickly dissolve society if it were not for the evils that would come with separating (p. 63). Philo challenges Cleanthes to maintain his “anthropomorphism” in the face of the reality of evil in the world. It is impossible, he argues, to claim that the “moral attributes of the Deity,” including His benevolence, are “of the same nature with these virtues in human creatures” (p. 66). Cleanthes admits the importance of the issue. There would be no purpose in demonstrating the “natural attributes of the Deity” if His moral attributes should be left “doubtful and uncertain.” He therefore denies the “misery and wickedness of man.” The good outweighs the bad in human life (pp. 67–68).

Philo cautions Cleanthes that by taking his stand on this line he is “introduc-

ing a total scepticism into the most essential articles of natural and revealed theology." Even assuming the preponderance of good over evil, this is insufficient to prove the benevolence of the Deity. If He is infinitely powerful, there should be no evil whatsoever in the world (pp. 68–69). Cleanthes attempts to save the benevolence of the "Author of nature" by positing that He is finitely powerful. He is benevolent, but limited by necessity (p. 71). Philo shows, however, that while the thesis of the finitude of the Deity might save His benevolence as an hypothesis, it cannot establish it as a fact. No inference concerning the benevolence of the first cause of the universe can be drawn from the mixture of good and evil in the world. The presence of evil is the result of a number of circumstances in the organization of the universe that might or might not be necessary to it. These circumstances include the use of "pains, as well as pleasures" to "excite all creatures to action"; the "conducting of the world by general laws"; the "frugality with which all powers and faculties are distributed to every particular being"; and the "inaccurate workmanship of all the springs and principles of the great machine of nature" (pp. 73–77). From his consideration of the causes of evil, Philo concludes that "the original Source of all things is entirely indifferent to all these principles, and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold, or to drought above moisture, or to light above heavy" (p. 79). Recognizing the force of Philo's argument, Cleanthes comments to Demea that "it must be confessed that the injudicious reasoning of our vulgar theology has given him but too just a handle of ridicule" (p. 80).

The first cause of all things, whatever it might be deemed to be, has no particular concern for man. The Deity is a disinterested observer of the universe and the beings, including man, that compose it. This disinterestedness, however, can be interpreted as at least a kind of negative benevolence towards man. It is possible to argue, as Philo hints, that the causes of evil in the universe are "necessary and unavoidable," at least for the sake of man's development (see p. 73). At one point in his argument, he claims that to "cure most of the ills of human life" it would be necessary to increase only one "power of faculty" of man's soul, his "propensity to industry and labor" or his "bent to business and application." For human beings to be induced to labor, they must feel both the lash of fear and the lure of hope: the fear of what they will suffer if they do not stir themselves to action; the hope that by their actions they will actually be able to improve their situation. The disinterestedness of the first cause provides the grounds for both hope and fear. It induces human beings to labor by not revealing whether it is benevolent or hostile towards them. It distributes to them both pleasures and pains (p. 73). Because the first cause is indifferent towards human beings, it does not interfere in the course of nature to care for their needs. It thus makes it possible for them to employ their powers of reason "in the conduct of life" (p. 74). More like a "rigid master" than an "indulgent

parent” towards human beings, it bestows on them no advantages except “reason and sagacity.” It thus forces them to use their reason to gain everything they need or want (pp. 75–76). Finally, by allowing a certain “disorder or confusion” in the operations of nature, it leaves to man the opportunity, by the employment of his reason and the application of his industry, to manipulate the course of nature (p. 77). The disinterestedness of the first cause moves human beings to labor. They would have no reason to undertake the struggles to master, create, cultivate, and build—the arduous efforts by which civilization is constructed—if it were either particularly careful or actively hostile to them. It forces them to act but leaves them free to determine for themselves how to act. Giving them nothing but their wits, the first cause of all things literally compels them to make something of themselves.

The theology or metaphysics developed in Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* supports both elements of the liberal project, nonpartisan government and the scientific conquest of nature. What Cleanthes calls the “Author of nature” not only does not oppose the endeavor by human beings to master and control nature, it invites them and even compels them to undertake it. The first cause of all things constrains man to become his own first cause. God in effect demands of man that he make himself into a god. Human beings can make the most of themselves if they cooperate with the first cause and choose to organize themselves in society in such a way as to expose themselves to the lash of fear and the lure of hope. This occurs only under the liberal political system of nonpartisan government, in which no individual or group has a special place in the order of society. Nonpartisan government, in turn, requires the separation of religion from politics. The secularization of politics is not just possible but absolutely necessary according to the theology elaborated by Cleanthes and Philo. The Deity revealed in the discussion does not—indeed cannot—rule directly over human beings. He gives no commandments to them. He has no will that must be enforced on them, either by Himself directly or by His earthly representatives. He cannot be used, then, by any one to claim a right to rule over the rest of society. The political implications of this theology are reflected in Cleanthes’ comment that “the proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of tolerance, order, and obedience.” When it “acts as a separate principle over men,” however, “it has departed from its proper sphere and has become only a cover to faction and ambition” (p. 88). The theology of the *Dialogues* purges religion of its political pretensions. This contributes to the elimination of the evils of the rule of man over man adumbrated by Philo (see p. 63). As illustrated in Philo’s rhetorical reconciliation of “the theist” and “the atheist,” it makes possible the achievement of peace in society (see pp. 85–86). Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* articulates the theological or metaphysical presuppositions of the Dionysian project for the scientific conquest of nature at the same time that it lays the political foundations necessary for the project’s accomplishment.

CONCLUSION

Liberal political philosophy, which seeks in practice to separate religion and politics, culminates in theory in a kind of religious teaching of its own. This religious teaching implies a more or less specific conception of the complete good life for man. It is, of course, possible to question how “complete” this conception of the good life really is. Unfortunately, liberalism cannot give a good answer to this question. As is clear from Hume’s elaboration of the theology of liberalism in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, liberal political philosophy abolishes all standards both natural and divine by which it might be answered. What this might lead to is reflected in Philo’s last speech in the *Dialogues*:

But believe me, Cleanthes, the most natural sentiment which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion is a longing desire and expectation that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance by affording some particular revelation to mankind, and making discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the Divine object of our faith. A person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity, while the haughty dogmatist, persuaded that he can erect a complete system of theology by the mere help of philosophy, disdains any further aid and rejects this adventitious instructor. (p. 94)

Man might imitate the God of the Bible and organize the world by the word of his mouth; he cannot, however, like the Biblical God give the organized world meaning and value by simply calling it good. From Hume’s other writings on religion, in particular the *Natural History of Religion*, it is clear that he would by no means welcome the flight to revealed religion. It is possible to understand the development of political philosophy after liberalism, and with it the course of political development in the modern world, as the result of this yearning for a new revelation from the ground of all Being.

NOTES

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, edited with an introduction by Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 83.

2. See, inter alia, Hobbes, *Leviathan* Parts III and IV; Locke, *First Treatise of Government and Reasonableness of Christianity*; Spinoza, *Theological and Political Treatise*.

3. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, edited with an introduction by Henry D. Aiken (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1966).

4. See Aristotle, *Politics*, translated with an introduction by Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Bk. I, esp. 1252a1–23.

5. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, edited with an introduction by C. B. MacPherson (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1968), Chs. 1–8.

6. The structure of the *Dialogues* perhaps indicates something about the dimensions of its subject matter, relating it to three of the greatest of Plato's dialogues, the *Symposium*, *Theaetetus*, and *Parmenides*. Appropriately, the *Symposium* is the only Platonic dialogue on a god, the god Eros. The *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides* deal with what are now called epistemology and ontology. Commentators tend to associate the *Dialogues* with Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. The resemblance is not so strong, however, as to the Platonic dialogues. In *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero in his own name recounts a conversation that he heard. In the *Symposium*, *Theaetetus*, and *Parmenides*, like Hume's *Dialogues*, the conversation is recalled by one of the author's characters. There are a number of references to Plato in the *Dialogues*. There is also a clear reference to Parmenides.

7. "Demea" means something like "common." There is a joke about a "Demea" in Plato's *Gorgias*. There is much that could be done with the names of the other characters in the *Dialogues*. The most interesting question about names in the *Dialogues* is why Hume gave his arch-sceptic the name of a Jewish Platonist.

8. Pamphilus' judgment in the introduction on the characters of the interlocutors should be carefully noted. Most commentators take Philo as Hume's spokesman in the *Dialogues*; a very few take Cleanthes.

9. See P. S. Wadia, "Philo Confounded," in *McGill Hume Studies*, edited by David Fate Norton, et al. (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1979), pp. 283–87, for a rather different interpretation of Philo's show of embarrassment. Wadia is one of the few commentators on the *Dialogues* who takes at all seriously the drama of the work.