

## Natural God or Natural Facts: Enlightenment Attitudes about Natural Religion

During the enlightenment, many thinkers and philosophers had varying beliefs about human autonomy. These different beliefs led to debate about one common component of human existence: nature and the natural abilities of humans. In the Enlightenment context, “Natural Religion” generally refers to what abilities and senses are natural to human beings to guide their behavior.

Among these thinkers was David Hume, who argued that humans are subject to a psychological nature and all human knowledge is based on experience. Of all the major figures from the enlightenment who wrote about natural religion, Hume has by far been the most common individual I have encountered in my preliminary research.

Beginning with “David Hume” by Christopher J. Berry and John Meadowcroft<sup>1</sup>, I started consulting multiple secondary sources. During this process, I encountered several other secondary sources pertaining to the enlightenment. My real challenge however, was locating primary sources especially ones that are in English. Many of the sources I was able to initially locate were in French or other languages and unable to be translated.

After our class meetings with Professor Mixon, I realized that this should not be as big of a problem as I originally thought. Since I was originally attempting structure my research around views opposed to Hume, the bulk of available sources required for that approach were

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher J. Berry, *David Hume* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2013), 10-14, 35-29, 51-57.

not in English. Now that I realize my topic should be narrowed and even centered around Hume, it should not be as difficult to add to the sources I need to complete this.

Many of the sources I have found thus far, expound on the ideas of natural theology and natural theologians. The main concept behind these is the idea that all humans have cognitive functions that are indicative of a God. Since there seem to be several sources that cover natural theology I am considering shifting the focus of my paper slightly. So far, I believe that Hume is the best philosopher to reference on the topic due to his heavy focus on natural religion. Interestingly, Wikipedia has been helpful in directing to me to sources about Hume and Natural Religion.<sup>2</sup>

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy<sup>3</sup> has also been a helpful to for conceptualizing ideas of Natural Religion as they relate to Hume and even some of his skeptics. These sources combined with the suggestions from Professor Mixon, I have been steadily adding to my research. Currently, it appears that there are ample primary and secondary sources to continue with my Hume centered approach.

Although I intend to streamline my research by focusing more on Hume and less on his critics, I am encountering other enlightenment perspectives on Natural Religion that are garnering helpful information.

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<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "David Hume," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David\\_Hume&oldid=1050695288](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&oldid=1050695288) (accessed October 25, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Chignell, Andrew and Derk Pereboom, "Natural Theology and Natural Religion", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/natural-theology>