

Natural Theology as Superstition: David Hume and the Changing Ideology of Natural Inquiry¹

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Summary

As is frequently emphasized, it was a common conviction of early modern natural philosophers that God had written two books, the Bible and the Book of Nature, and that studying the latter was to study God through his creation. Early modern natural philosophy and modern science are partly distinguished by the former's intimate relation to God: natural philosophers frequently talked with God in mind even when they were not directly talking about him. This is clearly true of many of Hume's contemporaries. In this essay I wish to focus on sections X and XI of Hume's first *Enquiry*, and to argue that their arguments are complementary if read in this context. The former argues against the possibility of founding knowledge claims on revealed religion; the latter argues against the possibility of acquiring knowledge about transcendent matters on the basis of natural inquiry. By challenging the cognitive authority of religion, Hume undermines the dominant ideology of natural inquiry that made sense of contemporary cognitive practices by at least implicit reference to God. Hume's work is therefore ideological in this context: he works to distance cognitive practices from religious epistemic ideals, and argues for replacing them with secular methodological standards. This is the legacy which he contributes to the emerging self-image of modern natural science.

Introduction

Natural theology, or physico-theology as it is sometimes called, was unquestionably an important part of early modern natural inquiry. The need for a

1 I am grateful to Peter Dear, Giora Hon, Ruth Lorand, Thomas Sturm and Gábor Palló and the Castle Hill Reading Group in the Philosophy of Science for helpful comments and discussion. My research was supported by the Hungarian Research Fund (OTKA 79193), and by the European Union and the State of Hungary, co-financed by the European Social Fund in the framework of the TÁMOP-4.2.4.A/2-11/1-2012-0001 'National Excellence Program'.

discipline aimed at an understanding of God through the study of his creation arose from the widespread conviction that the world is the product of God's handwork. As such, God's intentions, attributes, and purposes were taken to be reflected, to some significant degree, not only in the Bible but also in his creation: God had written two books to be studied by different means, i.e. the Bible and the 'Book of Nature'.² As two books ascribed to the authorship of God, knowledge about the world perceived as God's creation had to be reconciled with knowledge contained in Holy Scripture perceived as God's word. In this enterprise the resources of natural philosophy and theology had to be combined so as to reach a joint cognitive purpose: a Christian understanding of the world.

As Stephen Gaukroger points out, this aspiration was especially strong among the 'Royal Society apologists' who, in the aftermath of Robert Boyle and Thomas Sprat, 'were talking of natural philosophy in terms of a religious office, and natural philosophy was taken as a non-partisan way—that is, one free of sectarian confessional issues—of engaging religious questions of divine nature and purpose'.³ Andrew Cunningham, in a similar vein, sees the role of natural theology in early modern natural inquiry as so central that on this basis he denies the continuity of natural philosophy and modern science. Natural philosophy is about God even when its practitioners are not talking about him, a feature entirely uncharacteristic of modern science: 'no-one ever undertook the practice of natural philosophy without having God in mind, and knowing that the study of God and God's creation—in a way different from that pursued by theology—was the point of the whole exercise'.⁴ And even if John Henry's verdict in the debate surrounding Cunningham's thesis may very well be true, namely that '[n]atural philosophers, after all, were not theologians, and would have seen it as a betrayal of their natural philosophical principles to invoke God's direct intervention in their explanations',⁵ the conviction that natural philosophers were studying God's creation provided the basic *ideological framework* of early modern science: this was a background presupposition

2 See Shapin S., *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: 1996) 78.

3 Gaukroger S., *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1680–1760* (Oxford: 2010) 30.

4 Cunningham A., "How the Principia Got Its Name; Or, Taking Natural Philosophy Seriously", *History of Science* 29 (1991) 377–392, here 388. For a discussion see Grant A., "God and Natural Philosophy: The Late Middle Ages and Sir Isaac Newton", *Early Science and Medicine* 5 (2000) 279–298.

5 Henry J., "Voluntarist Theology at the Origins of Modern Science: A Response to Peter Harrison", *History of Science* 54 (2009) 110 n.65.

against which the significance of the enterprise was perceived and the ultimate meaning of its findings was ascribed. This ideology of knowledge was not superadded to the works of knowledge production: it was an intimate and unavoidable part of the framework of intelligibility, and not external to knowledge claims themselves.⁶

This stance concerning the significance of natural philosophy is well reflected in Newton's writings throughout his *oeuvre*. The anti-Cartesian position he elaborated in the 1670s was partly motivated by theological reasons.⁷ As opposed to Descartes's model of the universe that required no intervention for its maintenance,⁸ Newton's model entailed a voluntaristic theology that supplied the world with God's necessary intervention and regulation.⁹ The intimate relation between Newton's natural philosophy and theology is openly formulated as a dictum in the General Scholium first added to the second edition of the *Principia* (1713), where Newton proclaims that 'to treat of God from phenomena is certainly a part of natural philosophy',¹⁰ a view also expressed in an earlier manuscript with methodological implications:

We see the effects of a Deity in the creation and thence gather the cause and therefore the proof of a Deity and what are his properties belongs to experimental Philosophy. 'Tis the business of this Philosophy to argue from the effects to their causes till we come at the first cause.¹¹

As Newton envisaged in Query 31 of the *Opticks* (1721), our knowledge of the 'first cause' gained from natural philosophy would eventually bring along an 'enlargement' of moral philosophy: 'For so far as we can know by natural philosophy what is the first cause, what power he has over us, and what benefits we receive from him, so far our duty towards him, as well as that towards one another, will appear to us by the light of nature'.¹²

6 This is aptly illustrated in the Leibniz-Clark correspondence. See Shapin S., "Of Gods and Kings: Natural Philosophy and Politics in the Leibniz-Clark Disputes" *Isis* 72 (1981) 187–215.

7 Gucciardini N., *Isaac Newton on Mathematical Certainty and Method* (Cambridge, MA: 2009) 15; Snobelen S., "The light of nature': God and Natural Philosophy in Isaac Newton's *Opticks*", unpublished manuscript. (Spanish version: *Estudios de filosofía* 35 (2007) 15–53.)

8 See e.g. Wilson C., *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: 2008) 98–100.

9 Newton Isaac, "De Gravitatione" in *Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: 2004).

10 Newton Isaac, *Philosophical Writings* 92.

11 Newton ms. Add. 3970 (B), fol. 619v. Quoted in Snobelen, "The Light of Nature'".

12 Newton, *Philosophical Writings* 140.

Newton's views on the close connection between theological and natural knowledge were frequently echoed among his early eighteenth-century Scottish followers. George Cheyne in his 1715 *Philosophical Principles of Religion, Natural and Revealed* discusses in two parts the extent of knowledge of God to be gained through the study of nature, and the prospects for coupling the arithmetic of infinities with revealed religion. Although in this work Cheyne was sensitive to the limitations of combining religion with knowledge of nature, he simply perceived the aims and insights of natural philosophy as intrinsically unified with Christian religion.¹³

Perhaps the most original Scottish Newtonian, Colin Maclaurin, in his introduction to Newton's ideas posthumously published in 1748, when Hume's first *Enquiry* was also published, likewise sees the significance of natural philosophy in leading

to the knowledge of the Author and Governor of the universe. To study nature is to search into his workmanship: every new discovery opens to us a new part of his scheme. Our views of Nature, however imperfect, serve to represent to us in the most sensible manner, that mighty power which prevails throughout, acting with a force and efficacy that appears to suffer no diminution from the greatest distances of space or intervals of time; and that wisdom which we see equally displayed in the exquisite structure and just motions of the greatest and subtlest parts. These, with perfect *goodness*, by which they are evidently directed, constitute the supreme object of the speculations of a philosopher; who, while he contemplates and admires so excellent a system, cannot but be himself excited and animated to correspond with the general harmony of nature.¹⁴

This perspective from which nature is perceived as reflecting 'the perfect goodness' of its creator suggests an obvious way of unifying natural and moral philosophy, a way that was taken by some Scottish moral philosophers. Most notable is perhaps George Turnbull's *The Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy* (1740), which makes an attempt to establish the principles on the basis of which moral philosophy can be made out to be continuous with the spirit and content of Newton's *Principia*.¹⁵ Turnbull's central idea is this: regular and orderly appearances are due to the rule of laws in nature, and a

13 See Guerrini A., *Obesity and Depression in the Enlightenment* (Norman: 1999) 85–87.

14 Maclaurin Colin, *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries*, 3rd ed. (London: 1775) 3f.

15 Turnbull George, *The Principles of Moral Philosophy* (Indianapolis: 2005) 48ff.

physical explanation is given if an effect is subsumed under physical laws. Some of these laws are such that they produce 'good, perfection and beauty' in the material world,¹⁶ and an effect is thus accounted for morally if it is shown to be produced by such laws. Explaining phenomena in this way is the *part* of natural philosophy that can be called moral philosophy.

This is the context in which in this paper I wish to read Hume's sections on miracles and particular providence. The intricate connection between these two passages has already been noted,¹⁷ but their historical relevance is most typically detected in the context of religious debates. Here I wish to suggest that in these sections Hume challenges the foundations of those claims of knowledge that concern the connection between the transcendent and natural spheres. This perspective, amply illustrated above, implies the cognitive authority of revealed religion on the one hand, and suggests the transcendent implications of natural inquiry on the other.

Hume has complaints against this view in both respects: in the section 'Of Miracles' he denies that revelation can have relevance for natural inquiry in exploring the ways of nature; 'Of a Particular Providence and Future State' denies the possibility of incorporating natural philosophical insights into the Christian understanding of the world.¹⁸ The lesson is that natural theology is bordering on superstition as Hume understands it, in contrast to philosophy:

superstition is much more bold in its systems and hypotheses than philosophy; and while the latter contents itself with assigning new causes and principles to the phaenomena, which appear in the visible world, the former opens a world of its own, and presents us with scenes, and beings, and objects, which are altogether new.¹⁹

Despite undermining the cognitive authority of religion, Hume leaves open, at least in the first *Enquiry*, the possibility that religion can have non-cognitive but moral value. Therefore Hume's critique of religion in these two sections concerns only the epistemic status of religion, and thereby he contributes to the emergence of a secular ideology of natural inquiry. This is the significance

¹⁶ Turnbull, *Principles* 50.

¹⁷ See e.g. Buckle S., *Hume's Enlightenment Tract: The Unity and Purpose of An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: 2001) 238ff.

¹⁸ Hume David, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1st ed. 1748; Oxford: 2000).

¹⁹ Hume David, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* (1st ed. 1739/40; Oxford: 2007) 1.4.7.13.

of Hume's teaching in the context of contemporary knowledge production that I would like to spell out here.

Revealed Religion and Knowledge of Nature

As his correspondence testifies, Hume originally conceived his argument against the reliability of miracle reports while in discussion with a Jesuit at the time of writing up the *Treatise* in La Flèche around 1735.²⁰ Yet he eventually decided not to include it in the published text, fearing, as he explained in another letter, that it 'will give too much offence'.²¹ Cheyne's work mentioned above may have served as an important inspiration for the critique advanced against testimony on miracles and the argument from design in the *Enquiry* as well as in *Dialogues on Natural Religion*.²²

As Hume sees it, testimony on miracles provides the sole foundation of Christian religion: the 'authority' of both 'scripture and tradition' rests exclusively on the testimony of the apostles.²³ This authority for Hume cannot be anything but *cognitive authority*: a claim of knowledge which must be evaluated in the context of other claims of knowledge, a source of epistemic value to be judged in comparison with other sources. Right from the beginning, Hume discusses miraculous testimony and the questions of religion in a cognitive context, not contemplating the possibility that miraculous testimony or revelation could be a special source of epistemic value that is to be judged by standards different from more common sources of knowledge. Miraculous testimony is placed alongside profane testimony and by Hume's standards they are to be judged uniformly, and therefore testimony, in religious matters is treated just as a special case of the more general problem in the epistemology of testimony.²⁴ The specificity of miraculous testimony in religious matters is due to the fact that 'violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles',²⁵ because 'if the spirit of religion join itself to

20 Letter to George Campbell, 7 June, 1762. In *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T Greig (Oxford: 1932) vol. 1, 361.

21 Letter to Henry Home, 2 December, 1737. In *Letters* vol. 1, 24.

22 Wright J.P., "Dr. George Cheyne, Chevalier Ramsay, and Hume's Letter to a Physician", *Hume Studies* 29 (2003) 125–141, here 129, 137 nn.28 and 29.

23 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.1.

24 On the general epistemological relevance of Hume's section see Gelfert A., "Hume on Testimony Revisited", *Logical Analysis and the History of Philosophy* 13 (2010) 60–75.

25 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.38.

the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority'.²⁶

This exclusively cognitive perspective is also reflected in Hume's recurrent use of the phrase 'system of religion', which is much more frequent in this section than in Hume's other discussions of religious phenomena.²⁷ Given the several other contexts in which Hume uses 'system', he seems to imply that religion is an organized body of knowledge on a par with systems of natural and moral philosophy, and therefore it has to be judged by the same epistemological standards. By these standards, religion counts as a body of empirical knowledge: sacred texts and tradition report natural and historical events that are frequently miraculous; make predictions in the form of prophecies; and provide explanations that are again frequently miraculous. These are all statements on factual matters, and therefore the epistemic value of revealed religion is to be measured by an appeal to the court of experience in front of which miracle reports can be either rejected as falsities or admitted as 'proofs' or 'probabilities'.

The categories of proof and probability in Hume's epistemology are reserved for empirical knowledge claims, and they are contrasted with the certainty of *a priori* truths, that amounts to a 'demonstration'. The difference between proofs and probabilities consists in their different degrees of certainty. Proofs are 'such arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition'²⁸ and laws of nature are supported by such arguments. Probability arises 'where different effects have been found to follow from causes, which are to *appearance* exactly similar'.²⁹ It is to be emphasized that 'proof' and 'probability' are epistemic categories that concern the nature of our knowledge, and not ontic categories that concern the nature of the things in themselves. Therefore, even if we have full proof that an event has occurred in specific circumstances, it may turn out to be otherwise in the future. And similarly, the fact that on the basis of past observation we can only ascribe a certain probability to events arising from causes that are 'to *appearance* exactly similar', does not entail that those events could not be subsumed under strict laws should we inquire further into their hidden constitution or should we have more perfect cognitive faculties.

Now, in front of the court of experience, miraculous testimonies cannot stand a good chance of being accepted as proofs because unanimous experi-

26 Ibidem 10.17.

27 Ibidem 10.35, 36, 38.

28 Ibidem 6. n.10.

29 Ibidem 6.4.

ence speaks against them. Hume defines 'miracle' as 'a violation of the laws of nature', and goes on to say that, since 'a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined'.³⁰ Although Hume draws a distinction between two kinds of extraordinary phenomena, namely the 'miraculous' and the 'marvellous', the two categories, given Hume's definition, seem to merge.³¹ As the famous example of the Indian prince, who refuses on the basis of his past experience to believe that water can be frozen and perfectly hard, seems to suggest, the distinction between the two categories consists in the fact that a miracle is contrary to uniform experience, while a marvel is just 'not conformable to it'.³² The distinction is indeed problematic if miracles, in connection with proof and probability, are discussed as an epistemic category. Given the epistemic conditions of the Indian prince and his society, it may well have been a law of nature supported by unanimous experience that 'water is always in liquid form', and for him the report on the existence of frozen water may legitimately seem miraculous, and not only marvellous.

Given Hume's definition, a system based on miraculous testimony is by definition in epistemic disadvantage if compared to natural philosophical systems that establish the laws of nature by uniform observation and experience. And given that miracles, especially those reported by sacred texts, are typically unique—i.e. a single case reported by a single person—their probability is negligible against the uniform experience that speaks against them. Even if truthfulness could be presupposed as a convention with full compliance

30 Ibidem 10.12. The definition in the main text, which can be taken as Hume's official definition, treats 'miracle' as an epistemic category. There is, however, a more restricted definition given in a footnote (Hume, *Enquiry* 10.12 n.23) which requires that the violation of a law of nature be the consequence of divine intervention: 'A miracle may be accurately defined, *a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent*. A miracle may either be discoverable by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence.' The definition sounds more ontological than epistemic, as it does not involve reference to our epistemic condition. In the present context I am focusing exclusively on the official definition.

31 See the discussion of Joan of Arc in Hume David, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688* (Indianapolis: 1983) vol. II, 398–404.

32 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.10. For a discussion of related problems see Earman J., *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (Oxford: 2000) 34ff. As he puts it, Hume 'was able to create the illusion of a powerful argument by maintaining ambiguities in his claims against miracles' (ibidem 70). It seems to me that the ambiguity of 'miracle' and 'marvel' is the most important.

among members of a community, miracle reports cannot be trusted, because there are several other circumstances: mistakes, misperceptions, and other distortions like the agreeable passions ‘of *surprise* and *wonder*, arising from miracles’³³ whose possibility should make us suspicious as to the truthfulness of a miracle report.

Our reliance on testimony is derived exclusively from ‘our observation of the veracity of human testimony’, namely that we find memory is ‘tenacious to a certain degree’, and that people have ‘an inclination to truth’ and are ‘sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood’.³⁴ But we equally know from experience that there are conflicting testimonies that may arise from the ‘character’ of the witnesses or the ‘manner of their delivering their testimony’.³⁵ All these circumstances are to be weighed while deciding whether to accept a testimony as proof or probability, or reject it altogether. And even if all disturbing circumstances could be eliminated, and therefore a miraculous testimony were to be accepted, there would still be proof against proof—one perfectly reliable testimony against unanimous experience, which at most can entail a ‘mutual destruction of arguments’.³⁶

Our knowledge of the limited reliability of human testimony should make us cautious during the process of evaluating testimonies: we should proportion our belief to the evidence.³⁷ And testimony as evidence is, and should always be vulnerable because of our knowledge of its fallibility. Therefore, when testimony conflicts with past experience that amounts to full proof, testimony is bound to be rejected, no matter who provides it, the apostles, Cato, or whom-ever we may be inclined to trust: ‘The incredibility of a fact [...] might invalidate so great an authority.’³⁸ As Hume’s normative epistemological principle has it, ‘no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish’.³⁹ And given our knowledge of the fallibility of human testimony it is hard to imagine a case like that, and therefore ‘perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all records of history’.⁴⁰

33 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.16.

34 Ibidem 10.5.

35 Ibidem 10.7.

36 Ibidem 10.13.

37 Ibidem 10.4.

38 Ibidem 10.9.

39 Ibidem 10.13.

40 Ibidem 10.36.

As Stephen Shapin has pointed out, Hume's impersonalized standard of testimonial acceptance reflects the changing standards of credibility.⁴¹ For most of the early modern period personal *virtue* was considered to be the foundation of trust in one's testimony: as truthfulness was associated with certain virtues by which certain types of persons could have been identified as reliable. The gentleman was the ideal participant in knowledge-making practices whose virtues like gentility independence, integrity, and identity, in connection with his economic and social status, ensured his reliability. For Hume, however, these features and character traits are irrelevant in evaluating testimonial support for knowledge claims. Although 'integrity' and 'reputation' remain important features of the witness, because they warrant his personal credibility, especially when testimony is given in 'a public manner' so as to make the detection of falsity unavoidable, Hume does not connect these virtues to social status. And what is more important, he places the primary emphasis on 'unquestioned good sense, education, and learning',⁴² which suggests that Hume is inclined to replace personal virtue by *expertise*, thereby gesturing toward the detachment of moral considerations from the cognitive value of testimony.⁴³ Having the moral standing of a prophet or an apostle or Cato contributes little to the credibility of a testimony without being a competent observer.

A competent observer should always be reluctant to accept a miracle report not only because it is potentially always fallible when confronted with full proof, but also because a competent observer must have several methodological precepts in mind that should prevent him from admitting such testimony. Admitting a miracle as empirical evidence would violate sober cognitive norms like that of *explanatory reduction* that suggests we should aim in our cognitive enterprises at subsuming phenomena under a limited number of laws.⁴⁴ This norm arises from the empirical study of human nature that reveals the 'maxim' that the observation of past events is a good guide for our expectations of future and unobserved phenomena.⁴⁵ But if miracles are admitted as real phenomena in nature then the 'whole frame of nature is disjointed,

41 Shapin S., *The Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: 1994) 410ff.

42 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.15.

43 Professional knowledge emerged as a requirement in the Royal Society's practice toward the end of the seventeenth century. See Daston L. – Park K., *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: 1998) 249.

44 See Schliesser E., "Copernican Revolutions Revisited in Adam Smith by way of David Hume", *Revista Empresa y Humanismo* 13 (2010) 213–248.

45 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.16.

and every element performs its operations in a different manner, from what it does at present',⁴⁶ and therefore admitting miracles violates this norm, which has firm foundations not only in the proper methodology of natural philosophy but in human nature itself. Hume's principle of explanatory reductionism recommends parsimony in introducing new principles for new phenomena and fortitude with respect to established explanatory principles, i.e. laws of nature. Against this background, religious accounts of miracles are *par excellence* cases of introducing *ad hoc* and experientially unfounded principles into our explanations, which reliably indicates that these principles are false.⁴⁷

Furthermore, different miracles are admitted in different systems of religion that are inconsistent with one another, because 'the direct scope' of a miracle

is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed; so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on which that system was established; so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other.⁴⁸

This has two consequences. First, a miracle is not a piece of independent evidence that can be treated as such while constructing systems for explaining phenomena. Its only function is to establish a system to which it belongs. The examination of a reported miracle, and its acceptance as veridical, presuppose the system which treats it as a piece of evidence. As Hume puts it in a comment on the manuscript of George Campbell's *Dissertation on Miracles* that attacks Hume's position concerning miracles: 'I never knew any one, that examined and deliberated about nonsense who did not believe it before the end of his inquiries'.⁴⁹ This means that a system of religion is immune to cognitive critique from the outside, and the evidence it relies on can have epistemic value only within the frames of that particular system.

46 Ibidem 10.20.

47 It is a cardinal methodological norm for Hume. See Hume, *Treatise* 2.1.3.6–7. For a discussion see Demeter T., "Hume's Copernican Turn" in Neuber W. – Rahn T. – Zittel C. (eds.), *The Making of Copernicus: Early Modern Transformation of a Scientist and His Science* (Leiden: 2015). On the central role of explanatory reduction and its Newtonian origins see Hazony Y., "Newtonian Explanatory Reduction and Hume's System of the Sciences" in Biener Z. – Schliesser E. (eds.), *Newton and Empiricism* (Oxford: 2014) 138–170.

48 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.24.

49 See Hume's letter to Hugh Blair, 1761, *Letters* 1, 350.

Secondly, but not independently, systems founded on their own peculiar miracles are mutually destructive if evaluated from an independent point of view. We have rival systems with mutually exclusive explanatory and predictive content, but whose comparative evaluation is impossible due to their claiming the relevant evidence to be exclusively theirs and inaccessible to others. This begets a situation in which choice between theories is impossible on the basis of cognitive evaluation. This consequence undermines the methodological credibility of systems of religion in accounting for phenomena, and bestows an epistemic advantage on every system of natural philosophy that keeps an eye on these epistemic norms.⁵⁰

Prima facie it may seem that Hume's methodological ban on accepting miraculous testimony threatens not only the knowledge claims posed by systems of religion, but also the experimental practices of early modern natural philosophy. When Thomas Sprat, an early historian of the Royal Society, proclaimed that miracles are divine experiments, he also implied that experiments conducted by natural philosophers are analogous with them in being contrary to the commonly observed course of nature.⁵¹ As Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park put it, the 'sciences of nature during this period produced and consumed marvels as never before or since' and this practice was combined with the conviction that 'the sciences would thereby grow'.⁵² The practice of experimental natural philosophers entailed the production of phenomena that might seem miraculous and marvellous as Hume understood the terms, i.e. as phenomena contrary or not conformable to uniform experience, and natural philosophers circulated these findings in the form of experimental histories, i.e. testimonies. The production of seemingly miraculous phenomena was conjoined with an appetite for collecting observations of preternatural, outlandish and extraordinary phenomena that 'would serve as an observational approximation of controlled experiments—or rather, as a record of the experiments nature performed on itself'.⁵³ These phenomena were crying out

50 On Hume's methodological preferences see Demeter T., "Hume's Experimental Method", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (2012) 577–599.

51 Sprat T., *The History of the Royal Society of London, for the Improving of Natural Knowledge*, 4th ed. (1st ed. 1667; London: 1734) 352. See also Dear P., "Miracles, Experiments, and the Ordinary Course of Nature" *Isis* 81 (1990) 663–683.

52 See Daston – Park, *Wonders* 215.

53 *Ibidem* 239.

for an explanation and many of them met the epistemic criteria Hume set for miracles and marvels.⁵⁴

Hume, however, allows for the possibility of a miraculous testimony which is 'very extensive and uniform', such that this amounts to a proof. This would have to be a case in which a sufficient number of people with a sufficient degree of credibility testified to some miraculous event:

suppose, all authors, in all languages, agree, that, from the first of January, 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: Suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people: That all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction: It is evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived.⁵⁵

In these, for Hume unlikely, cases the methodological rule is clear: inquire further—unless the event is so unbelievable and contrary to the laws of nature that it does not deserve serious consideration,⁵⁶ which is the case especially when a miracle report is connected to some system of religion.⁵⁷ A successful search for the causes of allegedly miraculous events entails the *Entzauberung* of the miracle, i.e. it entails the event losing its status as a miracle.

For Sprat a miracle seemed to be a more common phenomenon than it was for Hume, because for Sprat 'there are many *Qualities*, and *Figures*, and *Powers* of things, that break the common Laws, and transgress the standing Rules of *Nature*'. But his attitude to such miraculous phenomena is quite consonant with Hume's: their causes are to be explored as 'it is certain that many things, which now seem *miraculous*, would not be so, if once we come to be fully acquainted with their *Compositions* and *Operations*'.⁵⁸ So, Hume's preference for a this-worldly explanation of natural events,

54 See for example Boyle's comment on Cellini's report of having seen a carbuncle (i.e. a gem blazing in the dark) that seems to be equivalent to the Indian prince's case. This is at least marvellous, but if as I have indicated above, the distinction between miracle and marvel is too blurry to maintain, then it counts as miraculous. Yet Boyle is willing to accept Cellini's testimony. See Boyle Robert, "Natural Phosphory" in *The Philosophical Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle* (London: 1725) vol. III, 149.

55 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.36.

56 Ibidem 10.37.

57 Ibidem 10.38.

58 Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* 214.

even if miraculous, was shared by many early modern British naturalists. As Boyle pointed out, invoking a 'supernatural cause' while studying natural phenomena 'will, I fear, look like shifting off the difficulty, instead of solving it; for we here enquire not into the first and universal, but the proper, immediate, and physical cause'.⁵⁹ This preference could easily be extended to miracles reported in the Scripture: it was a possible task of the early modern natural philosopher to understand these events in terms of their secondary causes.⁶⁰

However, Hume dramatically diverged from the followers of Boyle and Newton in the interpretation of such potential explanatory successes: for the former a successful explanation of a miracle meant that the miracle is in fact *explained away* and ceases to be a miracle; for the latter it just meant that the miracle is simply *explained* in terms of the causes by which God had wrought the miracle. But with respect to religious miracles Hume is even more radical. The most fundamental difference between the Royal Society apologists on the one hand, and Hume on the other, reflects different attitudes to the miracles testified by religious tradition. For Hume inquiring into miracles reported by religion is simply pointless—our knowledge of human nature, which is based on history and observation, tells us that 'the violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact; this must diminish very much the authority of the former testimony, and make us form a general resolution, never to lend any attention to it'.⁶¹ By contrast, for Boyle 'a naturalist may safely believe all the miracles attested by the holy scriptures',⁶² and as he says elsewhere, those miracles 'have a peculiar advantage above most other miracles, on the score of their duration: since the manifest proofs of the predictions continue still, and are as visible as the extent of the Christian religion'.⁶³

The main difference between Royal Society apologists and Hume does not consist in the way they suggest miraculous phenomena be treated once they are admitted as phenomena, but in the kind of testimony required for admitting a phenomenon worthy of inquiry. As John Henry points out, a voluntaristic theology that allows for miracles ascribed to God's will is consistent with

59 Boyle Robert, "Experiments and Observations upon Colours" in *The Philosophical Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle* (London: 1725) vol. 11, 44.

60 Henry, "Voluntarism".

61 Hume, *Enquiry* 10.38.

62 Boyle, "Experiments and Observations upon Colours" 44.

63 Boyle Robert, *The Christian Virtuoso*, in *The Philosophical Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle* (London: 1725) vol. 11, 259.

searching for secondary causes⁶⁴—and this is what Hume denies: he does not admit divine miracles as phenomena that deserve to be investigated. Hume sets the threshold for belief in a miracle report higher than most of his predecessors.⁶⁵ For Hume, as we have seen, taking religious testimony seriously presupposes religious belief and we know from experience that testimony arising from religious motivation is highly unreliable. Therefore it cannot serve as a foundation of a system with cognitive aspirations. But belief in revealed religion has no other source, and thus the knowledge claims of revealed religion are disqualified.

Knowledge of God from Knowledge of Nature

The *Enquiry*'s Section XI on particular providence continues to adopt an epistemic perspective on matters of religion, and he repeatedly talks about the 'religious hypothesis' that 'must be considered only as a particular method of accounting for the visible phænomena of the universe' (11.18, see also 21, 26, 27). If compared to the section on miracles, here the epistemic perspective is reverse: Hume is no longer concerned with the epistemic prospects of basing natural knowledge on revealed religion, but with the prospects of distilling knowledge of God from knowledge of nature. In this respect this section is a close relative of Part II of Section VIII, in which Hume discusses the possibility of knowing God through studying human actions. Hume concludes there that studying man with the methods of experimental reasoning is unfit to handle the questions of transcendence, and thus moral philosophy should remain content with 'the examination of common life'.⁶⁶ Hume's attitude in section XI concerning the prospects of knowledge in transcendent matters through natural philosophy is quite similar. Although this section is couched in dialogue form, this fact does not pose a serious problem from the present perspective:

64 Henry, "Voluntarism" 91f.

65 On the appetite for strange facts in the context of Baconian natural philosophy see Daston – Park, *Wonders* 250. They argue that the project of enlarging natural history, collecting counterexamples to received natural philosophical axioms, motivating inventions of art, etc. was the main drive behind lowering the threshold of admitting miraculous phenomena. This situation was to change in the 1730s and 1740s—which is, one could add, reflected in Hume's discussion of miracles.

66 Hume, *Enquiry* 8.36. For a detailed discussion see Demeter T., "Liberty, Necessity and Hume's 'Science of Man'", *History of the Human Sciences* 25 (2012) 15–31.

its methodologically relevant considerations are consonant with Hume's other pronouncements.

As Thomas Holden has recently pointed out, Hume's argument aims to defeat the traditional programme of natural theology, as has been illustrated in the introduction, i.e. 'the program of employing natural reason to work our way to species-specific knowledge of the intrinsic character of the original cause'.⁶⁷ But Hume does not refrain from exploring the limits of the kind of knowledge we may acquire of the original cause, and this exploration may be seen as giving rise to Hume's 'liminal natural theology' that is 'highly unorthodox, negative and irreligious'.⁶⁸

If religion is to be founded on the 'principles of reason',⁶⁹ as opposed to, say, revelation or innate ideas, then these limitations are especially clear. Talking about God and his properties is talk about existence and matter of fact, and in these questions no *a priori* argument can be successful.⁷⁰ Putting revelation on one side, the exploration can only start from the relational characterization of God as the cause of the 'order of nature': 'from the order of the work you infer, that there must have been project and forethought in the workman'. As Hume rightly points out, 'this is an argument drawn from effects to causes',⁷¹ and as such it must conform to the general methodological rules of experimental reasoning.⁷² There is nothing special in the methodological requirements set for natural theology: they are continuous with those of natural and moral philosophy in general, and indeed with the rules of everyday reasoning from which they are refined. Hume's experimental method of finding causes derives from a study of everyday causal reasoning and consists in a more conscious, reflective, and sophisticated application of it. The empirical study of everyday causal reasoning is thus the source of the normative canon of cause-searching which provides the 'logic' equally characteristic to reasoning in moral and natural philosophy—and of course, with a lesser degree of precision and rigour, to everyday reasoning too.⁷³

In the specific context of evaluating the cognitive limitations of natural theological reasoning Hume invokes a set of such rules. First: 'When we infer

67 Holden T., *The Spectres of False Divinity: Hume's Moral Atheism* (Oxford: 2010) 28.

68 Ibidem 46.

69 Hume, *Enquiry* 11.10.

70 Ibidem 4.1–13, 12.28–29.

71 Ibidem 11.11.

72 For a detailed discussion see Demeter, "Hume's Experimental Method".

73 See Serjeantson R., "Hume's General Rules and the 'Chief Business of Philosophers'" in Frasca-Spada M. – Kail P.J.E. (eds.), *Impressions of Hume* (Oxford: 2005) 187–212.

any particular cause from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and can never be allowed to ascribe to the cause any qualities, but what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect'.⁷⁴ This is a rule equally applicable while exploring the properties of 'brute unconscious matter, or a rational intelligent being'.⁷⁵ The practical consequence of this rule is that no property, intention, or motivation can be legitimately ascribed to the original cause that is not required to explain the effects, i.e. the universe. Therefore, it is implied, the traditional properties of the Christian God, like perfect goodness, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence etc., cannot be vindicated on the basis of natural theology, because the world should look quite different if the original cause had all these attributes. Albeit an inference is possible here, it is insufficient to satisfy the aspirations of a Christian natural theology.

Secondly and consequently, the method of analysis and synthesis, which Hume almost explicitly endorses as the universal method of natural and moral philosophies, can have only limited use in religious contexts:⁷⁶

We can never be allowed to mount up from the universe, the effect, to Jupiter, the cause; and then descend downwards, to infer any new effect from that cause [...] The knowledge of the cause being derived solely from the effect, they must be exactly adjusted to each other; and the one can never refer to anything farther, or be the foundation of any new inference and conclusion.⁷⁷

Although the exact terms do not figure here, in contemporary usage the terms 'mounting up' and 'descending' belong to the same family of concepts as 'analysis' and 'synthesis'. Those were applied to the search for causes—and this is indeed the case with Hume's usage as well.⁷⁸ The lesson Hume provides here is that analyzing causes from effects cannot proceed arbitrarily. And particularly, we cannot analyze phenomena into the characteristics of some deity. What we can do is to collect relevant phenomena, find analogies between them and ascribe those analogies to similar causes, thereby reducing a variety of phenomena to regular principles which underlie them, and making the principles

⁷⁴ Hume, *Enquiry* 11.12.

⁷⁵ Ibidem 11.13.

⁷⁶ See Hume, *Enquiry* 8.7–9. For a detailed discussion see Demeter, "Liberty, Necessity and Hume's 'Science of Man'".

⁷⁷ Hume, *Enquiry* 11.14.

⁷⁸ See Jardine L., *Francis Bacon and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: 1974) 249.

so gained perform explanatory work. But our knowledge cannot in any case transcend what we can infer on an analogical basis from the effects themselves.

Moreover, analysis and synthesis on this analogical basis inevitably break down should they be applied in the context of the exploration of God's intrinsic properties. The problem arises from the uniqueness of the relation between cause and effect in this case. Inference to a cause from its effect is possible only if there is a pool of observations with respect to the specific cause-effect relation, without which the cause could not be revealed by an analysis of the relevant analogies. Only in the case of having relevant analogies at hand can 'we mount from the effect to the cause; and descend [...] again from the cause', because without the support of 'a hundred other experiences and observations [...] this method of argument must be considered as fallacious and sophistical'.⁷⁹ There is thus a crucial lack of analogy between studying natural phenomena and studying God, because '[t]he Deity is known to us only by his productions, and is a single being in the universe, not comprehended under any species or genus, from whose experienced attributes or qualities, we can, by analogy, infer any attribute or quality in him'.⁸⁰ Consequently, the methodology of experimental reasoning cannot be fruitfully extended to God, precisely because of his uniqueness. And given that we have no other legitimate way to inquire into questions of existence and matters of fact, we simply have no legitimate way to inquire into the properties of the original cause beyond the empty insight that it was sufficient to cause a world like ours. Therefore 'it is impossible for you to know any thing of the cause, but what you have antecedently, not inferred, but discovered to the full, in the effect'.⁸¹

Thirdly and consequently, what we can in this particular case infer from the effect concerning its cause cannot establish any new explanation of past phenomena or any new prediction of forthcoming events. Hume's argument runs as follows:

If they tell me, that they have mounted on the steps or by the gradual ascent of reason, and by drawing inferences from effects to causes, I still insist, that they have aided the ascent of reason by the wings of imagination; otherwise they could not thus change their manner of inference, and argue from causes to effects; [...] forgetting that they have no reason to

79 Hume, *Enquiry* 11.25.

80 Ibidem 11.26.

81 Ibidem 11.20. See also 11.26 n.31: 'Let the inferred cause be exactly proportioned (as it should be) to the known effect; and it is impossible that it can possess any qualities, from which new or different effects can be inferred'.

ascribe to these celestial beings any perfection or any attribute, but what can be found in the present world. [...] If you come backward, and arguing from your inferred causes, conclude, that any other fact has existed, or will exist, in the course of nature, which may serve as a fuller display of particular attributes; I must admonish you, that you have departed from the method of reasoning, attached to the present subject, and have certainly added something to the attributes of the cause, beyond what appears in the effect.⁸²

Even if an ontological commitment to the original cause cannot be challenged, the enterprise of exploring it through the study of its effect is epistemically infertile because it cannot yield principles for predictive and explanatory success. The experimental method of reasoning can yield no cognitive benefits in this specific case, because we cannot compare various effects and ascribe them to the same cause. We have a unique relation here and we have access only to the effect, and no independent access to its cause—a hopeless epistemic situation.

Hume argues further that taking ourselves as the model of the original cause cannot improve this epistemic situation. We can know from experience the principles which govern human design, inclination, and action, and on the basis of this knowledge we can draw conclusions concerning human conduct. If human intellect had some ‘remote analogy’⁸³ to that of the ‘Supreme Being’, then there would be a pool of observations necessary for experimental reasoning. However, ‘it must evidently appear contrary to all rules of analogy to reason, from the intentions and projects of men, to those of a Being so different’.⁸⁴ Due to the lack of relevant similarities, human intellect cannot serve as an analogue of the original cause adequate for processing by means of experimental reasoning.

Overlooking these limitations of natural theology results in the imagination going wild creating a fictional ‘superlative intelligence and benevolence’ instead of sticking to the only conclusion that reason can provide: ‘Let your gods [...] be suited to the present appearances of nature.’⁸⁵ This is the only way natural theology can proceed for Hume, but as we have seen it does not get very far in this way, and it can turn out be ‘liminal natural theology’ at most: a natu-

82 Ibidem 11.16, 18.

83 One should note that this is quite contrary to what Philo deems plausible in Hume David, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (Cambridge: 2007) 12.7, 33.

84 Hume, *Enquiry* 11.27.

85 Ibidem 11.15.

ral theology that tells us something about what the original cause is not like, but is silent about its intrinsic character. But if Hume's advice is taken, then that prevents us from tormenting ourselves with problems like that of *theodicy*, which arises merely from a 'fruitless industry to account for the ill appearances of nature, and save the honour of the gods; while we must acknowledge the reality of that evil and disorder, with which the world so much abounds'.⁸⁶

As a result of these considerations it is natural to conclude that the traditional programme of natural theology, 'entirely unsupported by any reason or argument, can never be admitted but as mere conjecture and hypothesis'.⁸⁷ The religious hypothesis thus turns out to be a hypothesis in the pejorative sense of the term:⁸⁸ a knowledge claim unsupported by an analysis of phenomena, and therefore it can be listed among the 'speculative dogmas of religion' that arise from philosophy 'allying with superstition'.⁸⁹ By proclaiming natural theology as superstition Hume changes the frame of significance within which meaning can be ascribed to empirical and theoretical findings. In the early modern period an important source of legitimacy of theoretical work that had no practical relevance was that it contributed to the understanding of God.

Hume's challenge questioned this source of legitimacy and he reached a conclusion similar to that offered at the end of Section VIII: reason cannot be extended so as to draw inferences of otherworldly significance. Even if God did write the Book of Nature he did not equip us with the necessary tools of reasoning for reading it that way.

Consequently, Hume implicitly rejects Newton's and the Royal Society's vision concerning the study of God through nature and the enlargement of moral philosophy through our improved knowledge of the first cause. The main lesson Hume offers is that the knowledge we gain from studying the first cause in accordance with sober methodological rules, to which Newton and his followers also assented,⁹⁰ is incompatible with claims of transcendent knowledge. So if we are to stick to the only method of experimental reasoning, which is founded on 'experience and observation and analogy'⁹¹ and excludes

86 Ibidem 11.17.

87 Ibidem 11.26.

88 On the various uses of 'hypothesis' and related terms like 'query' and 'conjecture' see Anstey P., "The Methodological Origins of Newton's Queries", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 35 (2004) 247–269.

89 Hume, *Enquiry* 11.3.

90 See Buckle, *Hume's Enlightenment Tract* 284ff. And also Demeter T., "Enlarging the Bounds of Moral Philosophy: Newton's Method and Hume's Science of Man", in Biener Z. – Schliesser E. (eds.), *Newton and Empiricism* (Oxford: 2014) 171–204.

91 Hume, *Enquiry* 11.30.

revelation and innate ideas, we should change the ideology of natural philosophy: its religious frame of significance is to be replaced by an entirely secular one. In this respect, Hume's moral philosophy is certainly not Newtonian.

The Secular Ideal of Knowledge and Religious Fictionalism

I have emphasized throughout that Hume in these two sections weighs religion on the scale of epistemic value and cognitive reliability. On this scale he finds that revelation fails to report phenomena worthy of investigation, let alone evidence to be relied on, and also that empirical reason does not provide a fruitful way to explore the properties of the original cause. Therefore religion should give up all its knowledge claims, and natural philosophers should give up all their aspirations to reach knowledge of transcendence through the experimental method of reasoning—and there is no other viable way in questions of existence and matters of fact. You cannot have the methods and epistemic standards of natural philosophy *and* reach the conclusions of Christian theism. Knowledge properly so-called can belong exclusively to the secular world.

As we have seen, the edge of Hume's argument in both sections is driven towards those deriving religious belief from 'the principles of human reason',⁹² which does not in itself exclude the possibility of putting religious belief on a different footing. And, as we have seen, he indeed suggests that religious belief is rooted in human nature through the functioning of imagination. Having granted this, religious belief may be a miracle, as Hume suggests,⁹³ by the standards of reason, but it can be accounted for by other principles of human nature, which may suggest that it may have other, non-epistemic functions.⁹⁴

And indeed, while arguing for a secular ideal of knowledge, Hume is not blind to other contexts in which religion may prove to be useful. He contemplates whether religion can have virtues in moral and social respects independently of its poor cognitive performance, and in this context his conclusion is not as straightforward as his epistemic verdict. For the majority of the argument this may not seem to be the case. Section XI starts from the question of whether disputes concerning the origin of the world are 'entirely indifferent to

92 Ibidem 10.40 see also 11.10.

93 Ibidem 10.41.

94 Hume actually gives a quasi-psychological and quasi-sociological account of the origins of religion in Hume D., *The Natural History of Religion in A Dissertation on the Passions; The Natural History of Religion* (Oxford: 2007).

the peace of society'⁹⁵ or 'loosen, in a great measure, the ties of morality'.⁹⁶ In the course of argument he reaches the conclusion that past experience teaches us 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' and therefore 'every advantage is on' the side of the virtuous course of life. Consequently, there is no need beyond this insight for a 'divine existence' that guarantees 'supreme distributive justice' in order to maintain the order of society. Given that the reasoning that could lead us to the conclusion that there is such a divine existence is fallacious, we have no rational reason to believe in its existence and to conduct our actions according to its alleged instructions.⁹⁷

But this is not Hume's last word on the issue. Even if reason cannot vindicate religious precepts of morality and social conduct, the precepts themselves can be useful:

You conclude, that religious doctrines and reasonings *can* have no influence on life, because they *ought* to have no influence; never considering, that men reason not in the same manner you do, but 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 appear in the ordinary course of nature. Whether this reasoning of theirs be just or not, is no matter. Its influence on their life and conduct must still be the same. And 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 society, in one respect, more easy and secure.⁹⁸

Hume here points out the weakness of the argument that religious considerations can have no influence on our conduct because they have no rational grounding that could provide a compelling reason. People do draw conclusions and make predictions from their 'belief of a divine existence', and even if these are ill founded, they still have an advantageous influence on social conduct. Requiring rational foundations for religion is thus the business of 'dangerous friends and disguised enemies to the Christian religion', as they 'put it to such a

95 Hume, *Enquiry* 11.9.

96 Ibidem 11.4.

97 Ibidem 11.20.

98 Ibidem 11.28.

trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure'.⁹⁹ The most important consequence of this line of questioning is the removal of breaks and inhibitions that prevent actions harmful to society.

This position can be considered as a form of *religious fictionalism*.¹⁰⁰ It maintains that even if religious teachings are false, their truth-value is not an important property and therefore their cardinal virtue is not epistemic. Rather, their main virtue consists in some other property, namely in their social utility which is reflected in their contribution to the preservation of society. But even if Hume sees the possibility of a fictionalist position, he does not pursue it very far. This may be due to the intrinsic instability of the religious fictionalist position: A fictionalist disregards the truth-value of religious doctrines as probably false, and therefore he cannot believe in them; yet at the same time he requires action as if the doctrines were true. But if the fictionalist position is accepted, then the truth of religion cannot be part of the motivation for acting according to its commandments, and it is hard to see what else could fill the role of truth here if not the lessons drawn from previous experience concerning the advantages of a virtuous course of life. And where religious doctrine is superfluous, past experience takes over its motivating role. Essentially, religious fictionalism boils down to a Pharisaic position: the fictionalist must keep his wisdom to himself, and recommend trust in religion to everyone else in order to ensure the conformity with moral precepts.

Religious fictionalism is thus not an ally of enlightenment: it can preserve the social advantages of religion only if its truth is disguised behind the curtains of theism. Maybe this is one reason why Hume's position is equivocal concerning the non-cognitive uses of religion. On the one hand, there are passages in his *oeuvre* that insist that 'there must be an ecclesiastical order, and a public establishment of religion in every civilized community'.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, at other places he is clearly sceptical even about the social advantages of religion, and sees the dangers arising from religious zeal and enthusiasm.¹⁰² He goes much further in his letters, for example in the one addressed to Andrew Stuart in 1775, where he claims that if 'all Churches shall be converted into

99 Ibidem 10.40.

100 On fictionalism in general Rosen G., "Problems in the History of Fictionalism" in Kalderon M.E. (ed.), *Fictionalism in Metaphysics* (Oxford: 2005).

101 Hume, *The History of England* vol. III, 134–135. See also the role Hume ascribes to religion in his essay on the 'Idea of a Perfect Government' in Hume David, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller (Indianapolis: 1987) 512–529.

102 Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* offer a more radical and general critique of religion.

Riding Schools, Manufactories, Tennis Courts or Playhouses', it will contribute to 'our Prosperity'.¹⁰³ But in the epistemological context of the *Enquiry* he merely touches upon these issues.¹⁰⁴

Exploring Hume's attitude toward religious fictionalism would transcend the limits of the present paper. What is more important in the present context for a secular ideology of epistemology is that religious fictionalism concedes the cognitive defeat of both revealed and natural religion, and can at most make an instable attempt to save the social advantages of religion. The lesson Hume provides is clear: the failure of religion to meet the epistemic standards of experimental reasoning suggests that it cannot be taken seriously as a system cognitively competitive with natural and moral philosophies. So, whatever other advantages it may have, they must be independent from its epistemic performance.

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103 See the Appendix attached to Baumstark M., "The End of Empire and the Death of Religion" in Savage R. (ed.), *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain* (Oxford: 2012) 256–257.

104 See Hume, *Enquiry* 10.17, 11.29.