

THE BROKEN BRAKE. HUME AND THE “PROPER OFFICE” OF RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

In the *Dialogues concerning natural Religion*, Cleanthes delineates the “proper office” of religion: “to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience”. This view is adopted by Hume in some texts of the years 1755-56 and recalls that of the narrator in the philosophical essay “Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion” (1748): those who destroy religious prejudices “free Men from one Restraint upon their Passions, and make the Infringement of the Laws of Equity and Society, in one Respect, more easy and secure”. Does Hume really believe it? Many Hume scholars take him seriously; the *Philosophical Essays*, the *Dialogues* and the *History*, their relations, possible sources, and readings, tell us that we can’t. Religion is not a restraint on our passions nor an enforcement of morality. The “proper office” of religion, rather than Hume’s belief, seems to be one of his attempts to soften the offensive treatment of religious beliefs and their consequences.

KEYWORDS

David Hume, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, *Dialogues concerning natural Religion*, *History of Great Britain*, Religion, Morality

1. HUMEAN VOICES AND SCHOLARS

“Men [...] draw many consequences from the Belief of a divine Existence, and suppose, that the Deity will inflict Punishments on Vice, and bestow Rewards on Virtue, beyond what appears in the ordinary Course of Nature”,¹ observes a Humean voice in 1748. The same voice adds: “those, who attempt

¹ D. Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion”, in *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, London, A. Millar, 1748, pp. 205-229: 11.28, p. 227. I am very grateful to Laura Nicoli, Alberto Mingardi, Gianluca Mori, Giuliano Mori, Tim Parks, Emanuele Ronchetti and, in particular, Luigi Turco who have discussed with me this piece.

to disabuse them of such Prejudices, may [...] be good Reasoners, but I cannot allow them to be good Citizens and Politicians; since they free Men from one Restraint upon their Passions, and make the Infringement of the Laws of Equity and Society, in one Respect, more easy and secure”.² A few years later another voice observes: “the doctrine of a future state is so strong and necessary a security to morals, that we never ought to abandon or neglect it. For if finite and temporary rewards and punishments have so great an effect, as we daily find; how much greater must be expected from such as are infinite and eternal?”.³ And then it adds: “the proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience”.⁴ At the end of November 1756, David Hume the historian repeats: “the proper office of religion is to reform men’s lives, to purify their hearts, to inforce all moral duties, and to secure obedience to the laws and civil magistrate”.⁵

Do we believe these Humean voices, especially in our days, when restraint on passions, and enforcement of morals is particularly required? Some eminent scholars do.⁶ Most of them ascribe to Hume a belief in “true religion”. Someone acknowledges that Hume “denied that the prospect of divine rewards and punishments in an afterlife is an important and sustained factor in motivating morally appropriate behavior”; but, he adds, he “did concede that religion could be considered to have a ‘proper office’ with respect to the support of morality”.⁷ His conclusion is that “it is very possible that [Hume] recognized such an influence of religion in the life of his own beloved Calvinist mother”.⁸ Even she who remarks that in Hume’s history religion “almost never performs only the benign function”, and we find it “corrupting morals rather than enforcing them”, concedes that “the elusive true religion

2 Ibid.

3 D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural Religion*, ed. by N.K. Smith, London, T. Nelson, 19472, 12.10, pp. 219-220.

4 Ivi, 12.12, p. 220.

5 D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. II. Containing The Commonwealth, and The Reigns of Charles II. And James II*, London, A. Millar, 1757, p. 450 n.

6 Cf., for example, A.C. Willis, *Toward a Humean true religion: genuine theism, moderate hope, and practical morality*, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014, pp. 6-7, 135-136, 146.

7 D. Garrett, *Hume*, London and New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 309; cf. Id., *What’s true about Hume’s “true religion”*, “Journal of Scottish Philosophy”, 10, 2, 2012, pp. 199-220: p. 204.

8 Garrett, *Hume*, cit., p. 310.

will [...] quietly support sound morality”:⁹ “religion, if we must have a religion, should serve morality, not offend against it. Hume shows a lot of interest in the Quakers”.¹⁰

2. BETWEEN PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES AND A FUTURE STATE. AN INITIAL DIGRESSION

The assertion that religion is a restraint on passions and against the infringement of the laws of equity and society, appears in the 1748 *Philosophical Essays concerning human Understanding*, retitled *Enquiry concerning human Understanding* in 1758; more precisely, it occurs in the essay “Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion”, retitled “Of a particular Providence and of a future State” in 1750.¹¹ The argument, the dialogic form of the essay, and the final allusion to those “reasonings of too nice and delicate a Nature”,¹² anticipate the *Dialogues concerning natural Religion*.¹³ It is also for this reason, perhaps, that Hume declares that the *Dialogues* are “not more exceptionable than some things [he] had formerly published”;¹⁴ and Jean-André Naigeon disappointedly agrees: in the *Dialogues*

9 A. Baier, *Hume and the Conformity of Bishop Tunstal*, in Id., *Death & Character. Further Reflections on Hume*, Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 81-99: p. 82.

10 Ivi, p. 98 (cf. ivi, p. 89).

11 D. Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion”, in *Philosophical Essays*, 1748, cit., 11, pp. 205-229; D. Hume, “Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State”, in *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, London, A. Millar, 1750, pp. 209-234. There is a copy of the 1748 Essays, where the “Contents” reproduce the titles of the moral and political *Essays*, but the volume contains the *Philosophical Essays*, and the essay “Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion” already has the new title, cf. D. Hume, “Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State”, in *Essays, Moral and Political*, London, A. Millar, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid, 1748, pp. 209-233 (*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, CB3326726451, Accessed 20 Sept. 2018).

12 Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences”, cit., 1748, 11.30, p. 228.

13 J. Laird, *Hume’s Philosophy of Human Nature*, London, Methuen, 1932, p. 285.

14 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 8 June 1776, in *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols., ed. by J.Y.T. Greig, Clarendon Press Oxford, 1932, vol. II, ltr. 525, p. 323. Yet, he adds, “some of these were thought very exceptionable; and in prudence, perhaps, I ought to have suppressed them” (*ibid.*). In 1754 Hume writes to Le Blanc: “I doubt these Essays are both too bold & too metaphysical for your Climate; tho’ we have lately, in some French Writers, been entertain’d with Liberties, that are not much inferior” (D. Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, ivi, ltr. 94, p. 192). With regard to the *Philosophical Essays* in general, and the essay on miracles in particular, the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée* remarks: “Est-ce badinage ou enthousiasme? Peut-être l’un & l’autre; & quiconque examine de près un Déiste, découvre d’ordinaire qu’il a

Hume “n’offre au fond que les mêmes difficultés, les mêmes doutes qu’il avoit proposés il y a 40 ans dans ses essais sur l’entendement humain”.¹⁵ Hume “n’avoit rien ajouté à ses premiers apperçus [...] il étoit encore à-peu-près aussi sceptique sur cet article, que lorsqu’il publia ses essais sur l’entendement humain”.¹⁶ In the Index, partly composed by Hume for the 1758 edition, he refers twice to the essay: “Providence, particular, on what founded” and “Epicurus, his Apology”.¹⁷

It has been remarked that the essay is “a complex literary exercise”.¹⁸ Actually, it takes the Humean form of a dialogue. It is the account of a “conversation” between a narrator and a peculiar friend, who “loves sceptical Paradoxes” and advances principles that, in the narrator’s opinion, are curious and worthy of attention, although not approvable.¹⁹ At the end of the conversation, thanks to a Baylean technique,²⁰ the narrator has the last word and starts a new difficulty that, if possible, is even more radical than those raised by the sceptical friend. John Leland promptly detects the technique: not only the narrator “give[s] his friend a superiority in the argument”, but “some of the worst parts of this essay are directly proposed in his own person”.²¹

commencé ou du moins qu’il finira par être fanatiques” (*Bibliothèque Raisonnée*, Avril-Juin 1748, “De Londres”, p. 474).

15 J.-A. Naigeon, *Hume, Philosophie de*, in *Encyclopédie Méthodique. Philosophie Ancienne et Moderne*, 2 vols., Paris, Panckoucke, 1791-1792, vol. II, pp. 716a-756a: p. 748b.

16 Ivi, p. 756a. Naigeon gives an abstract of “Sur la providence particulière & sur l’état à venir” (ivi, pp. 734a-735b).

17 Index to D. Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, London, A. Millar, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1758, pp 531-539: pp. 533b, 361b. The providence reference is to “Of a particular Providence and of a future State”, cit., 11.20, pp. 217-218; the Epicurus reference is to ivi, 11.9-14, pp. 209-213.

18 M.A. Stewart, *Two Species of Philosophy: The Historical Significance of the First “Enquiry”*, in *Reading Hume on Human Understanding. Essays on the first “Enquiry,”* ed. by P. Millican, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002, pp. 67-95: p. 81.

19 Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences”, cit., 1748, 11.1, p. 205; 11.30, p. 229.

20 J. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples 1680-1760*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 306-307; Stewart, *Two Species of Philosophy*, cit., p. 93 n. 43. Robertson refers to Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*, Stewart to the *Continuation des Pensées diverses*.

21 J. Leland, *A View Of the Principal Deistical Writers of the Last and Present Century*. Vol. II. Containing Observations on Mr. Hume’s Philosophical Essays; and A Defence of Natural and Revealed Religion, London, B. Dod, 1755, Letter II, p. 27; cf. A. Flew, *Hume’s Philosophy of Belief: A Study of his First Enquiry*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 227.

The narrator remembers that Epicurus lived at Athens “in Peace and Tranquillity”, and the Epicureans “were even admitted to receive the sacerdotal Character”;²² yet Epicurus’s philosophical principles seem to be “pernicious to the Peace of civil Society”.²³ The friend replies echoing Hume’s *Treatise*: if Epicurus had been accused before the Athenian people, he could “easily have defended his Cause, and prov’d his Principles of Philosophy to be as salutary as those of his Adversaries”.²⁴ Here the narrator asks the friend to make a “Speech for Epicurus”, which might satisfy the “more philosophical” part of the audience.²⁵ The friend is ready to “suppose [himself] Epicurus for a Moment”, and “make [the narrator] stand for the Athenian People”: he will give his “Harangue” or “Apology for Epicurus”.²⁶ In short, the essay is a dialogue with a sceptical friend, and the largest part of the dialogue is a monologue by the friend, who puts his reasoning “into the mouth of Epicurus”.²⁷ Formally, something similar was to happen in the *Dialogues*, where the sceptical Philo “revive[s] the old Epicurean hypothesis”.²⁸

In 1750 Hume officially moves from the practical title (“Of the Practical Consequences of natural Religion”) to the providence title (“Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State”). It has been remarked that “both titles are smokescreen, along with the pretence of a dialogue, deflecting attention from the primary content”;²⁹ and that Hume “had difficulty in finding a title for this section which would not inconveniently emphasize its real character”.³⁰ While several scholars prefers the practical title,³¹ others judge both of them

22 Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences”, cit., 1748, 11.2, p. 206.

23 Ivi, 11.4, pp. 207-208.

24 Ivi, 11.5, p. 208. Cf. [D. Hume] *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London, J. Noon, 1739, vol. I, 1.4.5.17, p. 418; vol. II, 2.3.2.8, p. 243; D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. by P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 19782 (hereafter SBN followed by page number), pp. 240, 412.

25 Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences”, cit., 1748, 11.6, p. 206.

26 Ivi, 11.7, pp. 208-209; 11.24, p. 220; 11-27, p. 227. First the friend makes his harangue (§§ 9-23), then the narrator replies (§ 24), and the friend replies to his reply (§§ 25-27), finally the narrator has the last word (§§ 28-30).

27 Ivi, 11.23, p. 221.

28 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 8.1, p. 182.

29 Stewart, *Two Species of Philosophy*, cit., p. 81; cf. Flew, *Hume’s Philosophy of Belief*, cit., p. 227; T. Beauchamp, Annotations to D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by T. Beauchamp, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 254.

30 N.K. Smith, Introduction to Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., pp. 1-75: p. 51 n.1.

31 T. Penelhum, *David Hume: An Introduction to His Philosophical System*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 1992, p. 178. Penelhum argues that “the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion” is a “better” title, since Hume is arguing that there are none, but the same could be said of “a particular Providence and of a future State”.

inadequate.³² Supporters of the practical title believe that it is more descriptive and corresponding to its content,³³ if not more revealing,³⁴ direct and appropriate³⁵ than the providence title, which is considered instead either non-descriptive and misleading³⁶ or suggestive rather than frank.³⁷ Other scholars judge both titles misleading,³⁸ and some even suggest better possible titles.³⁹ Most notably, scholars disagree on whether the providence title is intentionally more provocative (to the orthodox)⁴⁰ than the practical title or vice versa.⁴¹

Personally, I do not find the providence title non-committal or bland.⁴² I think it marks a shift is from a criticism of natural religion and its practical consequences to a more Epicurean criticism of a particular providence.⁴³ This

32 Beauchamp, *Annotations*, cit., p. 254.

33 L. Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols., London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1876, vol. I, p. 330 n.1; E.C. Mossner, *The Religion of David Hume*, "Journal of History of Ideas", 39, 4, 1978, pp. 653-663: p. 656; J. Harris, *Hume. An Intellectual Biography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 230.

34 C. Battersby, *The "Dialogues" as Original Imitation: Cicero and the Nature of Hume's Skepticism*, in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. by D.F. Norton, N. Capaldi, W.L. Robison, San Diego, Austin Hill Press, 1979, pp. 239-252: p. 447 n.19; T. Penelhum, *Hume's Criticism of Natural Theology*, in *In Defence of Natural Theology. A Post-Humean Assessment*, ed. by J.F. Sennett and D. Groothuis, Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 2005, pp. 21-41: p. 26 n.6.

35 Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, cit., p. 227.

36 Smith, Introduction to Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., p. 51 and n.

37 Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, cit., p. 227.

38 P. Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's "Treatise". Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 144, 351 n.78.

39 "Had Hume felt free to do so he might have employed his own apt but piquantly provocative phrase the *religious hypothesis*" (Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, cit., pp. 222-227); "If one were to invent a third title it might be 'From World to God and Back Again'" (J.C.A. Gaskin, *Religion: The Useless Hypothesis*, in *Reading Hume on Human Understanding. Essays on the first "Enquiry"*, ed. by P. Millican, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002, pp. 349-369: p. 356).

40 Mossner, *The Religion of David Hume*, cit., p. 656.

41 J.C.A. Gaskin, *Religion*, cit., p. 356; G. Streminger, Religion a Threat to Morality: An Attempt to Throw Some New Light on Hume's Philosophy of Religion, "Hume Studies", 15, 2, November 1989, pp. 277-293: p. 277; T. Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity. Hume's Moral Atheism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 216 n.6.

42 Cf. Streminger, *Religion a Threat*, cit., p. 277.

43 The practical title indirectly refers to the friend's view (Hume, "Of the Practical Consequences", cit., 1748, 11.19, pp. 216-217; 11.27, p. 227), which is attacked by the narrator (ivi, 11.28, p. 227); the providence title directly refers to Epicurus's view according to the narrator (ivi, 11.4, pp. 207-208; 11.10, p. 210; 11.11, p. 210; 11.20, p. 140), which again is attacked by the narrator (ivi, 11.28, p. 227).

reading begs an obvious question: why did Hume retitl the essay?⁴⁴ Few scholars have advanced a direct answer.⁴⁵ Both titles per se show a neutral attitude and pursue a negative end;⁴⁶ they both find their source in the same early argument of the narrator;⁴⁷ and "Of a particular Providence and of a future State" better combines with the title of the preceding essay "Of Miracles": the two essays considered together discuss the standard proofs of the Christian religion.

The two titles can also be distinguished with respect to the perspective they entail. The practical title, which recalls the *Sceptic's* points of view ("an abstracted, invisible Object, like that which *natural* Religion alone presents to us, cannot long actuate the Mind, or be of any Moment in Life"),⁴⁸ indirectly refers to the friend's view, which is the view opposed by the narrator:⁴⁹ since natural religion or religious hypothesis has no practical consequences, its denial has none either.⁵⁰ The providence title directly refers to Epicurus's view (the denial of both providence and future state), to which is ascribed by the narrator also the denial of a divine existence.⁵¹ In both cases Hume advances his own stance: there are no practical consequences of natural religion and there is no particular providence and future state. Probably the more descriptive (and provocative) title would have been: "Of the [lack of] Practical Consequences of [the denial of] natural Religion". From this point of view the providence title is more cautious.

44 The expression "practical consequences" also occurs in two 1748 essays (D. Hume, *Of the original Contract*, in *Essays, Moral and Political*, London, A. Millar, 17483, pp. 289-307: p. 290; D. Hume, *Of Passive Obedience*, ivi, pp. 308-312: p. 308); the "*particular* Providence" is discussed in the *Natural History of Religion*, composed in the early 50s (D. Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, in *Four Dissertations*, London, A. Millar, 1757, VI, p. 43).

45 Harris, *Hume*, cit., pp. 230, 522 n. 19.

46 M.A. Stewart, *Religion and rational theology*, in *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by A. Broadie, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 31-59: p. 57 n. 34.

47 Hume, "Of the Practical Consequences", cit., 1748, 11.4, pp. 207-208.

48 D. Hume, *The Sceptic*, in *Essays, Moral and Political. Volume II*, Edinburgh, R. Fleming and A. Alison for A. Kincaid, 1742, pp. 139-174: p. 154.

49 Hume, "Of the Practical Consequences", cit., 1748, 11.28, p. 227.

50 Ivi, 11.27, p. 226; cf. ivi, 11.19, pp. 216-217; 11.27, p. 227.

51 According to his enemies and accusers (the narrator is one of them) Epicurus's denial of a divine existence (atheism) entails a denial of a providence and future state, which are the guarantee of morality, which is a guarantee to society (Hume, "Of the Practical Consequences", 1748, cit., 11.4, pp. 207-208; 11.20, p. 217). According to his defenders (the narrator's friend is one of them), Epicurus's denial of a providence and future state does not entail a denial of a divine existence (atheism) (ivi, 11.10-11, p. 210).

In 1728 Francis Hutcheson published his *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions*, which was to be revised and augmented in 1742.⁵² Here Hutcheson proclaims: “never could the boldest Epicurean bring the lightest Appearance of Argument against the *Possibility* of such a [future] State, nor was there ever any thing tolerable advanced against its *Probability*”.⁵³ Hume, as the anonymous author of the *Treatise*, had already argued against this state. In the *Philosophical Essays* the friend shows that, in spite of Hutcheson’s opinion, an Epicurean can easily argue against the possibility of a future state.

3. GOOD REASONERS BAD CITIZENS?

The narrator criticizes his friend for leaving politics “entirely” out of the question: a wise magistrate can “justly be jealous” of certain philosophical tenets, such as those of Epicurus, which “denying a divine Existence, and consequently a Providence and a future State, seem to loosen, in a great Measure, the Ties of Morality, and may be suppos’d, for that Reason, pernicious to the Peace of civil Society”.⁵⁴ Like Shaftesbury (“the Principle of *Fear of future Punishment*, and *Hope of future Reward* [...] is yet, in many Circumstances, a great Advantage, Security and Support to *Virtue*”),⁵⁵ even Hutcheson, who does not like ethical and religious legalism, maintains that “this Belief of a Deity, a Providence, and a future State, are the only sure supports to a good Mind”.⁵⁶ In particular, Hutcheson maintains “the Necessity of believing a future State”:

we have no Records of any Nation which did not entertain this Opinion. Men of Reflection in all Ages, have found at least probable Arguments for it; and the Vulgar have been prone to believe it, without any other *Argument* than their natural Notions of *Justice* in the *Administration of the World*. [...] This Opinion was interwoven with all Religions; and [...] removed Objections against *Providence*. The good Influence of this Opinion [...] probably did more good

52 F. Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations On the Moral Sense*, London, J. Darby and T. Browne for J. Smith and W. Bruce, 1728; London, A. Ward, J. and P. Knapton *et al.*, 17423.

53 Hutcheson, *Essay*, cit., 1728, 6, p. 188.

54 Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences”, cit., 1748, 11.4, pp. 207-208.

55 A. Ashley Cooper Earl of Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry concerning Virtue, or Merit, in Characteristicks*, 3 vols., 17233, vol. II, I, III, 3, p. 60; cf. *ivi*, pp. 57, 61, 71.

56 Hutcheson, *Essay*, cit., 1728, 6, p. 187. Cf. L. Turco, *Hutcheson nei “Dialoghi sulla religione naturale” di Hume*, in *I filosofi e la società senza religione*, ed. by M. Geuna and G. Gori, Bologna, il Mulino, 2011, pp. 449-488: p. 486; J.A. Harris, *Religion in Hutcheson’s Moral Philosophy*, “Journal of the History of Philosophy”, 46, 2, April 2008, pp. 205-222: p. 214.

than what might overballance many Evils flowing from even very *corrupt Religions*.⁵⁷

In the *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio*, which is perused by Hume in 1743,⁵⁸ Hutcheson explains why men “have always been persuaded, that religion was of the highest consequence to engage men to all social duties, and to preserve society in peace and safety [ad homines in officio continendos, atque ad eorum conjunctionem & consociationem tuendam & conservandam, plurimum posse religionem]”.⁵⁹

The friend – a man of thought who has found a probable argument against the future state – first observes that persecution proceed “entirely” from “Passion and Prejudice”, rather than from “calm Reason” or “any Experience of the pernicious Consequences of Philosophy”; then he begins his Epicurean speech, proving that his philosophical principles are “as salutary as those of his Adversaries, who endeavour’d [...] to subject him to the public Hatred”.⁶⁰ Epicurus sets up the subject of the dialogue: how far philosophical speculative questions concern the public interest? And he advances his answer: “they are entirely indifferent to the Peace of Society and Security of Government”.⁶¹ The “religious Philosophers” attempt to establish religion upon the principles of reason, and this is a question “entirely speculative”; likewise, when in his philosophical disquisitions he denies a providence and a future state, he only advances principles that, solid or weak, do not “undermine [...] the

57 Hutcheson, *Essay*, cit., 1728, 6, p. 188. “The Sanctions of *Rewards* and *Punishments*, as proposed in the Gospel, are not rendered useless or unnecessary, by supposing the virtuous Affections to be *disinterested*; since such *Motives of Interest*, proposed and attended to, must incline every Person to *desire* to have virtuous Affections [...] and must *over-balance* every other *Motive of Interest*, opposite to these Affections” (ivi, I, p. 26). Shaftesbury had admonished: “by means of *corrupt Religion*, or Superstition, many things the most horridly unnatural and inhuman, come to be receiv’d as excellent, good, and laudable *in themselves*” (Shaftesbury, *Inquiry*, cit., I, III, 2, pp. 46-47).

58 D. Hume to F. Hutcheson, 10 January 1743, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 19, pp. 45-48.

59 F. Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria, Ethices & Jurisprudentiae Naturalis Elementa continens. Lib. III*, Glasgow, R. Foulis, 1742, I, IV, III, p. 67. “From a general sense of religion prevailing in a society all its members are powerfully excited to a faithful discharge of every duty of life, and restrained [coërcetur] from all injury or wickedness” (*ibid.*). The short paragraph, Luigi Turco remarks, “is a substitute for Pufendorf’s long discussion on the absolute necessity of religion for the security of the state” (F. Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, ed. by L. Turco, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2007, p. 80 n. 8).

60 Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences”, cit., 1748, 11.5, p. 208; cf. ivi, 11.9, p. 209.

61 Ivi, 11.9, p. 209. He distinguishes between “the Questions of public Good and the Interest of Commonwealth” (or “useful Occupations”) and “the Disquisitions of speculative Philosophy” (“these magnificent, but, perhaps, fruitless Enquiries”) (*ibid.*).

Foundations of Society and Government”:⁶² that, “in distant Periods of Place and Time, there has been, or will be a more magnificent Display of these [godly] Attributes, and a Scheme or Order of Administration more suitable to such imaginary Virtues”, Epicurus declares, is a “mere Hypothesis”, the “religious Hypothesis”.⁶³

Having delivered his view Epicurus asks: “where, then, is the Odiousness of that Doctrine, which I [...] examine in my Gardens? Or what do you find in this whole Question, wherein the Security of good Morals, or the Peace and Order of Society is in the least concern’d?”.⁶⁴ He acknowledges to deny what the narrator says he denies: “I deny a Providence, you say, and supreme Governor of the World, who guides the Course of Events, and punishes the Vicious with Infamy, and Disappointment, and rewards the Virtuous with Honour and Success, in all their Undertakings”.⁶⁵ Yet, he certainly does not deny that “in the present Order of Things, virtue is attended with more Peace of Mind than Vice; and meets with a more favourable Reception from the World”.⁶⁶ And he finds a “Fallacy” and a “gross Sophism” in the assertion that, “while a divine Providence is allow’d, and a supreme distributive Justice in the Universe, I ought to expect some more particular Favour of the Good, and punishment of the Bad, beyond the ordinary Course of Events”.⁶⁷ Therefore he attacks those “vain” reasoners who render the “present” life “merely a Passage to something farther”.⁶⁸ The religious philosophers embrace a principle that is “both uncertain and useless”.⁶⁹

Epicurus’s “Harangue” is over.⁷⁰ The narrator makes his objections to the friend; and the friend repeats that philosophical disputes have no influence on society, and that the only measures of conduct originate from reflections on common life:

62 Ivi, 11.10, p. 210. Epicurus remembers us that “[we cannot], by any Rules of just Reasoning, return back from the Cause, and infer other Effects from it, beyond those by which alone it is known to us” (ivi, 11.13, p. 212; cf. ivi, 11.14, p. 213; 11.18, p. 216; 11.23, p. 220).

63 Ivi, 11.14, p. 213; cf. ivi, 11.18, p. 216; 1.21, p. 219; 11.26, p. 224.

64 Ivi, 11.19, pp. 216-217.

65 Ivi, 11.20, p. 217.

66 Ivi, 11.20, p. 217.

67 Ivi, 1.20, p. 218.

68 Ivi, 1.21, p. 218. If there are “Marks of a distributive Justice” in the world, then, “since Justice here exerts itself, it is satisfy’d”; if there are not, then there is “no Reason to ascribe Justice to the Gods”; if there are and there are not marks, and the justice of the gods exerts itself only “in Part” (not in its “full Extent”), then there is “no Reason to give it any particular Extent, but only so far as you see it, *at present*, exerts itself” (ivi, 11.22, p. 219).

69 Ivi, 11.23, p. 220.

70 Ivi, 11.24, p. 220.

All the Philosophy, therefore, in the World, and all the Religion, which is nothing but a Species of Philosophy, will never be able to carry us beyond the usual Course of Experience, or give us different Measures of Conduct and Behaviour, from those which are furnish'd by Reflections on common Life. No new fact can ever be infer'd from the religious Hypothesis: no Event foreseen or foretold; no Reward or Punishment expected or dreaded, beyond what is already known by Practice and Observation. So that my Apology for Epicurus will still appear solid and satisfactory; nor have the political Interests of Society any Connexion with the philosophical Disputes concerning Metaphysics and Religion.⁷¹

In this way, the friend reaffirms his view: philosophical disputes on religion do not have "any Connexion" with the "political Interests of Society". This also recalls the essay "Of Liberty and Necessity", which in turn recalls the *Treatise*, where Hume attacks the common attempt to refute a philosophical opinion "by a Pretext of its dangerous Consequences to Religion and Morality": "'tis not certain an Opinion is false, because 'tis of dangerous Consequence".⁷² The narrator observes that the friend is overlooking a circumstance. Even granted that he can accept the friend's premises, he must still deny his conclusion: the friend concludes that "religious Doctrines and Reasonings *can* have no Influence on Life, because they *ought* to have no Influence".⁷³ But we should not infer a "can" from an "ought". The remark is deemed extremely important, so much that (to some reader) it seems to be advanced by "Hume in his own person".⁷⁴ The narrator's remark recalls the distinction drawn in the first book of the *Treatise* between "what ought to be done" and "what is commonly done",⁷⁵ and the Hutchesonian distinction of the third book between "*is*, and *is not*" and "*ought*, or *ought not*".⁷⁶ In general

71 Ivi, 11.27, p. 226-227.

72 Hume, "Of Liberty and Necessity", in *Philosophical Essays*, cit., 1748, 8.26, pp. 152-153. Cf. [Hume] *Treatise*, cit., vol. II, 2.3.2.3, p. 237 (SBN 409).

73 Hume, "Of the Practical Consequences", cit., 1748, 11.28, p. 227. To conclude that the religious doctrines "can" have no influence on life, because they "ought" to have no influence, – the narrator argues – is a mistaken conclusion; in reality the religious doctrines can have an influence, which is salutary. To conclude that the religious doctrines "can" have a salutary influence on life, because they "ought" to have it, – the friend would reply – is a mistaken conclusion; in reality the religious doctrines can not have an influence, and, where they have it, it is a pernicious influence.

74 Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, cit., p. 228; cf. ivi, p. 229.

75 [Hume] *Treatise*, cit., 1739, vol. I, 1.4.7.7, pp. 465-466 (SBN 268).

76 [D. Hume] *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London, T. Longman, 1740, vol. III, 3.1.1.27, p. 25 (SBN 469). Hutcheson remarks that "ought" is a "confused", "unlucky Word in morals" (F. Hutcheson, *Illustrations upon the Morals Sense*, in *Essay*, cit., 1728, I, p. 244; II, p. 246); cf. L. Turco, *Lo scetticismo morale di David Hume*, Bologna, CLUEB, 1984, p. 167 e n. 23.

it recalls Nicolò Machiavelli (“what is done” and “what ought to be done”),⁷⁷ Spinoza (“ut sunt” and “ut esse vellent”),⁷⁸ Pierre Bayle (“ce que l’on devoit faire” and “ce que l’on fait”),⁷⁹ and Bernard Mandeville (“what they should be” and “what they really are”).⁸⁰

The fallacy of inference detected by the narrator seems to be adapted from one of Bayle’s arguments: “c’est mal raisonner, que de conclure de ce qu’un homme est Idolâtre, qu’il vit moralement mieux qu’un Athée” (he is religious therefore he is a good man and a better man than an atheist): “si l’on se contentoit de conclure il devoit être plus homme de bien qu’un Athée” (he is religious therefore he ought to be a good man and a better man than an atheist), Bayle allows, “le raisonnement seroit bon”; but, he asks, “combien y a-t-il de difference entre ce que l’on devoit faire, & ce que l’on fait?”⁸¹

There is more than an echo of Bayle behind the view attacked by the narrator. Since Bayle had already explained why “la connoissance d’un Dieu, & d’une Providence est une trop foible barriere pour retenir les passions de l’homme”:

[les Idolâtres et les Athées] ne sauroient former des sociétés, si un frein plus fort que celui de la Religion, savoir les loix humaines, ne réprimoit leur perversité. Et cela fait voir le peu de fondement qu’il y a à dire que la connoissance vague & confuse d’une Providence est fort utile pour affoiblir la corruption de l’homme.⁸²

Christian religion, Bayle argues, “n’est pas un frein capable de retenir nos passions [...] n’est pas capable de surmonter le penchant de la nature”.⁸³

Again, the narrator remarks, the friend is overlooking the fact that men do not reason like him. Men “draw many Consequences from the Belief of a divine Existence, and suppose, that the Deity will inflict Punishments on Vice, and bestow Rewards on Virtue, beyond what appears in the ordinary Course of Nature”; and this supposition does have an “Influence of their Life and

77 N. Machiavelli, *Prince*, in *The Works of the famous Nicholas Machiavel*, London, T.W. for A. Churchill *et al.*, 17203, XV, p. 219.

78 B. Spinoza, in, *Tractatus politicus*, in *Opera Posthuma* [Amsterdam, 1766], I, p. 267.

79 P. Bayle, *Pensées Diverses*, in *Œuvres Diverses de Mr. Pierre Bayle*, La Haye, Compagnie des Libraires, 1737, vol. III, § 145, p. 93b.

80 B. Mandeville, Introduction to *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits. With an Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools. And A Search into the Nature of Society*, London, J. Tonson, 17243, p. i.

81 Bayle, *Pensées diverses*, cit., § 145, p. 93b.

82 Ivi, § 131, p. 84a.

83 Ivi, § 165, p. 105b.

Conduct".⁸⁴ The friend has shown how wrong a reasoning this is, but the narrator disagrees: "Whether this Reasoning of theirs be just or not, is no Matter. Its Influence on their Life and Conduct must still be the same".⁸⁵ Even though both religious opinions, and philosophical opinions showing that religious opinions are but prejudices, "ought" to have no influence, they still have some. But there is something more, which regards the good reasoner who unmask these religious opinions. If the religious opinions have a salutary or useful influence on the people, the good reasoner reveals himself a bad citizen, because he destroys one of the restraints on passions and infringements of the laws:

Those, who attempt to disabuse them of such Prejudices, may, for aught I know, be good Reasoners, but I cannot allow them to be good Citizens and Politicians; since they free Men from one Restraint upon their Passions, and make the Infringement of the Laws of Equity and Society, in one Respect, more easy and secure.⁸⁶

Religion may secure morals, but irreligion secures immorality. The narrator seems to have in mind a passage of the *Histories*, which was to be mentioned in the *Dialogues*, where Polybius observes that "superstition [...] maintains the cohesion of the Roman State":⁸⁷

84 Hume, "Of the Practical Consequences", cit., 1748, 11.28, p. 227. The passage recalls Warburton's discussion of the "modern Apologists for Atheism" who deny the "civil" use of religion. Unlike Cardan and Bayle, Pomponazzi tries to answer the objection that the doctrine of the mortality of the soul has "very pernicious consequences" (W. Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated*, 9 vols., London, A. Millar and J. And R. Tonson, 17454, vol. I, 1.3, p. 75): men, rather than the learned and philosophers, Pomponazzi says, are taught to be "influenced" by hopes of rewards and fears of punishments, in order to "bridle" their "unruly" appetites (ivi, 1.3, p. 76). The doctrine of the mortality of the soul has "no ill influence" on the practice of philosophers, but is "pernicious" to the vulgar (ivi, 1.3, p. 77). The necessary doctrine of its immortality was established by the legislator, "Little solicitous for *truth*, in all this, but intent only on *utility*, that he can draw mankind to virtue" (ivi, 1.3, p. 78). To inculcate the doctrine of a future state, Warburton concludes, "is necessary to the well being of civil society" (ivi, 1.2, p. 59; cf. 12, pp. 71-72).

85 Hume, "Of the Practical Consequences", cit., 1748, 11.28, p. 227.

86 *Ibid.* D'Holbach answers to Hume's narrator and all those who "prétendent que le christianisme est utile à la politique & à la morale, & que, sans la religion, l'homme ne peut avoir de vertus, ni être un bon citoyen": "la religion ne met aucun frein aux passions des hommes, que la raison, que l'éducation, que la saine morale ne puissent y mettre bien plus efficacement" ([P.-H. Thiry d'Holbach] *Le Christianisme dévoilé, ou Examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne*, Londres, 1756, "Conclusion", pp. 280, 288).

87 Polybius, *The Histories*, 3 vols., London, Harvard University Press, LOEB, 1998, vol. III, 6.56, pp. 394-395.

[The Romans] have adopted this course for the sake of the common people. It is a course which perhaps would not have been necessary had it been possible to form a state composed of wise men, but as every multitude is fickle, full of lawless desires, unreasoned passion, and violent anger, the multitude must be held in by invisible terrors and suchlike pageantry. For this reason I think, not that the ancients acted rashly and haphazard in introducing among the people notions concerning the gods and beliefs in the terrors of hell, but that the moderns are most rash and foolish in banishing such beliefs.⁸⁸

Again Leland promptly detects a contradiction in Hume's conduct: Hume makes "full acknowledgements of the great usefulness of religion, especially that part of it which relateth to future rewards and punishments, to public communities", and owns that the doctrine and belief of future retributions are necessary for "preserving public peace and order", but, "most inconsistently", he endeavours "to subvert" that doctrine.⁸⁹ So Leland draws his conclusions about Hume's lack of wisdom in wavering between the Epicurean friend and the narrator. To be coherent with the just observations of the narrator, Hume should not have published the essay:

He did not act a wise or good part, the part of a friend to the public or to mankind, in publishing this Essay, the manifest design of which is to persuade men, that there is no just foundation in reason for expecting a future state of rewards and punishments at all. [...] For if the spreading of those principles and reasonings is contrary to the rules of good policy; and the character of good citizens, if they have a tendency to free them from a strong restraint [...]; then such principles and reasonings, according to his way of representing the matter, ought in good policy to be restrain'd, as having a bad influence on the community.⁹⁰

In the moral *Enquiry* Hume anticipates Leland's objection and accounts for the problem of a theory that is true and yet hurtful to society:

a Man has but a bad Grace, who delivers a Theory, however true, which, he must confess, leads to a Practice, dangerous and pernicious. Why rake into those Corners of Nature, which spread a Nuisance all around? Why dig up the Pestilence from the Pit, in which it is buried? The Ingenuity of your Researches may be admir'd; but your Systems will be detested: And Mankind will agree, if they cannot refute them, to sink them, at least, in eternal Silence and Oblivion:

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* The passage is quoted by Bayle (P. Bayle, *Continuation des Pensées Diverses*, in *Œuvres*, cit., vol. III, § 71, pp. 292ab); on the political use of religion by the Romans, cf. Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, in *Works*, cit., I, XI, pp. 282-283; *The Art of War*, ivi, IV, X, p. 486; VI, V, p. 502.

⁸⁹ Leland, *A View*, cit., "Conclusion", p. 655.

⁹⁰ Leland, *A View*, cit., letr. II, p. 44.

Truths, which are *pernicious* to Society, if any such there be, will yield to Errors, which are salutary and *advantageous*.⁹¹

According to the narrator of the *Philosophical Essays*, irreligious or Epicurean philosophies have a connection with the political interests of society: namely, they have a bad influence on life and conduct. Moving from the beginning to the end of the essay, the narrator moves from the initial possibility to the final reality of the socially pernicious consequences of these philosophies. They “*seem* to loosen, in a great *Measure*, the Ties of Morality, and *may be suppos'd*, for that Reason, pernicious to the Peace of civil Society”,⁹² he suggests at the beginning; “they *free* Men from one Restraint upon their Passions, and *make* the Infringement of the Laws of Equity and Society, in one Respect, more easy and secure”, he remarks at the end.⁹³

Yet, this bad influence is not a good reason for persecution. On this occasion the narrator “may, perhaps, agree” with his friend’s conclusion “in favour of Liberty”, even though he rejects his premises.⁹⁴ The state “*ought* to tolerate” every philosophical principles,⁹⁵ for two reasons: there is no “Instance of any Government’s suffering in its political Interests by such Indulgence”, because there is “no Enthusiasm” among philosophers (an echo of Voltaire), and their principles are not “very alluring” to the people; and “no Restraint can be put” on them “but what must be of dangerous Consequence to the Sciences, and even to the State, by paving the Way for Persecution and Oppression in Points, wherein the Generality of Mankind are more deeply interested and concern’d”.⁹⁶ On this occasion Leland shows his disagreement

91 D. Hume, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, London, A. Millar, 1751, 9.2, pp. 187-188. Hume does not deny that “’tis not certain an Opinion is false, because ’tis of dangerous Consequence” (Hume, “Of Liberty and Necessity”, cit., 1748, 8.26, p. 152), and repeats that “the philosophical Truth of any Proposition by no Means depends on its Tendency to promote the Interest of Society” (Hume, *Enquiry*, cit., 9.2, p. 187); yet, he adds, no “philosophical Truths can be more advantageous to Society” than those he delivers (ivi, 9.3, p. 188).

92 Hume, “Of the Practical Consequences”, cit., 1748, 11.4, pp. 207-208 (emphasis added).

93 Ivi, 11.28, p. 227 (emphasis added).

94 Ivi, 11.29, p. 228.

95 Ibid.

96 *Ibid.* In the first draft of his *Lettre sur Mr. Locke*, Voltaire argues: “Jamais les Philosophes ne feront tort à la Religion dominante d’un Pays. Pourquoi? C’est qu’ils sont sans enthousiasme, & qu’ils n’écrivent point pour le Peuple” (*Lettres de M. de V*** avec plusieurs pièces de différens auteurs*, La Haye, P. Poppy, 1739, p. 20). There are some exceptions: at the end of *A Dialogue* the narrator refers to the “philosophical enthusiasm” of the cynics (D. Hume, *A Dialogue*, in *Enquiry*, cit., 1751, pp. 223-253: p. 253; cf. [Hume] *Treatise*, cit., vol. I, 1.4.7.13, pp. 471-472; SBN 272); in the *Natural History* Hume maintains that the stoics “join a

with the narrator: “the principal design of this Essay, which seems to be to shew not only the reasonableness, but harmlessness of that [Epicurean] philosophy, is lost”; irreligious principles, having a bad influence on the society, “ought in good policy to be restrain’d”.⁹⁷

According to the narrator, even if philosophical and irreligious opinions can have dangerous consequences on morality and society, one should not forbid them, because they are limited to a few people, and because forbidding them and promoting persecution would produce a much more “dangerous consequence to the sciences, and even to the state”. However, religion still maintains his office. Even religious prejudices or wrong reasonings, just like the doctrine of a future state, are a “Restraint” on passions and violations of the laws of equity and society.

4. “THE LITTLE CONCERN WHICH WE DISCOVER FOR OBJECTS SO REMOTE” (THE PROPER OFFICE – PART I)

In 1750, when Hume is working at the *Dialogues*, Hugh Blair publishes a sermon on the importance of religious knowledge for the happiness of men, where he shows the improvement and consolation man receives from this knowledge as an individual and a member of society. Like Hume’s narrator in the *Philosophical Essays*, Blair maintains that religious knowledge is “subsidiary” to the improvement and preservation of society: “banish religious Principle, and you loosen all the Bonds of Society [...] you destroy the Security arising from *Laws* themselves”.⁹⁸ Religious principles have a “natural Tendency”: they provide “*additional* Restraints from Vice, and *additional* Motives to every Virtue”.⁹⁹ The sense of divine legislation supplies “Checks upon Men”, and the belief of divine rewards and punishment “come[s] in Aid of what human Rewards and Punishment so imperfectly provide for”.¹⁰⁰

Against the prevailing opinion that “moral Virtue may subsist, with equal Advantage, independent of Religion”, and “*Articles of religious Beliefs* are [...] remote from Life; Points of mere Speculation and Debate; of very

philosophical enthusiasm to a religious superstition” (Hume, *Natural History*, cit., 1757, XII, p. 89).

⁹⁷ Leland, *A View*, cit., ltr. II, p. 44.

⁹⁸ H. Blair, *The Importance of Religious Knowledge to the Happiness of Mankind*, Edinburgh, R. Fleming for A. Kincaid, 1750, pp. 26-27.

⁹⁹ Ivi, p. 13; cf. ivi, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Ivi, p. 27.

inconsiderable Influence on the Actions of Men",¹⁰¹ Blair advocates the "actual Significancy and Influence on Life" of religious principles.¹⁰² There is "some" connection between "the *Belief* of religious Principles, and correspondent *Practice*"; and their native good "*Tendency* will, at least in *some* Cases, become effectual".¹⁰³ Blair accounts for the enforcing good influence of religion:

Religious Knowledge has a *direct* Tendency to improve the social Intercourses of Men, and to assist them in cooperating for common Good. [...] it *forms* them for Society. It *civilizes* Mankind. It tames the Fierceness of their Passions, and wears off the Barbarity of their Manners.¹⁰⁴

Blair draws his inference: "if even those *imperfect* Forms of Religion, mixed with so much Error, were important to Society; *how much more*, that reasonable and true Worship of God which the Gospel teaches?"¹⁰⁵

In 1751 Hume declares to Gilbert Elliot that he shall "make Cleanthes the Hero of the Dialogue",¹⁰⁶ and (more ambiguously) that "the Confusion in which I represent the Sceptic seems natural".¹⁰⁷ By the same token, in 1776 he declares to William Strahan that the sceptic Philo "is indeed refuted, and at last gives up the Argument".¹⁰⁸ In the *Dialogues*, the young Pamphilus – who is a "mere auditor" but also Cleanthes's "pupil" (Pamphilus's father is Cleanthes's "intimate friend", and Pamphilus may be regarded as Cleanthes's "adopted son")¹⁰⁹ – concludes (with Cicero) that Cleanthes's principles

101 Ivi, p. 5; cf. p. 17.

102 Ivi, p. 13.

103 Ivi, p. 14.

104 Ivi, p. 23; cf. pp. 15-16, 24.

105 Ivi, p. 24. The enemies of religion contradict themselves: they "hold the good Influence of Christian principles to be *so inconsiderable*" and, at the same time, they "give us Instances of corrupt and wrong Principles having had a *great* Influence on the world", and complain of "the direful Effects which *Superstition* and *Enthusiasm* have produced" (ivi, p. 17). Blair remarks: "Is this then the Case, that *all* Principles, *except good ones*, are supposed to be of such mighty *Energy*? Strange! That false Religion should do *so much*, and true Religion *so little*" (*ibid.*). Corrupted religions "have *poisoned* the Tempers, and *transformed* the Manners of Men; and have *overcome* the strongest Restraints of Law, of Reason and Humanity" (*ibid.*).

106 D. Hume to G. Elliot of Minto, 10 March 1751, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 72, p. 153. Likewise, with regard to his moral *Dialogue*, Hume declares: "I have surely endeavoured to refute the Sceptic with all the force of which I am master; and my refutation must be allowed sincere, because drawn from the capital principles of my system" (D. Hume to [W. Balfour], 15 March 1753, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 81, p. 173).

107 D. Hume to G. Elliot of Minto, 10 March 1751, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 72, p. 155.

108 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 8 June 1776, in *Letters*, cit., vol. II, ltr. 525, p. 323.

109 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 1.1, p. 130 (cf. Ivi, 12.33, p. 228).

“approach still nearer to the truth” than those of Philo:¹¹⁰ the “accurate philosophical turn” had the better on the “careless scepticism”.¹¹¹ Can we take seriously Hume’s and Pamphilus’s declarations? In the prologue Pamphilus anticipates his teacher’s view, and recalls that of the narrator in the *Philosophical Essays*. The being of a God, he argues, is not only a very obvious but also a very important truth. It is, he says with a slightly Warburtonian accent,¹¹² “the surest foundation of morality, the firmest support of society”.¹¹³ Pamphilus has learned Cleanthes’s lesson in Part XII.

Philo had maintained that a very “wild and unsettled [...] system of theology is [not], in any respect, preferable to none at all”,¹¹⁴ and has just confessed that his sentiments are not always “unfeigned”, and that his “veneration” for “true” religion is proportioned to his “abhorrence” of “vulgar” superstitions (his “peculiar pleasure” is pushing their principles “sometimes into absurdity, sometimes into impiety”).¹¹⁵ Cleanthes answers him that “religion, however corrupted, is still better than no religion at all”.¹¹⁶ Cleanthes’s answer recalls the debate on Plutarch’s *Of Superstition* (“I, for my own part, had much rather People should say of me, that there neither is, nor ever was such a Man as Plutarch, than they should say, Plutarch is an unsteady, fickle, froward,

110 Ivi, “Pamphilus to Hermippus”, p. 128; cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, in *De Natura Deorum/Academica*, London, LOEB, Harvard University Press, 1979, 3.40.95, pp. 382-383.

111 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.34, p. 228.

112 W. Warburton, An Appendix In answer to a late Pamphlet entitled, “An Examination of Mr. W—s second Proposition, in Remarks On Several Occasional Reflections, London, J. and P. Knapton, 1744, p. 150 (“the absolute Necessity of Religion for the Support of Society”; cf. ivi, pp. 81, 166). Warburton is the author of *The Alliance between Church and State: or, the Necessity and Equity of an Established Religion and A Test-Law demonstrated, From the Essence and End of Civil Society, upon the fundamental Principles of the Law of Nature and Nations* [1736], London, F. Gyles, 1741, 1.3, p. 7; 1.3.2, p. 17.

113 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., “Pamphilus to Hermippus”, p. 128.

114 Ivi, 5.12, p. 169.

115 Ivi, 12.9, p. 219; cf. ivi, 12.1, p. 214.

116 Ivi, 12.10, p. 219. Samuel Grascome criticizes the notion that “even a false Religion, furnished with Maxims for the security of Government, is much better, with respect to the Community, than no Religion at all” (S. Grascome, *Moderation in Fashion*, London, W.B. for G. Sawbridge, 1705, “Preface”, p. 7). *False Religion worse than No Religion* is the subtitle of the *Enquiry concerning superstition*: “it has been said that the worst Religion which ever was among Men is better than no Religion at all; though I cannot but fear such Opinions may make the best convertible into the worst, and still keep a Salvo for the Priesthood, *it is better than none at all*” (*An Enquiry concerning Superstition, As it affects the Rights and Happiness of Civil Society. Written for the Advancement of True Religion and Virtue*, London, T. Warner, 1730, p. 9).

vindictive and touchy Fellow”);¹¹⁷ it also recalls the discussion between Horace (“it is better to have no Religion, than to worship the Devil”)¹¹⁸ and Cleomene (“all Religions are equally serviceable; and the worst is better than none”, “nothing can be worse in the Civil Society than an Atheist”)¹¹⁹ in Mandeville’s *Inquiry into the Origin of Honour*. Notwithstanding their differences, at first Horace and Cleomene officially hold that “Nothing has ever been thought to be more obligatory or a greater Tie upon Man than Religion”;¹²⁰ and that there “never had been a Doctrine or Philosophy from which it was so likely to expect, that it would produce Honesty, mutual Love and Faithfulness in the Discharge of all Duties and Engagements as the Christian Religion”.¹²¹ Following Cleomene and arguing like Bayle’s adversary in the *Continuation*¹²² Cleanthes further expounds:

The doctrine of a future state is so strong and necessary a security to morals, that we never ought to abandon or neglect it. For if finite and temporary rewards and punishments have so great an effect, as we daily find; how much greater must be expected from such as are infinite and eternal?¹²³

That “religion, however corrupted, is still better than no religion at all” is not Cleanthes’s invention. It is an old song sung by the adversaries of Plutarch as well as those of Bacon and Bayle. In modern times, it can be traced to Jean Barbeyrac. We should not ascribe to religion what depends on character, education, and custom, and not even accuse religion of impotence, ignoring “ce qu’elle a de propre à faire impression”.¹²⁴ With Gerardus Vossius (“cum qualemcumque numinis cultum atheotali oporteat preferre”),¹²⁵ Barbeyrac concludes: “la Religion, quoique corrompue, vaudroit mieux que l’Athéisme;

117 Plutarch, *Of Superstition or Indiscreet Devotion*, in *Plutarch’s Morals*, 5 vols., London, W. Taylor, 17185, vol. I, pp. 160-179: p. 173; cf. P. Bayle, *Réponse aux Questions d’un Provincial*, in *Œuvres Diverses*, cit., vol. III, 10, p. 921b; B. Mandeville, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour, and The Usefulness of Christianity in War*, London, J. Brotherton, 1732, II, p. 22.

118 Mandeville, *Enquiry*, III, p. 154.

119 Ivi, I, p. 24; III, p. 154. “I don’t deny the Usefulness which even the worst Religion that can be, may be of to Politicians and the the Civil Society” (ivi, I, p. 24).

120 Ivi, I, p. 16.

121 Ivi, I, p. 30; cf. ivi, I, p. 32.

122 Bayle, *Continuation*, cit., § 138, p. 386ab.

123 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.10, p. 219.

124 S. Pufendorf, *Le Droit de la nature et des gens [...] traduit du Latin par Jean Barbeyrac* [1706], 2 vols., Amsterdam, Veuve de P. de Coup, 1734, III, p. 231b n.

125 G.J. Voss, *De Historicis Latinis Libri III* [1627], Lugduni Batavorum: ex Officina Ioannis Maire, 1651, I, XIX, p. 94. The passage is discussed by John Toland, *Adeisidæmon, sive Titus Livius, a Superstitione Vindicatus*, The Hague, T. Johnson, 1709, § 23, pp. 67-68.

[...] elle troubleroit moins la Société, & [...] le bien qu'elle y produiroit seroit plus grand que le mal qu'elle pourroit y causer".¹²⁶ Does Hume know Barbeyrac's annotations to Pufendorf? I do not know. It is possible. He probably knows Anne and André Dacier's work, where it is said that "la Morale est la fille de la Religion", a sentence recalled by Barbeyrac.¹²⁷

In any case Montesquieu sings the same song. In the *Esprit des Loix* he attacks Bayle's tenet that having no religion is less dangerous than having a bad one ("l'idolatrie est pire que l'Athéisme").¹²⁸ This is but a "sophism", Montesquieu protests.¹²⁹ Religion is a restraint:

Dire que la Religion n'est pas un motif réprimant parce qu'elle ne réprime pas toujours, c'est dire que les Loix civiles ne sont pas un motif réprimant non plus. C'est mal raisonner contre la Religion [...]. Quand il seroit inutile que les Sujets eussent une Religion, il ne le seroit pas que les Princes en eussent, & qu'ils blanchissent d'écume le seul frein que ceux qui ne craignent pas les Loix humaines puissent avoir.¹³⁰

Therefore Montesquieu concludes: "il est toujours nécessaire qu'elle [la religion] s'accorde avec la Morale; parce que la Religion, même fausse, est le meilleur garant que les hommes puissent avoir de la probité des hommes".¹³¹ Like civil laws, religion must tend "principalement à rendre les hommes bons

126 Pufendorf, *Droit*, cit., III, p. 231b n. Hume could have said exactly the opposite: the evil that religion would produce would be greater than the good that it could produce in the society. Barbeyrac criticizes Bayle's *Continuation des Pensées Diverses* (Bayle, *Continuation*, cit., § 152, pp. 409a-410b). He makes a retortion of Bayle's assertion "si l'on regarde les Athées dans la disposition de leur coeur, on trouve que n'étant ni retenus par l'espérance d'aucune châtement divin, ni animez par l'esprérance d'aucune bénédiction céleste, ils doivent s'abandoner à tout ce qui flatte leurs passions" (ivi, § 129, p. 83a); and he makes appeal to Cicero: "the disappearance of piety towards the gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty and social union among men as well, and of justice itself, the queen of all the virtues" (Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, cit., 1.2.4, pp. 6-7). A society of atheists, Barbeyrac says, must be "plus corrompuë & sujette à de plus grands désordres, que celles qui conservent quelques principes de Religion, quoi qu'imparfaits & mal liez" (Pufendorf, *Droit*, cit., III, p. 231a): "pour retenir l'impétuosité de leurs Passions, & pour contrebalancer l'intérêt particulier, si souvent opposé au Bien Public, il faut un principe plus sensible, plus de la portée de tout le monde, plus propre à faire de profondes impressions, tel en un mot que la crainte de quelque Divinité" (ivi, p. 231b).

127 A. and A. Dacier, "Préface du Traducteur" to *Reflexions Morales de l'Empereur Marc Antonin avec des Remarques*, 2 vols., Paris, C. Barbin, 1691, vol. I, p. 3; Barbeyrac, "Preface" to Pufendorf, *Droit*, cit., pp. I-CXXI: p. XXIII.

128 Bayle, *Pensées*, cit., § 192, p. 123a.

129 [Montesquieu] *De l'Esprit des Loix*, 2 vols., Genève, Barillot, 1748, vol. II, XXIV, II, p. 174.

130 Ibid.

131 Ivi, XXIV, VIII, p. 181.

Citoyens",¹³² also because "il nous est bien plus évident qu'une Religion doit adoucir les mœurs des hommes, qu'il ne l'est qu'une Religion soit vraie".¹³³ And Voltaire will recall the song: "il est infiniment plus utile d'avoir une religion (même mauvaise) que de n'en avoir point du tout".¹³⁴

That Philo is speaking also against Montesquieu is confirmed by the fact that he knows that "Polybius ascribes the infamy of Greek faith to the prevalency of the Epicurean philosophy", and refers to the *Histories* "Lib. 6, cap. 54".¹³⁵ Commentators either hold that Hume's citation is inaccurate or silently correct it: it is chapter 56.¹³⁶ But Hume's citation is not mistaken, since in many seventeenth-century editions chapter 56 used to be chapter 54.¹³⁷ Yet, Polybius does not make the ascription Hume ascribes him;¹³⁸ it is Montesquieu that indirectly makes it by referring to Polybius's "l. 6":

132 Ivi, XXIV, XIV, p. 186. "Moins la Religion sera réprimante, plus les Loix Civiles doivent réprimer" (*ibid.* Cf. ivi, XXIV, XVI, p. 190).

133 Ivi, XXIV, IV, p. 177.

134 [Voltaire,] "Athée, Athéisme", in *Dictionnaire Philosophique Portatif*, Londres, 1764, pp. 33-43: p. 41. A society of atheists is impossible, Voltaire maintains, because men "n'auraient pas de *frein*" and they "ne pourraient jamais vivre ensemble": "il faut un Dieu vengeur qui punisse dans ce monde-ci ou dans l'autre les méchants échappés à la justice humaine" (ivi, p. 39; emphasis added): "chez les gentils, plusieurs sectes n'avaient aucun *frein* [...] il n'avaient aucun *joug* que celui de la morale & de l'honneur" (ivi, p. 40; emphasis added). Voltaire attacks Bayle and disagrees with Plutarch: they should have asked themselves "quel est le plus dangereux, du fanatisme, ou de l'Athéisme" (ivi, p. 41).

135 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.23, p. 224 and n.

136 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., ed. by N.K. Smith, 19472 [19351], p. 224; D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. by J.V. Price, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 256 n.b; D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural Religion and the Posthumous Essays*, ed. by R.H. Popkin, Indianapolis-Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 19833 [19801], p. 86 n. 28; D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural Religion*, ed. by M. Bell, London, Penguin, 1990, pp. 135, 150 n.9; D. Hume, *Writings on Religion*, ed. by A. Flew, La Salle, Illinois, Open Court, 1992, p. 287 n.90; D. Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion including "Dialogues concerning Natural Religion" and "The Natural History of Religion"*, ed. by J.C.A. Gaskin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 126 n. 2; D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. by D. Coleman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 99 n.c.

137 See, for example, *Polybii Lycortæ F. Megalopolitani Historiarum Libri qui supersunt interprete Isaaco Casaubono*, Amsterdam, J.J. van Waesberge & J. van Someren, 1670, VI, 54, pp. 692-693. An Amsterdam 1670 edition appears in the Hume library sold in 1840 (D.F. Norton and M.J. Norton, *The David Hume Library*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 1996, p. 122 n. 986).

138 Polybius merely say: "I think, not that the ancients acted rashly and at haphazard in introducing among the people notions concerning the gods and beliefs in the terrors of hell, but that the moderns are most rash and foolish in banishing such beliefs. The consequence is that among the Greeks [...] members of the government, if they are entrusted with no more than a talent, though they have ten copyists and as many seals and twice as many witnesses, cannot

Je crois que la Secte d'Épicure qui s'introduisit à Rome [...] contribua beaucoup à gâter le cœur des Romains. Les Grecs en avoient été infatués avant eux: aussi avoient ils été plutôt corrompus. Polybe nous dit que de son tems...¹³⁹

In the *Considérations* Montesquieu had already maintained that “la Religion est toujours le meilleur garant que l'on puisse avoir des mœurs des hommes”;¹⁴⁰ and it is to Montesquieu (rather than Polybius) that Philo replies: “Greek faith was infamous before the rise of the Epicurean philosophy”.¹⁴¹

Philo objects that the “vulgar superstition” (or “vulgar religion”) cannot be “so salutary” to society, since “all history abounds so much with accounts of its pernicious consequences on public affairs”; and he lists the “dismal consequences which always attend its prevalency over the minds of men”: “Factions, civil wars, persecutions, subversions of government, oppression, slavery”.¹⁴² Finally, he observes that there is no religion, without misery, but there is happiness, without religion:

If the religious spirit be ever mentioned in any historical narration, we are sure to meet afterwards with a detail of the miseries which attend it. And no period of time can be happier or more prosperous, than those in which it is never regarded or heard of.¹⁴³

History “abounds so much” with the accounts of the pernicious consequences to men and society of common religion. Recalling Locke’s “Business of true Religion” (“the regulating of Mens Lives according to the

keep their faith, whereas among the Romans those who as magistrates and legates are dealing with large sums of money maintain correct conduct just because they have pledged their faith by oath” (Polybius, *The Histories*, cit., vol. III, 6.56, pp. 394-397).

139 [Montesquieu] *Considerations sur les causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Decadence*, Paris, Huart *et al.*, 1734), 10, p. 101. After a paraphrasis of Polybius’s passage, Montesquieu concludes: “on a donc sagement établi la crainte des Enfers, & c’est sans raison qu’on la combat aujourd’hui” (ivi, p. 101 n.). An anonymous author observes: “Montesquieu does not scruples to assign the prevalence of the Epicurean system as one of the causes of the decline of the Roman empire” (*A Philosophical and Religious Dialogue in the Shades, Bewteen Mr. Hume and Dr. Dodd. With Notes by the Editor*, London, Printed by the Editor, 1778, p. 36 and n.). Sessions, for example, maintains that Philo is speaking “contra Polybius” (W.L. Sessions, *Reading Hume’s “Dialogues”. A Veneration for true Religion*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2002, p. 257 n. 34). Yet, even Philo’s remark on “Punic faith” could be a reference to Montesquieu’s *Esprit* (Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.23, p. 224; [Montesquieu] *De l’Esprit*, vol. II, XXI, VIII, p. 53).

140 [Montesquieu] *Considerations*, cit., 10, pp. 102-103.

141 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.23, p. 224.

142 Ivi 12.11, p. 220.

143 Ibid.

Rules of Virtue and Piety"),¹⁴⁴ and John Tillotson's "good influence [of Religion] upon the people" ("to make them obedient to government and peaceable one towards another"),¹⁴⁵ Cleanthes replies to Philo by illustrating the "proper office" of religion:

The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience.¹⁴⁶

Then, like Hutcheson and Blair, he accounts for its silent operation, which is subservient to morality, and explains the silence of history about its good influence:

as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives.¹⁴⁷

Finally, Cleanthes concludes that this is the necessary state of things: when its operation is not silent and subservient, religion corresponds to the historical account of it:

144 J. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, London, 1740, p. 5. Cleanthes does not speak of the proper office of "true" religion: he is answering Philo, who discusses common or "vulgar" religion, namely all religion, the "true" excepted (at least in theory).

145 J. Tillotson, Sermon III. Advantages of Religion to Societies, in *The Works Of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson*, 12 vols., London, R. Ware et al., 1742-1743, vol. I, pp. 94-109: p. 100. Cf. *ivi*, pp. 95, 99-101, 105, 108; Sermon IV. The Advantages of Religion to particular Persons, *ivi*, vol. I, pp. 109-128: pp. 109-112, 114, 124, 126.

146 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.12, p. 220. To "regulate the heart" is not a typical Humean expression. It sounds religious: "To Serve God, is to govern our selves by his Will and Commands; 'tis to submit our Passions, and our Desires, to his Sovereign Authority; 'tis to regulate our Heart, and to get the Mastery of our Inclinations, and of our Senses" (P. De Villiers, *Reflections on Men's Prejudices against Religion, and their Mistakes In the Practice of it. Translated from the French*, London, H. Clements, 1709, p. 27). To "humanize" is more Humean: a serious application to the sciences and liberal arts "softens and humanizes the Temper" (Hume, *The Sceptic*, cit., 1742, p. 160); an intercourse of society and a sweet or chearful amusement may "soften or humanize the character" (Hume, *History*, cit., 1754, p. 63), and learning "tends so much to enlarge the mind, and humanize the temper" (*ivi*, p. 303).

147 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.12, p. 220. The "good effects" of religion, Blair maintains, "are not so rare" (Blair, *The Importance of Religious Knowledge*, cit., p. 15) and "the whole History of Mankind shows, that religious Belief is no inconsiderable Principle of Action" (*ivi*, p. 17): "besides the *known* and *distinguished* Examples of true Religion and Virtue, which, in every Age of Crhistianity, have shone", he asks, "How many may there be, in the more *silent* Scenes of Life, overlooked by superficial Observers of Mankind"? (*ivi*, p. 14). According to Hutcheson "'tis the *Rarity* of Crimes, in comparison of innocent or good Actions, which engages our Attention to them, and makes them be recorded in History; while incomparably more honest, generous, domestick Actions are overlooked, only because they are so common" (Hutcheson, *Essay*, cit., 1728, 6, p. 184). I owe this reference to Luigi Turco (cf. L. Turco, *Hutcheson nei "Dialoghi sulla religione naturale"*, cit., p.459).

When it distinguishes itself, and acts as a separate principle over men, it has departed from its proper sphere, and has become only a cover to faction and ambition.¹⁴⁸

Not being convinced by Cleanthes's explanation, after having remarked that "all" religion, "except the philosophical and rational kind", will be only a cover to faction, and that Cleanthes's "reasonings" are "more easily eluded" than his "facts",¹⁴⁹ Philo will give his long answer.

Like Hume in the *Treatise*, and following Bayle, Philo first criticizes Cleanthes's inference from the effect of finite rewards and punishments to the stronger effect of the infinite ones, in the name of our lack of attachment for remote things:

The inference is not just, because finite and temporary rewards and punishments have so great influence, that therefore such as are infinite and eternal must have so much greater. Consider, I beseech you, the attachment which we have to present things, and the little concern which we discover for objects so remote and uncertain.¹⁵⁰

In an early version of the argument (the passage is scored out), Philo says something more that unmasks (rather than confirming, as it has been suggested),¹⁵¹ the "proper office" of religion. Again his words seem to be inspired by Bayle:¹⁵²

If indeed we consider the Matter merely in an abstract Light: if we compare only the Importance of the Motives, and then reflect on the natural Self-love of Mankind; we shall not only look for a great Effect from religious Considerations; but we must really esteem them absolutely infallible and irresistible in their Operation. For what other motive can reasonably counterballance them even for a Moment? But this is not found to hold in Reality; and therefore, we may be certain, that there is some other Principle of human Nature which we have here overlookt, and which diminishes, at least, the Force of these Motives. This

148 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.12, p. 220.

149 Ivi, 12.13, p. 220.

150 *Ibid.* Cf. Bayle, *Continuation*, cit., § 138, pp. 386a-387b.

151 J.C.A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* [1978], London, Macmillan Press, 19882, p. 202.

152 "Je ne prétens point que la théorie de la Religion soit toujours sans influence sur la morale pratique dans tous les Répruvez: je veux bien qu'en général elle soit prise pour une cause auxiliaire: je crois que lorsqu'elle favorise les inclinations de la nature corrompuë, elle augmente la dépravation" (Bayle, *Continuation*, cit., § 153, p. 411b). I owe this suggestion, as well as many others, to Gianluca Mori. Cf. G. Mori, *Religione e politica in Pierre Bayle: la "società di atei" tra mito e realtà*, in *I filosofi e la società senza religione*, cit., pp. 41-60.

Principle is the Attachment, which we have to present Things, and the little Concern which we discover for Objects so remote & uncertain.¹⁵³

In reality, our little concern for remote and uncertain objects “diminishes, at least, the Force” of religious motives, which cannot be expected to have a “great Effect”. Philo has joined Cleomene’s final position in Mandeville’s *Enquiry*. Cleomene first points out “a Thousand Instances, where Religion is not of that Efficacy”, and maintains that the “End of keeping Men in Awe is much better obtain’d by the Laws and temporal Punishment”;¹⁵⁴ then he gives his own account of the “small Effect and little Force, which Religion and the Belief of future Punishments, may be of to mere Man, unassisted with the Divine Grace.”¹⁵⁵ Cleomene’s account is close to Philo’s account: “Things at a Distance, tho’ we are sure they are to come, make little Impression upon us in Comparison with those that are present and immediately before us”;¹⁵⁶ therefore, Cleomene concludes, “we are conscious within of the little Power which Christianity has over our Hearts, and the small Influence it has over our Actions”.¹⁵⁷

Like Hume in the *Treatise*, in his answer Philo goes on to remark the contradiction of divines: when they are blaming the common carelessness of men concerning religion, they represent our attachment to the present things as the strongest principle and the religious motive as very weak; when they are attacking their speculative antagonists, they represent our attachment as the weakest principle and the religious motive as very strong:

When divines are declaiming against the common behaviour and conduct of the world, they always represent this principle as the strongest imaginable (which indeed it is); and describe almost all human kind as lying under the influence of it, and sunk into the deepest lethargy and unconcern about their religious interests. Yet these same divines, when they refute their speculative antagonists, suppose the motives of religion to be so powerful, that, without them, it were

153 Edinburgh, NLS, MS 23162, f. 80; cf. [Hume] *Treatise*, vol. II, 2.3.7.3, p. 272 (SBN 428-429). Hume not only speaks of our “propension [...] in favour of what is contiguous above what is remote” ([Hume] *A Treatise*, vol. III, 3.2.7.3, p. 134; SBN 535), a “violent propension to prefer contiguous to remote”, which is a “natural weakness”, a “narrowness of soul, which makes them prefer the present to the remote” (ivi, 3.2.7.6, pp. 137-138; SBN 537).

154 Mandeville, *Enquiry*, cit., I, p. 19.

155 Ivi, I, p. 38.

156 Ivi, I, p. 35; cf. Bayle, *Continuation*, cit., § 138, pp. 386b.

157 Mandeville, *Enquiry*, cit., II, p. 80.

impossible for civil society to subsist; nor are they ashamed of so palpable a contradiction.¹⁵⁸

Finally, he opposes the force of honesty and natural inclination to that of theological views and religious motives:

It is certain, from experience, that the smallest grain of natural honesty and benevolence has more effect on men's conduct, than the most pompous views suggested by theological theories and systems. A man's natural inclination works incessantly upon him; it is for ever present to the mind, and mingles itself with every view and consideration: whereas religious motives, where they act at all, operate only by starts and bounds; and it is scarcely possible for them to become altogether habitual to the mind.¹⁵⁹

Since religion operates “only by starts and bounds” and “only by intervals” – a typical Humean topic,¹⁶⁰ Mandevillian in content¹⁶¹ and Shaftesburian in language¹⁶² – Philo illustrates it with a scientific image shaped for scientific deists:

158 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.13, pp. 220-221; cf. [Hume] *Treatise*, vol. I, 1.3.9.12-15, pp. 200-205 (SBN 113-115).

159 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.13, p. 221.

160 The enthusiasts “at best are actuated by a forc'd & strain'd Affection, which moves by Starts & Bounds, & with a very irregular disorderly Pace” (D. Hume to W. Mure of Caldwell, 30 June 1743, in *New Letters of David Hume*, ed. by R. Klibansky and E.C. Mossner, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1954, ltr. 6, p. 13; cf. [D. Hume] *Of Superstition and Enthusiasm*, in *Essays, Moral and Political*, Edinburgh, R. Fleming and A. Alison for A. Kincaid, 1741, pp. 141-151: p. 145; Id., *The Sceptic*, in *Essays, Moral and Political. Volume II*, Edinburgh, R. Fleming and A. Alison for A. Kincaid, 1742, pp. 139-174: p. 154; D. Hume, *Of National Characters*, in *Essays, Moral and Political*, A. Millar, London / A. Kincaid, Edinburgh 17483, pp. 267-288: p. 270 n.; *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I. Containing The Reign of James I. and Charles I.*, Edinburgh, Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, 1754, p. 330; Hume, *Natural History*, cit., 1757, XII, pp. 86-87).

161 “A Man may believe the Torments of Hell, and stand in great Dread of them, whilst they are the Object of his serious Reflection; but he does not always think of them, nor will they always make the same Impression upon him, when he does” (Mandeville, *Enquiry*, cit., II, p. 85). Bayle thinks that the dispositions of the temper, the love of praise and the fear of infamy, and the rewards and punishments proposed by the magistrates have “beaucoup d'activité sur le cœur humain”, in comparison with fear and love of God: the former are the “ressorts des actions humaines”, the “principes qui font agir l'homme” and act “avec plus de force sur certains hommes”, and the latter are not “toûjours le principe plus actif” of human actions (P. Bayle, *I. Eclaircissement sur les Athées*, in *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 4 vols., Amsterdam-Leyde etc., P. Brunel et al., 17405, vol. III, pp. 627-629: I-III, p. 627; cf. Bayle, *Continuation*, cit., § 138, pp. 386ab).

162 Shaftesburian essay-writers “move chiefly by Starts and Bound; according as our Motion is by frequent Intervals renew'd” (A. Ashley Cooper Earl of Shaftesbury, *Miscellaneous Reflections*, in *Characteristicks*, cit., vol. III, p. 97).

The force of the greatest gravity, say the philosophers, is infinitely small, in comparison of that of the least impulse: yet it is certain, that the smallest gravity will, in the end, prevail above a great impulse; because no strokes or blows can be repeated with such constancy as attraction and gravitation.¹⁶³

Would true religion, if it ever existed, be able to perform its proper office in reality? Philo, who is ready (in words) to allow that "true religion [...] has no such pernicious consequences", answers in a Baylean manner: "we must treat of religion, as it has commonly been found in the world".¹⁶⁴ The religious principles seem to suffer from the same inconvenience (their intermittent action does not produce any durable good) of philosophical abstruse arguments in general, and philosophical sceptical arguments in particular; with the important difference that the latter are sound and philosophically irrefutable. By paraphrasing the *Philosophical Essays*, we could say: a religionist cannot propose that his religion, and the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, will have any constant influence on the minds of men, their morals and society; or, if it had it, that this influence would be beneficial.¹⁶⁵ Insofar as it has some influence, this influence does not enforce the motives of morality and is largely hurtful.

Philo has initially declared his "abhorrence of vulgar superstitions" (and "veneration for true religion");¹⁶⁶ at the end he will push the "matters too far", as Cleanthes will remark (in agreement with Blair), and allow his "zeal against false religion to undermine [his] veneration for the true":¹⁶⁷ not only religion does not secure morality and society, but it also puts them in danger. Philo's chain of reasoning is quite linear. He first observes that inclination is stronger than religious motives: it has the "advantage" of engaging on its side all the wit of the minds and, where in opposition to religious principles and duties, the mind "seeks every method and art of eluding them", and is also "almost

163 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.13, p. 221.

164 Ivi, 12.22, p. 223. "Considerons la Religion telle qu'elle existe, & non pas selon des idées abstraites dont les objets ne subsistent que dans notre entendement" (Bayle, *Réponse*, cit., 18, p. 949a); "Mon Dictionnaire est un Ouvrage Historique, je n'ai point le droit d'y représenter les gens comme on voudroit qu'ils eussent été, il faut que je le représente comme ils étoient" (Bayle, *I. Eclaircissement*, cit., XV, p. 628).

165 Cf. D. Hume, *Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy*, in *Philosophical Essays*, cit., pp. 231-256: p. 248.

166 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.9, p. 219.

167 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.24, p. 224 (ivi, 12.1, 214). "Now, when a Horror at *Superstition* and *Enthusiasm* seems to have made us insensible to the Dangers of *Irreligion*" (Blair, *The Importance of Religious Knowledge*, cit., p. 36).

always successful”.¹⁶⁸ Then Philo observes that this religion subservient to morality cannot have such a beneficial influence: philosophers, who cultivate reason, “stand less in need of such motives to keep them under the restraint of morals”; the vulgar, who “alone may need” some religious motives to rest under the “restraint of morals”, are “utterly incapable of so pure a religion as represents the Deity to be pleased with nothing but virtue in human behaviour”.¹⁶⁹

Superstition and enthusiasm certainly produce the “most pernicious” consequences for morality, and weaken “extremely” men’s attachment to the “natural” motives of justice and humanity, because they divert the attention and raise up a “new and frivolous” species of merit, and make a “preposterous” distribution of praise and blame.¹⁷⁰ Religion, as a principle of action, is not “any of the familiar motives” of human conduct; it acts on the temper “only by intervals”, and must be “rouzed by continual efforts”; it gradually produces a “habit of dissimulation”, and makes of fraud and falsehood the “predominant” principle.¹⁷¹ Such (religious) habits have “bad” effects even in common life, and no morality can be “forcible enough to bind the enthusiastic zealot”.¹⁷² If ever men think of their eternal salvation, the “steady attention alone” to so important an interest is apt to “extinguish the benevolent affections, and beget a narrow, contracted selfishness”.¹⁷³ Such a

168 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.14, p. 221. In the world we do not repose “less trust” in a man because from study and philosophy, “he has entertained some speculative doubts with regard to theological subjects”, but, if we are “prudent”, we are on our guard, lest we shall be cheated and deceived by a man “who makes a great profession of religion and devotion” (*ibid.*). Cf. Hume, *Natural History*, cit., 1757, XIV, p. 108; D. Hume to G. Elliot, 10 March 1751, in *Letters*, cit., ltr. 72, p. 154; J. Boswell, *An Account of my last Interview with David Hume, Esq.*, in Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., pp. 76-79: p. 76; P. Bayle, *Arcesilas*, in *Dictionnaire*, in *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 4 vols., Amsterdam-Leyde etc.: P. Brunel *et al.*, 17405, vol. I, Rem. K, p. 288a; Shaftesbury, *Inquiry*, cit., I, I, 1, p. 6.

169 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.15, p. 221. There are many instances of “degeneracy”: there are people guilty of the atrociousness of “declaiming in express terms, against morality; and representing it as a sure forfeiture of the Divine favour, if the least trust or reliance be laid upon it” (ivi, 12.15, p. 222). This “pure religion” that “represents the Deity to be pleased with nothing but virtue in human behaviour” recalls a 1743 letter concerning a sermon by William Leechman, where Hume wishes Leechman would be able to answer his objection “both to Devotion & Prayer, & indeed to every thing we commonly call Religion, except the Practice of Morality, & the Assent of the Understanding to the Proposition that *God exists*” (D. Hume to W. Mure of Caldwell, 30 June 1743, in *New Letters*, cit., ltr. 6, pp. 12-13).

170 Ivi, 12.16, 222.

171 Ivi, 12.17, 222; cf. Hume, *Of National Characters*, cit., pp. 270-271 n.

172 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.18, 222.

173 Ivi, 12.19, 222.

temper, “encouraged” by religion, “easily eludes” all the general precepts of charity and benevolence.¹⁷⁴

In general, religious motives (the motives of what Philo calls the “vulgar superstition”) have “no great influence on general conduct” and, where they predominate, their operation is not “very favourable to morality”.¹⁷⁵ Philo repeats himself: the spirit of “popular” religions is not “so salutary to society”,¹⁷⁶ and they have “pernicious consequences with regard to society”.¹⁷⁷ Philo however declares himself ready to allow that “true religion [...] has no such pernicious consequences”; but, he adds, “we must treat of religion, as it has commonly been found in the world”¹⁷⁸ (Hume corrects Philo, who first says “always been found”).¹⁷⁹ And the “speculative” tenet of theism, being “a species of philosophy”, while it must partake of its “beneficial influence”, it must also lie under a like “inconvenience”: it is “always confined to very few persons” (but this is not its only inconvenience).¹⁸⁰ Religion could be a restraint, Cleanthes argues; the “chief restraints” upon mankind, Philo answers, are others, like the reflection on the general interests of society;¹⁸¹ and Cleanthes consoles himself by declaring that men, “when afflicted, find consolation in religion”.¹⁸²

5. “I SHOUD SOFTEN ALL THE PASSAGES, WHICH HAVE GIVEN OFFENCE” (THE PROPER OFFICE – PART II)

When the first volume of the *History of Great Britain* appears, Hume remarks, “I was assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation; English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, churchman and

174 Ivi, 12.19, 222.

175 Ivi, 12.20, 223.

176 Ivi, 12.21, 223.

177 Ibid.

178 Ivi, 12.22, 223.

179 Edinburgh, NLS, MS 23162, f. 81.

180 Ivi, 12.22, 223.

181 Ivi, 12.22, 224. In the courts of judicature, the authority of oaths arises from “the solemnity and importance of the occasion, the regard to reputation, and the reflecting on the general interests of society”, not from “any popular religion” (*ibid.*).

182 Ivi, 12.27, p. 225. Cleanthes remembers Philo that “true” religion is “the chief, the only great comfort in life; and our principal support amidst all the attacks of adverse fortune” (ivi, 12.24, p. 224); Blair had highlighted how important the “religious Comfort” is (ivi, p. 20) and what religious knowledge “promises in the Way of *Consolation*, of Aid and Relief to Man, amidst the Distresses of Life” (Blair, *The Importance of Religious Knowledge*, cit., p. 18).

sectary, freethinker and religionist, patriot and courtier, united in their rage against [me]”.¹⁸³ Bayle had declared that his *Dictionnaire* was an “Ouvrage Historique”, and therefore he had the duty to represent the people “comme ils étoient”;¹⁸⁴ Montesquieu had admonished his followers: “c’est mal raisonner contre la Religion que de rassembler dans un grand Ouvrage une longue énumération des maux qu’elle a produits, si l’on ne fait de même celle des biens qu’elle a faits”.¹⁸⁵ In particular, Hume is accused of having reduced religion to enthusiasm and superstition;¹⁸⁶ and he acknowledges his “great Error”: “my too frank & plain & blunt way of talking of Religion”.¹⁸⁷ Between 1755 and 1756 Hume writes a defence of his treatment of Christian religion in the first volume of the *History*, which he later extends to the second.¹⁸⁸

It has been supposed that this slightly accusatory apology¹⁸⁹ was originally intended as a Preface or as a long footnote to the second volume of the *History*.¹⁹⁰ The first paragraph of the Preface include a “proper office” passage, which is close to Cleanthes’s passage in the *Dialogues*.¹⁹¹

183 *The Life of David Hume, Esq. Written by Himself*, London, W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1777, pp. 18-19.

184 Bayle, *I. Eclaircissement*, cit., XV, p. 628.

185 [Montesquieu] *De l’Esprit*, cit., vol. II, XXIV, II, p. 174.

186 [R. Flexman] *Review of the “History of Great Britain, Vol. I”*, “The Monthly Review”, March 1755, vol. XII, art. XXX, pp. 206-229: pp. 207-208, 229.

187 D. Hume to J. Clephane, 18 February 1755, in J.C.A. Gaskin, *Hume’s Attenuated Deism*, in “Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie”, 65, 1983, pp. 160-173: p. 172.

188 The manuscript is entitled “Preface”, but the title is scored out (“Preface by David Hume to vol. II of *History of Great Britain*”, in “The Papers of John Maynard Keynes”, Cambridge, King’s College Archives, University of Cambridge, Ms JMK/PP/87/33; for the text, see *infra* Appendix B 3); it is published in E.C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 19802, pp. 306-307. Hume indirectly calls the text “Apology” (ivi, p. 307). As he writes “It ought to be no matter of Offence, that in this Volume, as well as in the foregoing” (ivi, p. 306), the apologetic text was intended for the first and second volumes of the *History*; also the published apologetic footnote is intended for the first and second volumes: “we have not been sparing, in this volume more than in the former, to remark [the abuse of religion]” (Hume, *History [...] Vol. II*, cit., 1757, p. 450 n).

189 “It ought to be no matter of Offence [...]. It ought as little to be matter of Offence [...]. As to the civil & political Part of his Performance, he scorns to suggest any Apology” (ivi, pp. 306-307).

190 Mossner, *Life*, cit., p. 306. Gilbert Elliot’s son classifies the apologetic text as a “Draft of Preface to a volume of D. Hume’s History – / in David Hume’s own hand / found among my father’s papers” (Cambridge, Ms JMK/PP/87/33, cit.). John Hill Burton, who first publishes it, titles it “Preface” (J.H. Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, 2 vols., Edinburgh, W. Tait, 1846, vol. II, pp. 11-13), Mossner follows Elliot and Burton by calling it the “suppressed preface” or “preface to vol. II” (Mossner, *Life*, cit., pp. 306, 686a, 688b), and Hume scholars commonly follow Mossner. Moritz Baumstark maintains that the draft was meant to

The proper Office of Religion is to reform Men’s Lives, to purify their Hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, & to secure Obedience to the Laws and civil Magistrate. While it pursues these useful Purposes, its Operations, tho’ infinitely valuable, are secret & silent; and seldom come under the Cognizance of History. That adulterate Species of it alone, which inflames Faction, animates Sedition, & prompts Rebellion, distinguishes itself on the open Theatre of the World. [...] the beneficent Influence of Religion is not to be sought for in History: That Principle is always the more pure & genuine, the less figure it makes in those Annals of Wars, & Politics, Intrigues, & Revolutions, Quarrels & Convulsions, which it is the Business of an Historian to record & transmit to Posterity.¹⁹²

In February 1755 Hume plans to make some apologetic “alterations” to the first volume of the *History* for the “first new Edition” or the French Translation.¹⁹³ The first of these alterations, the “new Paragraph”, contains the “proper office” passage, which is very close to the apology and to Cleanthes’s passage¹⁹⁴ (is the new paragraph a piece of the Preface or its first

be a “lengthy foot- or endnote given that none of the instalments of Hume’s *History* include a preface” (M. Baumstark, *David Hume: The Making of a Philosophical Historian. A Reconsideration*, Edinburgh, The University of Edinburgh, 2007, p. 154 n. 366); yet, the manuscript was originally entitled “Preface”, later scored out. Unlike Mossner, who dates the draft to 1756 (Mossner, *Hume*, cit., p. 306), Baumstark cautiously dates it to spring 1755 (ivi, p. 154 n. 366).

191 For the complete texts, see *infra* Appendix B 1-4. According to Cleanthes religion should “regulate” the hearts of men, rather than “purify” them (Preface), and “humanize” their “conduct” rather than “reform” their “Lives” (Preface); it should also “infuse the spirit of Temperance, Order, and Obedience” rather than “inforce all moral Duties” and “secure Obedience to the Laws & civil Magistrate” (Preface). Cleanthes’s “proper office” seems to be religiously determined; even though also Cleanthes thinks that religion “only inforces the Motives of Morality & Justice”. With regard to the operation of religion, Cleanthes thinks it “silent”, rather than “secret & silent” (Preface), and concludes that it is “in danger” of being “overlooked” and “confounded” with the motives of morality and justice, rather than saying that it “seldom” comes “under the Cognizance of History” (Preface).

192 Mossner, *Life*, cit., p. 306.

193 D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, in J. Vercruyse, *Lettre et corrections inédites de David Hume*, “Dix-huitième Siècle”, 2, 1970, pp. 33-37: p. 35. Hume thinks to add the “proper office” passage in the second edition of the first volume: “Here are some Alterations which I propose to make on the first new Edition of my History [...] Page. 7. After line 299, add, beginning a new paragraph. The proper Office of Religion” (*ibid.*); or in the French translation: “If this letter shou’d come too late to hand for inserting in Page. 7. That Passage beginning with these Words (The Proper Office of Religion) and ending with (misguided Religion) be so good to insert it in Page 266 after Line 26” (ivi, p. 35).

194 D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, cit., p. 35 (see *infra* Appendix B 1 and 2). In the Preface the purposes of religion are “useful” rather than “salutary” (new paragraph), and

draft, a development of Cleanthes's argument?). The "new paragraph" (not a footnote and not even a Preface), was supposed to precede and soften the "Character of Puritans".¹⁹⁵ Notwithstanding Hume's hopes and fears ("I have little Prospect of a second Edition")¹⁹⁶ about "the first new Edition",¹⁹⁷ the second edition appeared in 1759.¹⁹⁸

In the meantime Hume found a new publisher, who thought that "some" of his expressions were "improper", and – contrary to Hume's opinion – that the "Enmity" of the clergy "chiefly has hurt" the author and the book, which was "other wise promis'd to be popular".¹⁹⁹ Hume acknowledges himself guilty of

its operations "infinitely valuable" rather than "precious" (new paragraph). Mossner's transcription of the Preface reads "inforce", Vercruysse transcription of the new paragraph reads "enforce"; Mossner's transcription of the Preface reads "Purposes", Vercruysse transcription of the new paragraph reads "Purpose" (but it is preceded by "these"). The new paragraph adds that the adulterate species religion is "the great Source of Revolutions and public [civil: scored out] Convulsions", a sentence that does not occur in the Preface.

195 D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, cit., p. 35. The 1755 new paragraph was supposed to be inserted at the beginning of the volume, before the "Character of the puritans", replacing in part and attenuating the beginning of the "Character" (cf. D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I. Containing the Reigns of James I. and Charles I.*, Edinburgh, Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, 1754, pp. 7-9). The "Character of the puritans" was suppressed in the second edition of the first book (D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain under the House of Stuarts. Vol. I. Containing the Reigns of James I. and Charles I. [...]. The Second Edition Corrected*, London, A. Millar, 1759, p. 9; D. Hume, *The History of England, from The Invasion of Julius Cæsar to The Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols., London, A. Millar, 1762, vol. V, p. 7). Hume also suggests for the new edition, and the French translation, to "ommit all" the "account of the Roman catholic superstition, its genius and spirit" (D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, cit., p. 36; Hume, *History [...] Vol. I*, cit., 1754, pp. 25-27).

196 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, in H.F. Klemme, "And Time Does Justice to All The World": Ein unveröffentlichter Brief von David Hume an William Strahan, "Journal of the History of Philosophy", 29, 4, October 1991, pp. 657-664: p. 661.

197 D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, cit., p. 35.

198 D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain under the House of Stuarts. Vol. I. Containing the Reigns of James I. and Charles I. [...]. The Second Edition Corrected*, London, A. Millar, 1759.

199 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, cit., p. 660 (cf. D. Hume to A. Millar, 20 May 1757, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 132, p. 250). According to Hume the strokes of deism commonly excite "Clamour", and clamour commonly excites "Curiosity", quickens the "Demand", and promotes the "Sale" (D. Hume to J. Clephane, 18 February 1755, cit., p. 172; D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, cit., pp. 659-660). John Brown suggests that Hume – "bent upon *Popularity* and *Gain*" – "omitted no Opportunity [...] to disgrace Religion" and, being asked "why he had so larded his Work with Irreligion", he replied "that his Book might sell". Yet, Brown goes on, "it was whispered him, that he had totally mistaken the Spirit of the Times [...], had offended his best Customers, and ruined the Sale of his Book" (J. Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, London, L. David and C. Reymers, 1757, VI, pp. 57-58). Brown gives a more detailed version of the same anecdote (*An Estimate of the Manners*

“a few Strokes of Deism; and those too oblique ones”.²⁰⁰ Acknowledging himself guilty of “Indiscretion, in some Passages which regard religious Parties”, Hume asks Strahan to communicate him his remarks and to point out the improper expressions in order to “correct” them: “in case of reprinting, – he declares – I shou’d soften all the Passages, which have given Offence”.²⁰¹ At that time Hume is finishing the second volume, which will be announced in October and published in November 1756 (but dated 1757): here he adds a long apologetic footnote, which contains a “proper office” passage very close to the 1755 new paragraph.²⁰² This is the reason why he will not add the new paragraph in the second edition of the first volume, where the criticized “Character of Puritans”, as well as “the account of the Roman catholic superstition”, is suppressed.²⁰³

and Principles of the Times, London, L. David and C. Reymers, 17586 [1757], vol. II, XII, pp. 86-87), where mentions one of Hume’s letters announcing that in the second volume he “will not offend the Godly” (ivi, p. 87): actually Hume made a similar assertion: “I shall give no farther Umbrage to the Godly” (D. Hume to W. Strahan, 12 April 1755, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 108, p. 218). In 1757 Hume is still convinced that “some Strokes of Irreligion [...] [were] rather likely to encrease the Sale, according to all past Experience” (D. Hume to A. Millar, 20 May 1757, cit., p. 250; cf. D. Hume to A. Millar, 21 July 1757, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 136, p. 256).

200 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, cit., 659. One month before Hume wrote: “Any Tincture of Deism, I know, woud be hurtful to a man’s Fortune [...]. If it really has been the Tincture of Deism, which has borne me down, nothing can be more unexpected, Shaftesbury, Dr Middleton, Voltaire, Montesquieu; many others have certainly very much inhanced their Reputation by Liberties of this kind. I myself owe part of that little Reputation I enjoy to some very strong Attempts of that Nature. Are the World disgusted with this Species of Philosophy, & resolv’d to shelter themselves again in implicit Faith and Credulity” (D. Hume to J. Clephane, 18 February 1755, cit., pp. 172-173).

201 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, cit., p. 660. Again, one month before Hume wrote: “I have been indiscreet in some things. In particular, I am convinced, that whatever I have said of Religion should have received some more Softenings” (D. Hume to J. Clephane, 18 February 1755, cit., p. 172).

202 Hume, *History [...] Vol. II*, cit., 1757, p. 450 n; see *infra* Appendix B 4. In the footnote the operations of religion are “valuable” (Preface) rather than “precious” (new paragraph), and the purposes of religion are “salutary” (new paragraph) rather than “useful” (Preface); and the adulterate species religion is “the great source of revolutions and public Convulsions” (new paragraph).

203 Hume, *History [...] Vol. I*, cit., 1754, pp. 7-9, 25-27; Hume, *History [...] Vol. I*, cit., 1759, pp. 7, 23-24 (cf. Hume, *History of England*, cit., 1762, vol. V, pp. 7, p. 26). The “Character of the puritans” is attacked, for example, by Roger Flexman and Daniel MacQueen (R. Flexman, *Review of the “History of Great Britain”*, “The Monthly Review”, March 1755, art. XXX, pp. 206-229: pp. 207-208; [J. Bonar] *An Analysis of The Moral and Religious Sentiments Contained in the Writings of Sopho and David Hume, Esq.*, Edinburgh, 1755, pp. 42-45; D. MacQueen, *Letters on Mr Hume’s History of Great Britain*, Edinburgh, Sands, Donaldson, Murray, and

In 1755 Hume offers an alternative to the French translator: he can insert the “proper office” passage as a new paragraph either at the beginning of the volume, before the “Character of Puritans”, or at the end of the volume, in the discussion of “theological hatred”: “all the historians [...] and all authors [...] represent the civil disorders and convulsions as proceeding from religious controversy [...] the disorders in Scotland intirely, and those in England mostly, proceeded from so mean and contemptible an origin”.²⁰⁴ No matter where to place the new passage, Hume gives the translator a precise justification for its addition: “The History contains so much Satyre against the Absurdity and Barbarities of the several Sects, that such a Sentiment seems very proper to qualify it, and preserve the proper Regard for true Piety”.²⁰⁵ Yet, in 1756 he adds a long footnote to the second volume of the *History* (a development of the Preface?).²⁰⁶ This footnote, which does not appear in the French 1760 translation, is removed after the 1767 edition, and does not appear in the 1770 edition.²⁰⁷ Unlike the contemporary scholar (“Whatever the reason for the

Cochran for A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1756, ltr. I, pp. 5-6). In 1755 Hume thinks to omit only the character of Catholics (D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, cit., p. 36), and to leave the “Character of the puritans”, preceded by the new apologetic paragraph (ivi, p. 35).

204 Hume, *The History of Great Britain*, cit., 1754, p. 266; cf. D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, cit., p. 37. The passage for the insertion was not deleted in the second edition (Hume, *History [...] Vol. I*, cit., 1759, pp. 255-256), and Hume here appends a footnote: “the controversy, therefore, between the parties was almost wholly theological, and that of the most frivolous and ridiculous kind” (ivi, p. 256 n.).

205 D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, cit., p. 37.

206 Hume, *History [...] Vol. II*, cit., 1757, cit., pp. 450-451 n. The footnote (642 words) is not completely drawn from the Preface (745 words): there are strong similarities, but also several differences, not only in tone and in the order of arguments. For example, the “best things” topic does not occur in the footnote (cf. *infra* n. 251 and Appendix B 3-4). The Preface has the following structure: (1) introduction; (2) the proper office of religion (true piety and adulterate religions); (3) the fallacy: from the abuses of religion to religion in general; (4) fanaticism or enthusiasm and superstition; (4.1) the Church of England; (4.2) fanaticism and moderation, and contemporary sects (Presbyterians, Independants) and first Reformers; (5) conclusion: the impartiality of the author. The structure of the footnote is the following: (1) the sophism: from the abuses of religion to religion in general; (2) the proper office of religion (true piety and adulterate religions); (3) the historian; (4) fanaticism and superstition; (4.1) the Church of England; (4.2) contemporary sects (Presbyterians, Independants, Anabaptists) and first Reformers; (5) fanaticism and moderation.

207 D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain*, from *The Invasion of Julius Cæsar to The Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols., London, A. Millar, 1767, vol. VI, pp. 447-448; D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain*, from *The Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution in 1688*, 8 vols., London, T. Cadell, 1770, vol. VIII, p. 348; cf. D. Hume, *Histoire de la Maison de Stuart sur le trône d'Angleterre*, 3 vols., Londres, 1760, vol. III, p. 467.

final removal of the passage may have been”),²⁰⁸ in 1777 Samuel Jackson Pratt feels the need to explain its disappearance: “[Hume] accordingly [...], when speaking of the religious parties, subjoins the following note, which when his fame was established beyond the reach of party, he cancelled as unworthy of admission”.²⁰⁹

In short, the “proper office” passage has at least four versions: Cleanthes’s argument in part XII of the *Dialogues*, the 1755 planned short new paragraph for the second edition of the first volume of the *History*, the planned long undated Preface to the second volume of the *History*, and the 1756 long published footnote to the second volume of the *History*.²¹⁰

It is commonly maintained that Hume first writes the “proper office” passage in the apologetic Preface for the second volume of the *History*, but then decides not to publish the Preface, and turns it into a long footnote, finally drops the footnote and puts it, “in a paraphrased form”, in the mouth of Cleanthes in the *Dialogues*.²¹¹ and since Cleanthes’s “closely resembles Hume’s own words” in the Preface, he is also “echoing Hume’s own views”.²¹² Yet, Hume could have put Cleanthes’s words into the mouth of the author of the apologetic pieces: especially, if the first draft of the *Dialogues* was ready in 1751, some years before the composition of these pieces.²¹³ The substance is similar, even though the published footnote seems to be more religiously and apologetically intended.²¹⁴

In 1756 Daniel MacQueen had wished that, against Hume’s “loose and irreligious sneers”, the friends of religion should show “the mild, the pure, and

208 Garrett, *What’s true*, cit., p. 203.

209 [S.J. Pratt] *Supplement to the Life of David Hume, Esq.*, London, J. Bew, 1777, p. 20.

210 Without a serious dating of the manuscript of the Preface, and the required compared analysis of the paper, ink and handwriting, I can only conjecture that Cleanthes’s argument was the first nucleus of the “proper office” passage (1751?), which Hume first develops into the short new paragraph (1755), then into the long undated Preface (1755/1756?), and finally into the long published footnote (1756).

211 Garrett, *Hume*, cit., p. 310; cf. Garrett, *What’s true*, cit., p. 204.

212 J. Immerwahr, *Hume’s Aesthetic Theism*, “Hume Studies”, XXII, 2, November 1996, pp. 325-337: p. 33.

213 M.A. Stewart, *The Dating of Hume’s Manuscripts*, in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation*, ed. by P. Wood, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2000, pp. 267-314: pp. 301-302. Hume also makes a revision of the *Dialogues* around 1757, possibly before publishing the footnote to the *History*.

214 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.12, p. 220; Hume, “Preface”, cit., p. 306; D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, cit., p. 35; Hume, *History [...] Vol. II*, cit., p. 450 n. Cf. *supra*, nn. 199, 201, 208, 217.

salutary influence of genuine piety”.²¹⁵ Being accused of having mentioned only the abuses of the adulterate religion, and their mischievous consequences, Hume explains why he said so little of “the salutary Consequences which result from true & genuine Piety”.²¹⁶ Here Hume celebrates the “proper office” of religion: “to purify their Hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, & to secure Obedience to the Laws and civil Magistrate”.²¹⁷

To “purify” our hearts and “reform” our lives: Hume is speaking the proper religious language. According to Bishop Tillotson, to whom he refers in the 1745 *Letter from a Gentleman* and in the 1748 philosophical essay “Of Miracles”, the divine grace and wisdom is full of “great power and virtue to purify our hearts and to reform our lives”.²¹⁸ This is the “great end and design of the Christian religion”:

to reform the world, to purify the hearts and lives of men from corrupt affections and wicked practices, to teach Men to excel in all kinds of virtue and goodness. And this is every where in the New Testament most expressly declared.²¹⁹

According to William Leechman, which was criticized by Hume in 1743, the doctrines delivered from the pulpits ought to have “a real tendency to make [men] wiser and better, to enlighten their minds, purify their hearts, or reform their lives”.²²⁰ And the reverend Hugh Blair, with St. Peter (“purifying their

215 MacQueen, *Letters*, cit., ltr. IX, pp. 327-328.

216 Hume, “Preface”, cit., p. 306.

217 *Ibid.*

218 J. Tillotson, *Sermon LXV. Concerning the Incarnation of Christ*, in *Works*, cit., vol. III, pp. 284-329: p. 328.

219 J. Tillotson, *Sermon CCVII. Of the necessity of good works*, in *Works*, cit., vol. X, pp. 4682-4707: p. 4694.

220 W. Leechman, *The Temper, Character, and Duty of a Minister of the Gospel*, R. Foulis, 1741, p. 44. Even John Leland asks men “to receive [revelation] with a Faith that may [...] have a happy Tendency to purify their Hearts and reform their Lives” (J. Leland, *Remarks On a Late Pamphlet, Entitled “Christianity not founded on Argument”*, London, R. Hett, 1744, p. 55; cf. H. Dodwell, *Christianity Not Founded on Argument; and the true Principle of Gospel-Evidence*, London, T. Cooper, 1741, p. 36; R. Wallace, *Ignorance and Superstition a Source of Violence and Cruelty, and in particular the Cause of the present Rebellion*, Edinburgh, R. Fleming / London, J. Davidson, 1746, pp. 12, 16). In the manuscript Preface and the publish footnote, Hume turns Cleanthes’s “to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct” (Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.12, p. 220), which originally was “to regulate the hearts [“s” scored out] of men” (NLS, MS 23162, f. 80), into “to reform Men’s Lives, to purify their Hearts” (Hume, “Preface”, cit., p. 306; Hume, *History [...] Vol. II*, cit., 1757, p. 450 n). To “purify” the hearts of men is not a typical Humean expression. According to *The Stoic* man should

Hearts by Faith"), celebrates "that Christian Faith, which the Scripture represents as certainly *purifying the Hearts*".²²¹

The scholar thinks that Hume's apology is "of such general value in the understanding of Hume on both history and religion";²²² I would rather say that it is of value in accounting for Hume's attitude towards religion and his peculiar way to defend himself against the accusation of being irreligious. Rather than Hume's true opinion about the useful, salutary, beneficial influence of true uncorrupted religion, the apology and the footnote seems to me some of those "softenings" that in February 1755 Hume thinks his treatment of religion should have received:²²³ "In a quarter of an Hour, – he adds in March – after I undertook it, I render'd my History unexceptionable to the most orthodox Bigot".²²⁴ And in April his purpose is clearly declared: "I shall give no farther Umbrage to the Godly".²²⁵ William Warburton immediately detects all the ambiguity of Hume's "ample apology" and "proper office" of religion:²²⁶

Now, was Mr. David Hume only playing the Philosopher, I should take this to be no more than the Definition of a mere *moral mode*, known by the name of a *divine philosophy in the mind*; something fluctuating in the *brain* of these Virtuosi, and ennobled with the title of *Natural Religion*.²²⁷

With regard to the relation between religion and morality, the *Memoranda* advance a Baylean view: "No Religion can maintain itself in Vigour without many Observances to be practis'd on all Occasions. Hence the Priests are stricter upon these than moral Dutys without knowing the Reason. There is a secret Instinct of this kind".²²⁸ The *Natural History* dissipates every doubt.

"proceed still in purifying the generous Passion" and he "will still the more admire its shining Glories" (D. Hume, *The Stoic*, in *Essays*, cit., 1742, pp. 115-130: p. 126; cf. *supra* n. 191).

221 Blair, *The Importance of Religious Knowledge*, cit., p. 14; Acts, 15, 7-9; cf. J. Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, As deliver'd in the Scriptures*, London, A. Bettesworth et al., 17366, p. 37.

222 Mossner, *Life*, cit., p. 306.

223 D. Hume to J. Clephane, 18 February 1755, cit., p. 172; D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, cit., p. 660.

224 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, cit., p. 661; cf. *ivi*, p. 659; D. Hume to J. Clephane, 18 February 1755, cit., p. 172.

225 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 12 April 1755, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 108, p. 218.

226 Cf. [W. Warburton] *Remarks on Mr. David Hume's Essay on the Natural History of Religion*, London, M. Cooper, 1757, Remark II, pp. 15-23.

227 *Ivi*, Remark II, pp. 17-18. Warburton makes fun of Hume's argument in the "proper office" passage, *ivi*, p. 21.

228 E.C. Mossner, *Hume's "Early Memoranda", 1729-1740: The Complete Text*, "Journal of the History of Ideas", 9, 4, 1948, pp. 492-518: II, 39, p. 503. With regard to the Greeks, Bayle

The “essentials” of a common, worldly, incarnate religion, can never lie in morality:

if we should suppose, what seldom happens, that a popular religion were found, in which it was expressly declared, that nothing but morality could gain the divine favour; if an order of priests were instituted to inculcate this opinion, in daily sermons, and with all the arts of persuasion; yet so inveterate are the people’s prejudices, that for want of some other superstition, they would make the very attendance on these sermons the essentials of religion, rather than place them in virtue and good morals.²²⁹

And to put some “order” and help the reader to see the “Scope of the Discourse”,²³⁰ in 1758 Hume adds an explicit title-slogan: “Sect. XIX. Bad influence of most popular religions on morality”,²³¹ and in the Index: “Morality, hurt by popular Religions”.²³² Perhaps, also for this reason Warburton maintains that Hume’s apology contain “something more than an Insinuation that he believed, what his *Natural History of Religion* shews he does not believe”.²³³

6. CONCLUSION: “THAT ALL THE CHURCHES SHALL BE CONVERTED INTO RIDING SCHOOLS”

According to the *History*, after the first 1754 volume, “religion can never be deemed a point of small consequence in civil government”; in certain periods it can also be regarded as “the great spring of men’s actions and determinations”.²³⁴ The *History* is full of examples of the pernicious

maliciously (is he talking only about them?) observes: “ingénieux & voluptueux, & par-là sujets à une suite épouvantable de crimes, ont eu besoin d’une Religion qui les chargeât d’une infinité d’observances” (Bayle, *I. Eclaircissement*, cit., XV, p. 629).

229 Hume, *Natural History*, cit., 1757, XIV, pp. 104-105. “In every religion [...] many of the votaries, perhaps the greatest number, will still seek the divine favour, not by virtue and good morals, which alone can be acceptable to a perfect being, but either by frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous extasies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinions” (ivi, p. 103). If we “turn the reverse of the medal”, “What so pure as some of the morals, included in some theological systems? What so corrupted as some of the practices, to which these systems give rise?” (ivi, p. 116).

230 D. Hume to W. Strahan, 25 May 1757, in *Letters*, cit., vol. I, ltr. 133, pp. 250-251.

231 Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, in *Essays and Treatises*, cit., 1758, p. 525.

232 Index to Hume, *Essays and Treatises*, cit., 1758, p. 536.

233 [Warburton] *Remarks*, cit., Remark II, p. 15.

234 Hume, *History [...] Vol. II*, cit., 1757, p. 71.

consequences of religion; yet there are also a few examples of its useful effects under precise circumstances

[a] new religion, by mitigating the genius of the antient superstition, and rendering it more compatible with the peace and interests of society, had preserved itself in that happy medium, which wise men have always sought, and which the people have so seldom been able to maintain.²³⁵

Despite Philo's pessimism ("to make a saving game" of religion),²³⁶ with Bacon Hume seems to maintain that it is better to have some established uniform religion, a state religion.²³⁷ This religion, it has been suggested, is Presbyterianism in the 1752 essay "Of the Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth", and Anglicanism or the Church of England in the *History*.²³⁸ In the essay on the perfect commonwealth Hume briefly delineates that limited monarchy "to which [he] cannot, in theory, discover any considerable objection".²³⁹ Here the presbyterian government is "establish'd", and the presbyters are in the hands

235 D. Hume, *The History of England, under the House of Tudor*, 2 vols., London, A. Millar, 1759, vol. II, p. 505.

236 Hume, *Dialogues*, 12.21, p. 223. It is a "certain and infallible" maxim in politics that "both the number and authority of priests should be confined within very narrow limits; and that the civil magistrate ought, for ever, to keep his fasces and axes from such dangerous hands" (ivi, 12.21, p. 223): "in fact, the utmost a wise magistrate can propose with regard to popular religions, is, as far as possible, to make a saving game of it, and to prevent their pernicious consequences with regard to society". It is "so humble a purpose", and every expedient which the magistrate tries is "surrounded with inconveniences": if the magistrate "admits only one religion among his subjects, he must sacrifice, to an uncertain prospect of tranquillity, every consideration of public liberty, science, reason, industry, and even his own independency"; if he "gives indulgence to several sects, which is the wiser maxim, he must preserve a very philosophical indifference to all of them, and carefully restrain the pretensions of the prevailing sect; otherwise he can expect nothing but endless disputes, quarrels, factions, persecutions, and civil commotions" (ivi, 12.21, p. 223).

237 "Even so great a philosopher as lord Bacon, thought that uniformity in religion was necessary to the support of government, and that no toleration ought to be given to sectaries. See his Essay *De Unitate Ecclesiae*" (Hume, *History*, 6 vols., cit., 1762, vol. V, p. 114 n.; the footnote is added in 1762).

238 Baier, Hume and the Conformity, cit., pp. 92, 95, 96; cf. J.B. Stewart, Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 279; W.R. Jordan, Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration of David Hume and Religious Establishment, "The Review of Politics", 64, 4, Autumn 2002, pp. 687-713: p. 694 and n.18. According to Jordan, Hume recognizes that religion "has a positive role to play in public life and can even help assure a healthy moral order" (ivi, pp. 688-689; cf. ivi, pp. 707, 711).

239 D. Hume, *Of the Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*, in *Political Discourses*, R. Fleming for A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, Edinburgh 1752, pp. 281-304: p. 285.

of the magistrates:²⁴⁰ “without the dependence of the clergy on the civil magistrate [...] ’tis folly to think any free government will ever have security or stability”.²⁴¹

As it has been observed, in the *History* Hume occasionally acknowledges the positive role of a superstitious religion, especially under negative circumstances:

It must be acknowledged, that the influence of the prelates and the clergy was often of great service to the public. Tho’ the religion of that age can merit no better name than that of superstition, it served to unite together a body of men who had great sway over the people, and who kept the community from falling to pieces, from the factions and independant power of the nobles. And what was of great consequence; it threw a mighty authority into the hands of men, who by their profession were averse to arms and violence; who tempered by their mediation the general disposition towards military enterprizes; and who still maintained, even amidst the shock of arms, those secret links, without which it is impossible for human society to subsist.²⁴²

The only repose, which France experienced, was during the festival of Easter, when the King stopped the course of his ravages. For superstition can sometimes restrain the rage of men, which neither justice nor humanity is able to controul.²⁴³

He even indirectly alludes to the possibility that the sentiment of uncorrupted religion could have some efficacy “in fortifying the duties of civil society”.²⁴⁴ After the first 1754 volume Hume has replaced the few oblique strokes of deism with some less oblique strokes of theism.

Sometimes, when he argues in favour of an established church, behind the author of the *History* we can grasp the voice of the narrator in the *Philosophical Essays*: a (Machiavellian) good citizen and politician rather than a good reasoner and disabuser. In 1759, together with the religiously corrected second edition of the first volume of the *History*, Hume published the Tudor

240 Ivi, p. 291. There is “an assembly or synod of all the presbyters of the county”, which is “the highest ecclesiastical court” (*ibid.*). Yet, the magistrates “may take any cause from this court, and determine it themselves” (*ibid.*); they also “name rectors or ministers to all the parishes” and they “may try, and depose or suspend any presbyter” (*ibid.*). There is a “council of religion and learning”, which “inspects the universities and clergy” (ivi, p. 288).

241 Ivi, p. 298.

242 D. Hume, *The History of England, from The Invasion of Julius Cæsar to The Accession of Henry VII*, 2 vols., London, A. Millar, 1762, vol. II, p. 10.

243 Ivi, p. 219.

244 Ivi, vol. I, p. 249.

volumes. Here, like the narrator in *A Dialogue*,²⁴⁵ he takes the matter “a little higher”, and makes a short digression concerning the ecclesiastical state: he reflects on the reasons why “there must be an ecclesiastical order, and a public establishment of religion in every civilized community”,²⁴⁶ and shows how “ecclesiastical establishments, tho’ commonly they arose at first from religious views, prove in the end advantageous to the political interests of society”.²⁴⁷ Yet, it is difficult to take him too seriously, as he offers a provocative solution to the religious affair:

in the end, the civil magistrate will find [...] that in reality the most decent and advantageous composition, which he can make with the spiritual guides, is to bribe their indolence, by affixing stated sallaries to their profession, and rendering it superfluous for them to be farther active, than merely to preserve their stock from straying in quest of new pastures.²⁴⁸

In spite of Adam Smith’s disagreement (the “interested and active zeal of religious teachers [...] must be altogether innocent where the society is divided into two or three hundred, or perhaps into as many thousand small sects”),²⁴⁹ Hume does not change or abandon his solution. In the posthumously published essay “Of the Origin of Government”, accomplished at the end of February 1774, he observes that the “duty” of the clergy “leads them to inculcate morality”, and therefore they “may be justly thought, so far as regards this world, to have no other useful object of their institution” but “the distribution of justice, or, in other words, the support of the twelve judges”.²⁵⁰

Hume seems to be proud of his own invention: the “proper office of Religion”. He puts it in the mouth of Cleanthes and of the author of the apologetic preface and footnote. Like the common saying *corruptio optimi*

245 Hume, *A Dialogue*, cit., 1751, p. 238.

246 Hume, *The History of England, under the House of Tudor*, cit., 1759, vol. I, p. 116. Even here Hume, considering the matter “more closely” (not “at first view”), asserts that the “interested diligence of the clergy [...] in every religion, except the true, it is highly pernicious, and has even a natural tendency to pervert the true, by infusing into it a strong mixture of superstition, folly, and delusion” (*ibid.*). Cf. T. Demeter, *Natural Theology as Superstition: David Hume and the Changing Ideology of Natural Inquiry*, in *Conflicting Values of Inquiry. Ideologies of Epistemology in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by T. Demeter, K. Murphy and C. Zittel, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2014, pp. 176-199: pp. 197-199.

247 Hume, *The History of England, under the House of Tudor*, cit., vol. I, p. 118.

248 Ivi, p. 117.

249 A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols., London, W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776, vol. II, pp. 378-380.

250 D. Hume, *Of the Origin of Government*, in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 2 vols., T. Cadell, London 1777, vol. I, pp. 35-39: p. 35.

pessima (even Swift makes an apologetic use of it),²⁵¹ which is recalled in the Preface (“every thing is liable to Abuse, & the best things the most so”), the “proper office” is properly used by Hume to defend himself; it is something that readers would have enjoyed – perhaps our modern sympathetic readers much more than his diffident contemporaries, even though William Rose on the *Monthly Review* appreciates the “proper office” passage, with some suspicions on Hume’s real intentions (a change of sentiments or a prudential attitude?).²⁵² Several readers quote it, and some discuss it;²⁵³ only few explicitly

251 Hume, “Preface”, cit., p. 306. Hume uses this device in *Of Superstition and Enthusiasm* (“that *the Corruption of the best Things produces the worst*, is grown into a Maxim, and is verify’d among other Instances, by the pernicious Effects of *Superstition* and *Ethusiasm*, the Corruptions of true Religion”), where he shows the political harmful consequences of the two species of “false” religion ([Hume] *Of Superstition and Enthusiasm*, cit., 1741, p. 141); and he uses it again in the *Natural History* (“*corruptio optimi pessima*”), where he maintains that “few corruptions of idolatry and polytheism are more pernicious to political society than this corruption of theism” (Hume, *Natural History*, cit., 1757, IX, p. 63): from the comparison of theism and idolatry and polytheism, we may form some observations that “confirm the vulgar observation, that the corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst” (ivi, X, p. 65; cf. ivi, XI, p. 68). In the *Apology* Swift argues: “Religion they tell us ought not be ridiculed, and they tell us Truth, yet surely the Corruptions in it may; for we are taught by the tritest Maxim in the World, that Religion being the best of Things, its Corruptions are likely to be the worst” (J. Swift, “An Apology”, in *A Tale of a Tub. Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind*, London, J. Nutt, 17105, [pp. 1-22]: p. 6, cf. ivi, [pp. 2, 5, 12]). The maxim is quoted, among others, by Tillotson: “there are some persons as bad, nay perhaps worse, that have been bred up in the christian religion, than are commonly to be found in the darkness of Paganism; for the corruption of the best things is the worst, and those who have resisted so great a light as that of the gospel is, are like to prove the most desperately wicked of all others” (J. Tillotson, *Sermon LXV. The Prejudices against Jesus and his Religion consider’d*, in *The Works Of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson*, 10 vols., Dublin, S. Powell for E. Exshaw, 1739-1740, vol. VI, pp. 47-65: p. 57; cf. *Sermon LXXIX. The Unchangeableness of God*, ivi, pp. 325-339: p. 329).

252 [W. Rose] *Review of the “History of Great Britain, Vol. II”*, “The Monthly Review”, January 1757, Vol. XVI, pp. 36-50. Rose remarks: “We have none of those indecent excursions on the subject of religion [...] which must, no doubt, have given offence to every candid Reader. Whether his restraining the wantonness of his invective, against every denomination of Christians, be owing to a change of sentiments, or to prudential considerations, we shall not here to enquire; but there are several passages in his work that may greatly assist the attentive Reader, in forming a judgment, as to this circumstance: However, let him be heard in vindication of what he had formerly advanced upon the subject” (ivi, p. 36). And, after having quoted the note, the reviewer concludes: “We shall leave our Readers to their own reflections on this” (ivi, p. 38). According to John Brown Hume acknowledged that his irreligious passages “ruined the Sale of his Book”: “a second Volume [...] hath appeared; not a Smack of Irreligion is to be found in it; and an Apology for the first concludes the whole” (Brown, *Estimate*, cit., VI, p. 58).

253 See *infra* Appendix A.

draw its consequences.²⁵⁴ Actually, even if we take him seriously, Hume does not concede too much to religion. Hume has a "good Office" to perform: like his Lucian, he intends to "entirely open [...] the Eyes of Mankind", by his own "great Authority" and "all the Force of Reason and Eloquence"²⁵⁵. But he does not stop there. In 1775 he jocularly delineates one of those events that will "fully establish our Prosperity": "that all the Churches shall be converted into Riding Schools, Manufactories, Tennis Courts or Playhouses. Old as I am, I expect to see [...] [this object] much advanced".²⁵⁶

According to the physician William Cullen, before dying Hume imagines a conversation, in the mode of Lucian's *Kataplous*, and asks Mercury for a delay: "he had been very busily employed in making his countrymen wiser, and particularly in delivering them from the Christian superstition, but that he had not yet completed that great work".²⁵⁷ At first Hume deems this excuse "sufficiently specious", but he soon realizes that Mercury would tell him "it was idle to think of remaining for that purpose as it would be time enough to return for it two or three hundred years hence".²⁵⁸ According to the friend Adam Smith, Hume imagines a dialogue, in the mode of Lucian's *Dialogues of the dead*: "Good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of people; have a little patience only till I have the pleasure of seeing the churches shut up, and the Clergy sent about their business".²⁵⁹ In a less private letter,

254 "Cleanthes, [...] cruelly, does represent Butler here [...] Hume [...] ensured its theological emptiness by destroying the theological bases on which, in Butler's view, its discernment of special religious duties would have to depend. He has made Cleanthes identify true religious morality with secular ethics. [...] Cleanthes is not a literary reproduction of the historical Bishop Butler. But he represents Hume's judgement of the theological emptiness of rational theism, and Hume's willingness to live with rational theism if it remains morally unproductive in practice" (T. Penelhum, *Butler and Hume* [1988], in *Themes in Hume. The Self, the Will, Religion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 244-260: p. 259; cf. Penelhum, *David Hume: An Introduction*, cit., p. 191; T. Penelhum, *God and Skepticism. A Study in Skepticism and Fideism*, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1983, pp. 138-139).

255 D. Hume, "Of Miracles", in *Philosophical Essays*, cit., 1748, pp. 173-203: p. 190.

256 D. Hume to A. Stuart, 1 August 1775, in M. Baumstark, *The end of empire and the death of religion. A reconsideration of Hume's later political thought*, in *Philosophy & Religion in Enlightenment Britain*, a cura di R. Savage, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 257.

257 W. Cullen to W. Hunter, 17 September 1776, *The Correspondence of Dr William Hunter, 1740-1783*, ed. by C.H. Brock, 2 vols., London, Pickering & Chatto, 2008, vol. I, p. 226. Cf. Lucian, *The downward Journey, or the Tyrant*, in *Lucian*, 8 vols, London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1960, vol. II, pp. 2-57: pp. 17-21; cfr. Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis*, London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1925, 3, pp. 374-375.

258 Ibid.

259 A. Smith to A. Wedderburn, 14 August 1776, in *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. by E.C. Mossner and I.S. Ross, Indianapolis, Liberty, 1987, ltr. 163, p. 204.

and the published refined version of the account, Smith slightly changes his version of Hume's "jocular" excuse: "if I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition".²⁶⁰ In both cases Charon's reply is the same: "O you loitering rogue; that wont happen these two hundred years; do you fancy I will give you a lease for so long a time? Get into the boat this instant".²⁶¹

The tendency to "humanize the temper" is commonly ascribed by Hume to learning,²⁶² sciences and liberal arts,²⁶³ rather than religion. The question is whether a philosophy exists (both the sceptical friend in the *Philosophical Essays* and Philo in the *Dialogues* insist that we must examine religion as a "species of philosophy")²⁶⁴ that can restrain our passions? In the *Philosophical essays*, Hume answers that such a philosophy is the sceptical one. Like the passion for religion, the passion for (stoic) philosophy is liable to the "inconvenience" of fostering selfishness:

tho' it aims at the Correction of our Manners and Extirpations of our Vices, it may only serve, by imprudent Management, to foster a predominant Inclination, and push the Mind, with more determin'd Resolution, towards that Side, which already *draws* too much, by the Byass and Propensity of the natural Temper. [...] we may, at last, render our Philosophy, like that of Epictetus and other Stoics,

260 A. Smith to W. Strahan, 9 November 1776, in *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, cit., ltr. 178, p. 219; A. Smith, Letter from Adam Smith, LL.D. to William Strahan, Esq., in *The Life of David Hume, Esq. Written by Himself*, London, W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1777, pp. 39-62: p. 50.

261 A. Smith to A. Wedderburn, 14 August 1776, cit., p. 204. In the official version the "two hundred years" become "many hundred years" (A. Smith to W. Strahan, 9 November 1776, cit., ltr. 178, p. 219).

262 Hume, *History [...] Vol. I*, cit., 1754, p. 303; cf. *ivi*, p. 63.

263 D. Hume, *The Sceptic*, in Id., *Essays, Moral and Political. Volume II*, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid *et al.*, 1742, pp. 139-174: p. 160.

264 Hume, "Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion", 11.27, p. 226 ("All the Philosophy, therefore, in the World, and all the Religion, which is nothing but a *Species of Philosophy*, will never be able to carry us beyond the usual Course of Experience, or give us different Measures of Conduct and Behaviour, from those which are furnish'd by Reflections on common Life"; emphasis added); Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.22, p. 223 ("True religion, I allow, has no such pernicious consequences: but we must treat of religion, as it has commonly been found in the world; nor have I any thing to do with that speculative tenet of Theism, which, as it is a *species of philosophy*, must partake of the beneficial influence of that principle, and at the same time must lie under a like inconvenience, of being always confined to very few persons"; emphasis added). Cf. *ivi*, 1.18, p. 139 ("Locke seems to have been the first Christian who ventured openly to assert, that *faith* was nothing but a species of *reason*; that religion was only a branch of philosophy; and that a chain of arguments, similar to that which established any truth in morals, politics, or physics, was always employed in discovering all the principles of theology, natural and revealed").

only a more refin'd System of Selfishness, and reason ourselves out of all Virtue, as well as social Enjoyment. [...] we are, perhaps, all the while flattering our natural Indolence, which [...] seeks a Pretext of Reason, to give itself a full and uncontroul'd Indulgence.²⁶⁵

“Academic or Sceptical” philosophy seems to be “little liable” to the inconvenience of fostering selfishness, because it “strikes in with no disorderly Passion of the human Mind, non can mingle itself with any natural Affection or Propensity”.²⁶⁶ Given its nature, its advantages are clear:

Nothing [...] can be more contrary than such a Philosophy to the supine Indolence of the Mind, its rash Arrogance, its lofty Pretensions, and its superstitious Credulity. Every Passion is mortify'd by it, except the Love of Truth; and that Passion never is, nor can be carry'd to too high a Degree.²⁶⁷

Yet, sceptical philosophy, which is “harmless and innocent” in “almost” every instance, by “flattering no irregular Passions, it gains few Partizans”, and by “opposing so many Vices and Follies, it raises to itself abundance of Enemies”.²⁶⁸ In the *Dialogues* Philo is clear: “the motives of vulgar superstition have no great influence on general conduct; nor is their operation very favourable to morality, in the instances where they predominate”.²⁶⁹ The *Natural History* is explicit: “the greatest crimes have been found, in many instances, compatible with a superstitious piety and devotion”.²⁷⁰ Likewise, in his last interview with James Boswell, recalling the *Dialogues*, Hume is

265 D. Hume, “Sceptical Solution of these Doubts”, in *Philosophical Essays*, cit., 1748, pp. 69-91: 5.1., pp. 69-70. The steady attention to salvation is “apt” to beget “a narrow, contracted selfishness” (Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.19, p. 222).

266 Hume, “Sceptical Solution of these Doubts”, cit., 5.1., p. 70. According to *The Sceptic* a serious application to the sciences and liberal arts “cherishes those fine Emotions, in which true Virtue and Honour consists”; and a man of taste and learning has such a bent of mind that “must mortify in him the Passions of Interest and Ambition, and must, at the same Time, give him a greater Sensibility of all the Decencies and Duties of Life” (Hume, *The Sceptic*, cit., p. 160). In 1753, Hume adds that a philosophic temper “takes off the edge from all disorderly passions, and tranquilizes the mind” (D. Hume, *The Sceptic*, in *Essays and Treatises on several Subjects*, 4 vols., London, A. Millar / Edinburgh A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1753, vol. I, pp. 226-255: p. 253 n.). A cultivated taste for liberal arts “extinguishes the passions” or rather “improves our Sensibility for all the tender and agreeable Passions” (D. Hume, *Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion*, in *Essays*, cit., 1741, pp. 1-8: p. 6).

267 Ivi, 5.1., p. 70.

268 Ivi, 5.1, pp. 70-71.

269 Hume, *Dialogues*, cit., 12.20, pp. 222-223. The assertion is mitigated by the substitution of “no great” for “little” influence, the addition of “very” before “favourable”, and the omission of “few” before instances (Edinburgh, NLS, MS 23162, f. 82).

270 Hume, *Natural History*, cit., 1757, XIV, p. 108.

supposed to have said “flatly” that “the Morality of every Religion was bad”; he is also supposed to have advanced his own (Baylean) “extravagant reverse” of the common remark on infidels: “when he heard a man was religious, he concluded that he was a rascal, though he had known some instances of very good men being religious”.²⁷¹

Hume the historian declares that he had composed the first volume of his History “*ad populum*, as well as *ad clerum*” and has “thought, that scepticism was not in its place in an historical production”.²⁷² Yet, he is ready to acknowledge scepticism an important role in history by counterfeiting the (enthusiastic) holy fervours and religious ecstasies (in alternative to the familiar motive of interest):

So congenial to the human mind are religious sentiments, that, where the temper is not guarded by a philosophical scepticism, the most cool and determined, it is impossible to counterfeit long these holy fervours, without feeling some share of the assumed warmth: And, on the other hand, so precarious and temporary is the operation of these spiritual views, that the religious extasies, if constantly employed, must often be counterfeit, and must ever be warped by those more familiar motives of interest and ambition, which insensibly gain upon the mind.²⁷³

In 1762 he throws the passage into a footnote and the determined philosophical scepticism disappears: only interest and ambition remain to oppose religious ecstasies.²⁷⁴ Unhappily, not only in Hume’s days, the sceptical solution is the most difficult one, even for a sceptical philosopher and historian, especially when any restraint on the passions and enforcement to morals is particularly required.²⁷⁵

APPENDIX A. SOME OF THE AUTHORS WHO DISCUSS THE “PROPER OFFICE”

271 Boswell, *An Account of my last Interview*, cit., p. 76. Cf. *supra* n. 168.

272 D. Hume to J. Clephane, 1 September 1754, cit., vol. I, ltr. 93, p. 189.

273 Hume, *History [...] Vol. I*, cit., 1754, p. 330.

274 Hume, *History*, 6 vols., cit., 1762, vol. V, p. 323: “So congenial to the human mind are religious sentiments, that it is impossible to counterfeit long these holy fervours, without feeling some share of the assumed warmth”. He also adds that the operation of the spiritual views is “precarious and temporary from the frailty of human nature” (*ibid.*).

275 Even learning (which commonly “tends so much to enlarge the mind, and humanize the temper”), especially if “rude [...] and imperfect”, under certain circumstances may serve “to exalt that epidemical frenzy” which prevail, and “to suppl[y] the dismal fanaticism with a variety of views” (Hume, *History [...] Vol. I*, 1754, cit., p. 303).

J.H. BURTON, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, 2 vols., Edinburgh, W. Tait, 1846, vol. II, pp. 10-11.

W. KNIGHT, *Hume*, W. Blackwood and Sons, 1886, p. 67.

H. CALDERWOOD, *David Hume*, Edinburgh, Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1898, pp. 102-103, 125-126.

C.W. HENDEL, *Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1925, p. 391.

J.Y.T. GREIG, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1931, pp. 217-218.

E.C. MOSSNER, *The Life of David Hume* [1954], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980², pp. 306-307.

J.B. STEWART, *The Morals and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, New York – London, Columbia University Press, 1963, pp. 392-393 n. 34.

E.C. MOSSNER, *The Religion of David Hume*, "Journal of the History of Ideas", vol. 39, no. 4, October-December 1978, pp. 653-663: p. 658.

J.C.A. GASKIN, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* [1978], London, Macmillan Press, 1988², p. 188.

P. JONES, *Hume's Sentiments. Their Ciceronian and French Context*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1982, pp. 79-80.

T. PENELHUM, *God and Skepticism. A Study in Skepticism and Fideism*, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1983, pp. 138-139.

D.W. LIVINGSTON, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 332.

D.W. LIVINGSTON, *Hume's Conception Of True Religion*, in *Hume's Philosophy of Religion. The Sixth James Montgomery Hester Seminar*, Winston-Salem, Wake Forest University Press, 1986, pp. 33-73: p. 62.

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APPENDIX B. THE PROPER OFFICE

1. *Cleanthes's and the "proper office" in the Dialogues concerning natural Religion*²⁷⁶

The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience; and as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives. When it distinguishes itself, and acts as a separate principle over men, it has departed from its proper sphere, and has become only a cover to faction and ambition.²⁷⁷

2. *Hume's new paragraph for The History of Great Britain. Vol. I*²⁷⁸

Sir *, As I am sensible, that a Work intended for the Public can never be sufficiently correct, I cease not making Alterations on all my Writings, either from the Suggestions of my Friends, the Sentiments of the Public, or my own

276 D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural Religion*, ed. by N.K. Smith, London, T. Nelson, 19472, 12.12, p. 220.

277 "The proper Office of Religion is to regulate the Heart [originally: the Hearts] of Men, humanize their Conduct, infuse the Spirit of Temperance, Order, & Obedience; and as its Operation is silent, & only inforces the Motives of Morality & Justice, it is in danger of being overlooked [originally: overlookt], and confounded with these other Motives. When it distinguishes itself, & acts as a separate Principle over Men, it has departed from its proper Sphere, & has become only a Cover to Faction & Ambition" (Edinburgh, NLS, MS 23162, f. 80).

278 D. Hume to J.-B. Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, in J. Vercruysse, *Lettre et corrections inédites de David Hume*, "Dix-huitième Siècle", 2, 1970, pp. 33-37: pp. 35-37. The new paragraph was supposed to be inserted into the second edition of *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I*, before the "Character of the puritans" (D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I. Containing the Reigns of James I. and Charles I.*, Edinburgh, Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, 1754, p. 7), and into the French translation of the first edition, either before the "Character of the puritans" or after a discussion of the religious hatred (ivi, p. 266). One month later Hume writes to Strahan: "I believe, however, you will be of Opinion, that in case of reprinting, I shou'd soften all the Passages, which have given Offence. Nothing vexes me more, than to find how easily that was done. In a quarter of an Hour, after I undertook it, I render'd my History unexceptionable to the most orthodox Bigot" (D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, in H.F. Klemme, "And Time Does Justice to All The World": *Ein unveröffentlichter Brief von David Hume an William Strahan*, "Journal of the History of Philosophy", 29, 4, October 1991, pp. 657-664: pp. 660-661).

Reflections. Here are some Alterations which I propose to make on the first new Edition of my History, and which I thought necessary to communicate to you.

Page. 7. after Line 29, add, beginning a new Paragraph.

The proper Office of Religion is to reform Men's Lives, to purify their Hearts, to enforce all moral Duties, and to secure Obedience to the Laws and civil Magistrate. While it pursues these salutary Purpose[s], its Operations, tho' infinitely precious, are secret and silent; and seldom come under the Cognizance of History. The adulterate Species of it alone, which inflames Faction, animates Sedition, and prompts Rebellion, distinguishes itself in the open Theatre of the World, and is the great Source of Revolutions and public [biffé: civil] Convulsions. It is with regret I find, that that Period of British Annals, which lies before us, will so often give Occasion to remarks the Progress and Operations of this false and misguided Religion.

When the first Reformers attack'd the System of Romish Hierarchy, so guarded by Power, supported by Riches, and sanctify'd by the Precedents of many Ages; no wonder, that many of them, in the Prosecution of so arduous a Task, were, by Opposition, Contest and Persecution, enflam'd with some degree of Enthusiasm. Hence that Rage of Dispute etc.²⁷⁹ [...].

If this letter shou'd come too late to hand for inserting in Page. 7. That Passage beginning with these Words (The proper Office of Religion) and ending with (misguided Religion) be so good as to insert it in Page 266 after Line 26.²⁸⁰ [biffé: There] The History contains so much Satyre against the

279 From "When the first Reformers" to "that rage of dispute", the new paragraph replaces the old one: "The first reformers, who made such furious and successful attack on the romish Superstition, and shook it to its lowest foundations, may safely be pronounced to have been universally inflamed with the highest Enthusiasm. These two species of religion, the superstitious and fanatical, stand in diametrical opposition to each other; and a large portion of the latter must necessarily fall to his share, who is so couragious as to control authority, and so assuming as to obtrude his own innovations upon the world. Hence that rage of dispute, which every where seized the new religionists" (Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I*, cit., p. 7).

280 In this case the new paragraph was supposed to follow this passage: "But the grievances, which tended chiefly to enflame the parliament and nation, especially the latter, were, the surplice, the rails placed about the altar, the bows exacted on approaching it, the liturgy, the breach of the sabbath, embroidered copes, lawn-sleeves, the use of the ring in marriage, and of the cross in baptism. On account of these, were both parties contented to throw the government into such violent convulsions; and to the disgrace of that age and of this island, it must be acknowledged, that the disorders in Scotland intirely, and those in England mostly, proceeded from so mean and contemptible an origin" (Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I*, cit., p. 266).

Absurdity and Barbarities of the several Sects, that such a Sentiment seems very proper to qualify it, and preserve the proper Regard for true Piety.

3. *Hume's Preface to The History of Great Britain. Vol. II*²⁸¹

[Preface]²⁸²

[p. 1] ²⁸³It ²⁸⁴ought to be no matter of Offence²⁸⁵, that in this Volume, as well as in the foregoing, the Mischiefs which arise from the Abuses of Religion, are so often mention'd, ²⁸⁶while²⁸⁷ so little in comparison is²⁸⁸ said of the salutary Consequences which result from true & genuine Piety. The proper Office of Religion is to reform Men's Lives, to purify their Hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, & to secure Obedience to the Laws & civil Magistrate. While it pursues these useful Purposes, its Operations, tho' infinitely valuable, are secret & silent; and seldom come under the Cognizance of History. That adulterate Species of it alone, which inflames Faction, animates Sedition, & prompts Rebellion, distinguishes itself on the open Theatre of the World. Those ²⁸⁹therefore²⁹⁰ who attempt to draw Inferences, disadvantageous to Religion, from the Abuses of it mention'd ²⁹¹by Historians, proceed upon a

281 "Preface by David Hume to vol. II of *History of Great Britain*", in "The Papers of John Maynard Keynes", Cambridge, King's College Archives, University of Cambridge, Ms JMK/PP/87/33. "Draft of Preface to a volume of D. Hume's History - / in David Hume's own hand / found among my father's papers". The Preface was supposed to be prefixed to D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. II. Containing The Commonwealth, and The Reigns of Charles II. And James II*, London, A. Millar, 1757. The text was never prefixed to the volume; but Hume will turn it into a long modified footnote, and this is probably the reason why the title "Preface" is scored out in the manuscript. The final sentence "Whoever in a factious Nation pays Court to neither Party, must expect that Justice will be done him by Time only, perhaps only by a distant Posterity" recalls Hume 1755 letter to Strahan: "I see I must have Patience. I have met with the Approbation of so many Men of Sense & Learning, that I cannot suspect my Pains to be altogether thrown away. I hope I have in London a few Partizans to check the popular current. And time does Justice to all the World" (D. Hume to W. Strahan, 22 March 1755, cit., p. 660).

282 Preface: scored out.

283 The Reader shou'd not be offended: scored out.

284 shoud: scored out.

285 ought to be no matter of Offence: interl. add.

286 &: scored out.

287 while: interl. add.

288 in comparison is: interl. add.

289 sceptics, therefore: scored out.

290 therefore: interl. add.

291 ill Effects arising from the: interl. added and scored out.

very gross & a very²⁹² obvious Fallacy. For besides, that every thing is liable to Abuse, & the best things the most so; the²⁹³ beneficent Influence²⁹⁴ of Religion²⁹⁵ is²⁹⁶ not to²⁹⁷ be sought for in History: That Principle is always the²⁹⁸ more²⁹⁹ pure & genuine, the less figure it makes in those Annals of Wars, &³⁰⁰ Politics, Intrigues, & Revolutions, Quarrels & Convulsions³⁰¹, which is is [sic] the Business of an Historian to record & transmit to Posterity.

It ought as little to be matter of Offence, that no religious Sect is mention'd in this Work³⁰² without being expos'd sometimes to some Note of Blame and Disapprobation. The³⁰³ Frailties³⁰⁴ of our Nature mingle themselves with every thing, in which we³⁰⁵ are employ'd³⁰⁶; and no human Institution³⁰⁷ will ever reach Perfection. The Idea of an infinite Mind, the Author of³⁰⁸ the Universe³⁰⁹ seems at first Sight³¹⁰ to require a Worship absolutely pure, simple, unadorned; without³¹¹ Rites, Institutions, Ceremonies; even without Temples, Priests, or³¹² verbal Prayer & Supplication; Yet has this Species of Devotion been often found to degenerate into the most dangerous Fanaticism.³¹³ When we³¹⁴ have recourse to the Aid of the³¹⁵ Senses & Imagination, in order to adapt our³¹⁶ Religion, in some degree,³¹⁷ to human Infirmary; it is³¹⁸ very

292 a very: interl. add.

293 good Effects: scored out.

294 beneficent Influence: interl. add.

295 are: scored out.

296 is: interl. add.

297 to: interl. add.

298 most: scored out.

299 more: interl. addition

300 &: interl. add.

301 Quarrels & Convulsions: interl. add.

302 mention'd in this Work: add.

303 Infirmities: scored out.

304 Frailties: interl. add.

305 engage: scored out.

306 are employ'd: add.

307 Illegible word: scored out.

308 Nature: scored out.

309 the Universe: interl. add.

310 at first Sight: interl. add.

311 out: interl. add.

312 Litur: scored out.

313 Illegible word: scored out.

314 take: scored out.

315 Aid of the: interl. add.

316 Devotion: scored out.

317 , in some degree,: interl. add.

difficult & almost impossible, to prevent [p. 2] altogether the Intrusion of Superstition, or keep Men from laying too great Stress on the ceremonial & ornamental Parts of their Worship. Of all the Sects, into which Christians have been divided, the Church of England seems to have chosen the most happy Medium; yet will it³¹⁹ undoubtedly allow'd, that during the Age, of which these Volumes treat, there was³²⁰ a³²¹ Tincture of Superstition in the Partizans of the Hierarchy; as well as a strong³²² Mixture of Enthusiasm in their Antagonists. But it is the Nature of the latter Principle soon to evaporate and decay; A Spirit of Moderation³²³ usually³²⁴ succeeds, in a little time,³²⁵ to the Fervors of Zeal: And it must be acknowledg'd, to the Honor of the³²⁶ present³²⁷ Presbyterians, Independants, & other Sectaries of this Island, that they resemble in little more but in Name their Predecessors, who flourish'd during the civil Wars; & who were the Authors of such Disorder. It would appear ridiculous in the Eyes of the judicious Part of Mankind to pretend, that even the first Reformers in most Countries of Europe, did non carry Matters to a most violent Extreme, & were not, on many Occasions, liable to the Imputation of Fanaticism.³²⁸ Not to mention, that uncharitable Spirit, which accompanies Zealots of all kinds, & which led the³²⁹ early Reformers, almost universally,³³⁰ to inflict upon the Catholic, & on all who differed from them, the same Rigors, of which they themselves so loudly complain'd.³³¹

These Hints, however obvious, the Author thought proper to suggest, with regard to the free & impartial Manner, in which he³³² has³³³ treated religious Controversy: He is content to submit to any Censure, if there be found a single

318 is: scored out.

319 it: interl. add.

320 some: scored out.

321 a: interl. add.

322 strong: interl. add.

323 generally: scored out.

324 usually: interl. add.

325 , in a little time,: interl. add.

326 Illegible word: interl. added and scored out.

327 present: interl. add.

328 It would appear ridiculous [...] Imputation of Fanaticism: 1st marg. add.

329 first: scored out.

330 to send the Catholics to Hell, [illegible words] as fast as they were themselves sent thither by their Antagonists: scored out.

331 Not to mention, that [...] so loudly complain'd: 3rd marg. add.

332 is: scored out.

333 has: interl. add.

Passage objected against, to which these Considerations do not afford a compleat Answer.³³⁴ As to the civil & political Part of his Performance, he scorns to suggest any Apology, where he thinks himself intitled to Approbation. To be above the Temptations of Interest is a Species of Virtue³³⁵ which we do not find by Experience to be very common: But to neglect at the same time all popular & vulgar³³⁶ Applause,³³⁷ is an Enterprize much more rare & arduous. Whoever in a factious Nation pays Court to neither Party, must expect that Justice will be done him by Time only,³³⁸ perhaps only by a distant³³⁹ Posterity.

4. *Hume’s footnote to The History of Great Britain. Vol. II*³⁴⁰

This sophism, of arguing from the abuse of any thing against the use of it, is one of the grossest, and at the same time, most common, to which men are

334 He is content [...]compleat Answer: 2nd marg. add.

335 of Virtue: interl. add.

336 & vulgar: interl. add.

337 & to shock establish’d Prejudices: scored out.

338 David Hume (in a different handwriting): scored out.

339 a distant: interl. add.

340 The footnote was published in D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. II. Containing The Commonwealth, and The Reigns of Charles II. And James II*, London, A. Millar, 1757, pp. 449-450n. The footnote is appended to the expression “spirit of irreligion” of the following paragraph: “The abuses in the former age, arising from overstrained pretensions of piety, had much propagated the spirit of irreligion†; and many of the ingenious men of this period lie under the imputation of Deism. Besides wits and scholars by professions, Shaftesbury, Halifax, Buckingham, Mulgrave, Sunderland, Essex, Rochester, Sidney, Temple are supposed to have adopted these principles” (ivi, pp. 449-450). In February 1755 Hume writes: “If it really has been the Tincture of Deism, which has borne me down, nothing can be more unexpected, Shaftesbury, Dr Middleton, Voltaire, Montesq[u]ieu; many others have certainly very much inhandcd their Reputation by Liberties of this kind. I myself owe part of that little Reputation I enjoy to some very strong Attempts of that Nature” (D. Hume to J. Clephane, 18 February 1755, in J.C.A. Gaskin, *Hume’s Attenuated Deism*, in “Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie”, 65, 1983, pp. 160-173: p. 172).

subject. The history of all ages, and none more than that of this period, which is our subject, offers us examples of the abuse of religion; and we have not been sparing, in this volume more than in the former, to remark them: But whoever would thence draw an inference to the disadvantage of religion in general would argue very rashly and erroneously. The proper office of religion is to reform men's lives, to purify their hearts, to enforce all moral duties, and to secure obedience to the laws and civil magistrate. While it pursues these salutary purposes, its operations, tho' infinitely valuable, are secret and silent, and seldom come under the cognizance of history. The adulterate species of it alone, which inflames faction, animates sedition, and prompts rebellion, distinguishes itself on the open theatre of the world, and is the great source of revolutions and public convulsions. The historian, therefore, has scarce occasion to mention any other kind of religion; and he may retain the highest regard for true piety, even while he exposes all the abuses of the false. He may even think, that he cannot better show his attachment to the former than by detecting the latter, and laying open its absurdities and pernicious tendency.

It is no proof of irreligion in an historian, that he remarks some fault or imperfection in each sect of religion, which he has occasion to mention. Every institution, however divine, which is adopted by men, must partake of the weakness and infirmities of our nature; and will be apt, unless carefully guarded, to degenerate into one extreme or other. What species of devotion so pure, noble, and worthy the Supreme Being, as that which is most spiritual, simple, unadorned, and which partakes nothing either of the senses or imagination? Yet is it found by experience, that this mode of worship does very naturally, among the vulgar, mount up into extravagance and fanaticism. Even many of the first reformers are exposed to this reproach; and their zeal, tho', in the event, it proved extremely useful, partook strongly of the enthusiastic genius: Two of the judges in the reign of Charles the second scruples not to advance this opinion even from the bench. Some mixture of ceremony, pomp, and ornament may seem to correct the abuse; yet will it be found very difficult to prevent such a form of religion from sinking sometimes into superstition. The Church of England itself, which is perhaps the best medium among these extremes, will be allowed, at least during the age of archbishop Laud, to have been somewhat infected with a superstition, resembling the popish; and to have payed a higher regard to some positive institutions, than the nature of things, strictly speaking, would permit. It is the business of an historian to remark these abuses of all kinds; but it belongs also to a prudent reader to confine the representations, which he meets with, to that age alone of which the author treats. What absurdity, for instance, to suppose, that the

Presbyterians, Independants, Anabaptists, and other sectaries of the present age partake of all the extravagancies, which we remark in those, who bore these appellations in the last century? The inference indeed seems juster; where sects have been noted for fanaticism during one period, to conclude, that they will be very moderate and reasonable in the subsequent. For as it is the nature of fanaticism to abolish all slavish submission to priestly power; it follows, that as soon as the first ferment is abated, men are naturally in such sects left to the free use of their reason, and shake off the fetters of custom and authority.