

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

### Introduction

Enlightenment thinkers generated many theories and questions regarding how the natural capacities of humans were used to establish or disprove the existence of a God. Among these prominent ideologies was natural religion, a doctrine whereby philosophers examined the use of human faculties to explore religious and theological questions.<sup>1</sup> David Hume, an influential enlightenment thinker and philosopher, was known for his controversial ideas regarding natural religion. Hume's assertions concerning natural religion prompted numerous responses from his opponents and supporters, establishing him as one of the most influential philosophers on the topic.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the responses provoked by Hume were detailed in the *Encyclopédie*, a French encyclopedia published between 1751 and 1766 and most famously edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert.<sup>3</sup> It contains entries from numerous writers on various enlightenment thoughts, providing contrast to some of the other major thinkers of the time such as Hume. It is comprised of multiple entries from different authors on natural religion, thereby providing insight as to the common understandings of religion as it pertains to human action and thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Chignell 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/>

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J. Berry. *David Hume*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central. 83-84.

<sup>3</sup> The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Susan Emanuel. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2005. Originally published as "Religion naturelle," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 14:79–83 (Paris, 1765). (accessed November 2, 2021).

Hume's works, when compared with those in the *Encyclopédie*, offer an understanding of how his views influenced other enlightenment thinkers. Specifically, what made his works on natural religion so controversial and how they influenced other philosophers. Comparing and contrasting his thoughts with authors in the *Encyclopédie* can provide a greater understanding of the enlightenment interpretations of natural religion and why he was so influential on the topic.

Many empiricists such as Hume believed that humans are driven by emotions rather than reason,<sup>4</sup> in particular, he argued that if humans could accept and recognize this, there would be greater potential for healthy individual and collective existence.<sup>5</sup> Philosophers who adhered to this doctrine asserted that humans are more reactional to their emotions than deliberate thought.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, working with and mastering emotions would be more important than thought and rational investigation.<sup>7</sup>

Several authors in the *Encyclopédie* were of the opinion that God is the foundation of human existence and the reason for using human senses to serve the interests of that God.<sup>8</sup> However, Hume argues that while positive religious beliefs can motivate humans to do good, the natural qualities of humans have the power to establish and direct their existence and

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<sup>4</sup> With regard to empiricism, it is often considered a philosophy of science and therefore subject to the scrutiny of falsifiability. Not surprisingly, the philosophical critique of scientific method was, and even remains, prevalent in cultures that dominate during a particular time. For British empiricists, many of the pro-rational ideas they were disputing coincided with the hegemony of the British Empire. Reasons for their exploration of these ideas varied from wanting to manage the power of their culture, to identifying what influence it would have on humanity as a whole.

<sup>5</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 14-19.

<sup>6</sup> Trevor Roper, Hugh Redwald, and John Robertson. *History and the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 41-43.

<sup>7</sup> Philipp Blom. *A Wicked Company the Forgotten Radicalism of the European Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. 2010. New York: Basic Books. 162.

<sup>8</sup> The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Susan Emanuel. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2005. Originally published as "Religion naturelle," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 14:79–83 (Paris, 1765). (accessed November 2, 2021).

development for the better.<sup>9</sup> It is this challenge to the relevance of a God that placed Hume's thoughts and beliefs at odds with other philosophers on natural religion.

Hume is known for his implementation of empiricism, skepticism and naturalism.<sup>10</sup> His conceptualization of natural religion frequently contrasted those of many encyclopedists of the time. Mainly his belief that discovery, or the comprehension of ideas through experience, are crucial to determining the legitimacy of an idea.<sup>11</sup> In other words, if one has not experienced something with their own natural senses, how can it be proven legitimate?<sup>12</sup> This was the foundation for his approach to separating what is factual from that which is perceived.

Hume's ideas and analysis were initially disseminated in his book "A Treatise of Human Nature" in which he describes the internal foundation of human nature.<sup>13</sup> Along with other philosophers of the time such as John Locke, Hume espoused the idea that humans obtain knowledge solely through experience.<sup>1415</sup>

We must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures. Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension.<sup>16</sup>

Although his book was not initially successful, it has become a valuable source in understanding his thoughts and the fundamentals of British Empiricism. Not least of which is his

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<sup>9</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Locke had different ideas about tangibility than Hume, but they shared the common belief of individual perception. When situating philosophers within a belief system or school of philosophy, it can vary greatly depending on how they are separated. From a historical perspective, the observation of their motives and reactions is generally an accurate way to classify them. With so many differences and similarities, it is important to understand each philosopher as an individual.

<sup>16</sup> David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. London: Electric Book, 2019.

assertion that humans are inclined to obtain reason from convictions.<sup>17</sup> Meaning that humans make decisions based on the initial appeal of an idea and are motivated to gather supporting evidence for it after the fact.<sup>18</sup> However, Hume did not believe that all emotions were equal and that people had to learn benevolence and patience.<sup>19</sup>

Conversely, Louis chevalier de Jaucourt, a Burgundian scholar, suggested in the *Encyclopédie* that natural religion was first in a set of three principal duties one must fulfill with natural senses to appease God stating:

Man can be considered either as a creature of God or as endowed by his Creator with certain faculties, as much of the body as of the soul, of which the effects are quite different according to the usage made of them. Lastly, man can be considered as a being inclined, indeed obliged to live in society with his fellows, and is even required to do so by his natural condition. The first of these relationships is the true (*propre*) source of all the *duties* of natural law, which are directed at God and are understood by the name of *natural religion*. It is not necessary to assume anything further; a man, finding himself alone in the world would be perfectly able to practice his *duties*, at least the principal ones, from whence all others follow.<sup>20</sup>

This viewpoint operates under the assumption that there is a God and that all of the senses are designed to serve that God's interests. Supposing the existence of a God places Louis chevalier de Jaucourt's ideas in opposition to Hume's. Many philosophers who shared Hume's stance on religion believed that the idea of a vindictive god was a superstition engineered to control others.<sup>21</sup> Religion was something that Hume and many other empiricists generally opposed, claiming that even if rationale and logic were applied, there was no logical proof of a

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<sup>17</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 19-20.

<sup>18</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 72-73.

<sup>20</sup> Jaucourt, Louis, chevalier de. "Duty." *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. Translated by Jeremy Caradonna. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2004. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.271> (accessed [fill in today's date in the form April 18, 2009 and remove square brackets]). Originally published as "Devoir," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 4:915–917 (Paris, 1754)

<sup>21</sup> Blom, *A Wicked Company the Forgotten Radicalism of the European Enlightenment*, 186.

deity.<sup>22</sup> Believing that there may or may not be a god, and if one does exist, it has little or no influence over human autonomy.<sup>23</sup>

Some French encyclopedists viewed religious and theological dilemmas in terms of natural obligations, meaning that adherents of any faith regardless of their God's name, are bound by the natural religion of human nature. One such instance is an entry in the *Encyclopédie* by an unknown author who argues that idolatry of manmade creations and figures is a violation of natural religion:

Theodoret's decision is not judicious, because no one is exempt from this law of natural religion: "One must make reparations, through restitution or other means, for any damage one does to one's neighbors." Abdas, a simple individual and subject of the king of Persia, had ruined his neighbors' property in burning the magi's temple, and this property was all the more valuable in that it belonged to the dominant religion. Moreover, there is no comparison between the construction of a temple and the destruction of several Christian churches. Responding that the rebuilt temple would have served idolatry is of no use, since Abdas himself would not have designated it for this purpose.<sup>24</sup>

According to Hume, achieving a more emotionally aware society and species would require a retraining of sorts.<sup>25</sup> To accomplish this, Hume promoted the idea of an educational system tailored to emotions rather than reason.<sup>26</sup> He also emphasized the importance of public intellectuals who could combine insight with passion.<sup>27</sup> University professors, he argued, were too intellectual and could not incorporate emotional components in their teachings.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 51-53.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremy Gregory. "Introduction: Transforming 'the Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': Or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 287-289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-0208.2009.00211.x>.

<sup>24</sup> "Church Father." *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. Translated by Emily Jane Cohen. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2002. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.336> (accessed [fill in today's date in the form April 18, 2009 and remove square brackets]). Originally published as "Père de l'église," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 12:338-350 (Paris, 1765).

<sup>25</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 83-85.

<sup>26</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 42-44.

<sup>27</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 19-21.

<sup>28</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 7-9.

Skepticism was a major influence behind many empiricist ideas of the time and challenged ideas that were often considered common sense.<sup>29</sup> Hence, Hume and other empiricists suggested that religion is not the product of reason.<sup>30</sup> According to many empiricists of the time, arguing for or against religion avoids the central dilemmas facing humanity.<sup>31</sup> This was a major driving force behind Hume's advocacy for religious toleration and mutual respect between groups and individuals.

### **Historiography**

Contemporary interpretations of natural religion often frame it as a religious doctrine whereby nature itself is treated as a deity.<sup>32</sup> This is sometimes conflated with natural theology which traditionally contended the reality of God based on observable natural facts.<sup>33</sup> For this paper however, natural religion will refer to the enlightenment ideas regarding the role of natural human capacities in relation to a theoretical God. It will establish the contrasts between eighteenth century French enlightenment thinkers and David Hume.

### **Religious Climate in Europe:**

Charly Coleman argues that the widespread interest of European philosophers in observing the extents and limitations of human autonomy was the foundation for religious and theological dialogues during the enlightenment.<sup>34</sup> Coleman also situates this within current

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<sup>29</sup> This presents the issue of what some called rational access, meaning there is a certain degree of rationale required to access certain ideas. At the core of this particular argument is the idea that there are certain facts and physical features of the universe that are not yet comprehensible by humans.<sup>29</sup> Empiricists would in turn be able to argue that these unknowns are the reason that knowledge is gained through experience.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Trevor Roper, Hugh Redwald, and John Robertson. 117-118.

<sup>31</sup> Trevor Roper, Hugh Redwald, and John Robertson. 124-126.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Chignell 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/>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Charly Coleman. "Resacralizing the World: The Fate of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography." *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 2 (2010): 373–75. <https://doi.org/10.1086/651614>.

scholarly discourses on the topic and provides observations about contemporary interpretations. This provides a strong foundation for understanding the climate in Europe during the enlightenment and combines it with the current understandings of philosophical and religious divides.

He also mentions how the recent interest of scholars in examining this dynamic has led to more discussion about secularizing which had long been considered a collapse of traditional beliefs.<sup>35</sup> However, Coleman notes that it has more recently been used to describe theological precursors and that historians need to consider the impact that print media had on things like religious texts and consequently their influence on the spread of ideas.<sup>36</sup> Coleman's observations provide a strong argument for considering the role of technology in the dispersal of thoughts and ideas, as well as what this meant for the control of information.

### **The Role of a God:**

Philipp Blom expounds on this by presenting the frustrations of many enlightenment philosophers in the drifting of religious institutions from their core beliefs. As many of the French encyclopedists argued, if there is a God, that God is best served with the faculties he gifted to his subjects.<sup>37</sup> Blom summarizes this desire of many enlightenment thinkers to use religion as a guideline for human conduct and interaction.<sup>38</sup> This postulates that most thinkers during the enlightenment at least considered the possibility of a God in their arguments, as

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<sup>35</sup> Charly Coleman. "Resacralizing the World: The Fate of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography." *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 2 (2010): 372.. <https://doi.org/10.1086/651614>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Chignell 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/>

<sup>38</sup> Blom, *A Wicked Company the Forgotten Radicalism of the European Enlightenment*, 172-173.

opposed to Hume who believed that a God was irrelevant if humans have autonomy to act on their own free will regardless of a deity.<sup>39</sup>

Blom does differentiate between organized or institutional religions such as Christianity and the belief that there is a deity which is not concerned with the particulars of one's individual life.<sup>40</sup> He even goes as far as to call Christianity a religion of suffering, and makes a comparison of the behaviors and ideas that are considered sacrilegious to other belief systems such as the Romans who were polytheistic.<sup>41</sup> This shows the plausibility of enlightenment interpretations of God or religion not necessarily referring to Christianity but any higher power.

### **Hume's Distinctiveness:**

Christopher J. Berry provides a comprehensive look at what set Hume apart from so many philosophers of the time. Mainly how Hume was less religious and more scientific in most of his approaches to philosophical debates.<sup>42</sup> He especially emphasizes Hume's belief in a focus on the "Science of Man" and that Hume believed all science was in some way related to the human condition.<sup>43</sup> While other philosophers may have shared some of these views, Berry's observation shows it as a basis for Hume's thoughts whereas many encyclopedists would have used a God as the primary motivator behind human actions.

Berry also asserts that Hume believed religion and God were social inventions of human society and that changes and breakthroughs occur when the natural inclination of humans to advance in a particular direction collectively.<sup>44</sup> According to Berry, Hume was a proponent of using natural human inclinations to guide progress and that religious ideas were not necessarily

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<sup>39</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 50-51.

<sup>40</sup> Blom, *A Wicked Company the Forgotten Radicalism of the European Enlightenment*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Blom, *A Wicked Company the Forgotten Radicalism of the European Enlightenment*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 41.



applicable to every person.<sup>45</sup> Berry's overview of Hume's basic ideas with regard to religion provide a better understanding of Hume's rationale and prevent it from seeming so absolute.

### **French Encyclopedists:**

Robert Darnton explains the origin and development of the *Encyclopédie* and what challenges were faced in publishing it. This provides some clarity as to the context and conditions that influenced its creation and what contributors faced when adding their information. Specifically, the alternate and sometimes veiled messages that were engineered to circumvent religious laws or restrictions on texts.<sup>46</sup> Understanding this is important for considering the framing of most entries in context of a God. While this does not automatically make every entry in the *Encyclopédie* facetious, it does require consideration for a certain level of censorship.

Darnton's focus on the creation of the *Encyclopédie* is unique and provides context for the entries by explaining the conditions that influenced their creation. In addition to explaining what challenges were faced in its conception, Darnton also provides information about the state of printing and publishing as a whole in Europe during this time.<sup>47</sup> Having a basic understanding of this is valuable for comprehending the influences this had on the exchange of ideas between philosophers.

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<sup>45</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 41.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Darnton. *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979. 7-9.

<sup>47</sup> Darnton. *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979. 24.

### **Modern Philosophy as a Baseline for Natural Religion**

Rene Descartes is often considered the father of modern philosophy.<sup>48</sup> He was largely a rationalist but he was also a staunch opponent of empiricism.<sup>49</sup> Though he lived during a slightly earlier time than Hume, Berkeley, or Locke his works are very influential in modern philosophy. Descartes' works offer more than just an opposing view to empiricist ideas, they also provide a foundation for the understanding of modern philosophy.<sup>50</sup>

While Descartes' views are contrary to most empiricist ideas, they are necessary for the historian because they can provide insight as to the origins of modern philosophy. Specifically, his ideas reflect western thought in general during the enlightenment period.<sup>51</sup> In addition to his philosophical contributions, he is often credited as being a key figure of the scientific revolution.<sup>52</sup> For the sake of framing historical research within the context of enlightenment, his works provide an abundance of information.

Whereas many empiricists tended to avoid arguments centered on logic, this was the very foundation of Descartes' ideas.<sup>53</sup> Opposition to authority and tradition while favoring experience and reason was one commonality that his views shared with empiricists.<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, he shared a similar disdain for academia as many empiricists and believed solitude was the best way to gain insight.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Jeremy Gregory. "Introduction: Transforming 'the Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': Or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 287–289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-0208.2009.00211.x>.

<sup>51</sup> Dorinda Outram. *The Enlightenment*. 2nd ed. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2005. 130.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 130-131.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>55</sup> Trevor Roper, Hugh Redwald, and John Robertson. *History and the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 36.

Descartes suggested some proof of a benevolent God and that humans were provided with a mind and sensory system that enables individuals to acquire knowledge. However, he generally avoided theological issues and tended to focus on what could be physically proven.<sup>56</sup> This suggests that he had some level of respect for a deity and believed it was to some extent superior to human capacity.

### **Role of Religion in Philosophical Debates**

Determining to what extent natural facilities played into human decision making was often a common point of contention between philosophers.<sup>57</sup> While empiricists may have shared a common belief that human knowledge is formed through experience, they had varying beliefs in the inherent or natural abilities of humans in the decision-making process.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, nature becomes a fairly loose term and is subject to the context in which each philosopher placed it. Often these distinctions were much clearer between theologians and philosophers given that one usually worked within the bounds of a religion and the other did not.

That is not to suggest philosophers did not have religious views, many did, but they generally allowed their thoughts to breach religious doctrine.<sup>59</sup> In the historical context, philosophers and theologians would have likely tested the malleability of prevailing beliefs

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<sup>56</sup>Andrew Chignell 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/>

<sup>57</sup> Many belief systems whether philosophical or religious, frequently use nature as the boundary between the tangible and intangible. Much of the debate regarding this boundary is centered on the natural forces at work versus the controllability of them. Empiricism's basis of experience over logic posits that Hume's view of humans as animals would be most in accordance with core empiricist thoughts. Whereas, Berkeley or Locke suggested more autonomy in decision making.

<sup>58</sup> Empiricists had varying beliefs about the influence of logic on human actions. What remained consistent, was the belief that emotions and perceptions are at the center of human decisions and experiences. It is through this commonality that they can be placed under the category of empiricists. With so many philosophical schools of thought, it can be difficult to differentiate simply based on how they are categorized.

<sup>59</sup> B. W. Young. "Religious History and the Eighteenth-Century Historian." *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 3 (2000): 849–68. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X99001375>.

systems. Historians must consider in retrospect the conditions that theologians and philosophers were operating under. Whether or not they faced persecution for their ideas, or if the societies in which they lived embraced their exploration, one must consider their circumstances.

There is also the issue of what new revelations could inspire or provoke within a society. Hume was particularly critical of the influence that well-established institutions had on society such as academia or religion.<sup>60</sup> Although he did not denounce their existence or usefulness to society, his beliefs regarding what their role should be was very different than what they actually were during his lifetime. Historians should interpret what the social impacts of ideas such as Hume's were on human societies at the time.

Hume argued that beliefs could be justified based on their utility if they provided motivation to accomplish chosen objectives.<sup>61</sup> Whether or not a belief was supported by evidence became irrelevant if the beliefs could create inspiration. This was especially true with regard to ethics, whereby several empiricists believed emotional decisions rather than deliberate thoughts should drive morality. In other words, deliberate thoughts could not accurately guide moral decisions in the same manner as sincere emotions.

British empiricism in particular, challenged rationalism on the basis that logic could not make humans sensitive.<sup>62,63</sup> Without sensitivity, a very brilliant, logical person may be able to make deductions but still not be sensitive to others. Thus, an absence of emotion in logical

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<sup>60</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 10-11.

<sup>61</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 73.

<sup>62</sup> Jeremy Gregory. "Introduction: Transforming 'the Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': Or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 289-302.

<sup>63</sup> Examination of British empiricism as a whole can glean information about the condition of the British Empire at the time. Natural religion therefore could be viewed as a response to logical religious justifications given by society at the time for actions of the collective. Consequently, an analysis of rationalizations given by people with influence would be a philosophically sensible endeavor. In the case of natural religion, it can be explored through philosophy but with different lenses to focus on nature itself or the natural ability of humans.

decisions would defeat the purpose of any suppositions gained through rational thinking. Again, empiricists like Hume believed that this should be cultivated with educational systems rooted in the importance of emotions rather than the advancement of logic.

Hume's philosophy at its core was an evaluation of self which was centered on each individual's assessment of themselves. Essentially, how one's own character can be influenced to bring out the best in themselves and those around them. Ironically, his own philosophical ideas challenged the usefulness of traditional philosophy due to its academic nature. Rather than isolating in intellectual environments, he chose to live amongst others and share the human experience.<sup>64</sup>

Sharing of experience was at the core of empiricism and others such as John Locke promoted the idea that humans are shaped by experience.<sup>65</sup> Because of this, the idea of sharing experiences was theoretically the only way for humans to develop further. According to the basic principles of empiricism, no amount of logic or rationale can substitute actual experience.<sup>66</sup> This was countered by rationalists such as Descartes who argues that senses may detect things that are not actually real such as hallucinations or illusions.<sup>67</sup>

Locke advocated the idea that creating a distinction between these qualities could help identify the source of most disagreements about the world.<sup>68</sup> George Berkeley challenged some of Locke's ideas about qualities. Mainly how qualities could be separated into primary or

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<sup>64</sup> Berry, *David Hume*, 106-109.

<sup>65</sup> Trevor Roper, Hugh Redwald, and John Robertson. *History and the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 110-111.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Chignell 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/>

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Chignell 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/>

<sup>68</sup> Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*. 2nd ed. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2005. 51-53.

secondary. According Berkeley, all qualities about an object were subject to each individual's unique perception and common observations did not necessarily reflect certainty.<sup>69</sup> In short, Berkeley challenged Locke's observations by claiming that primary and secondary qualities are indistinguishable.<sup>70</sup>

Locke believed that humans have no innate ideas at birth, but must determine what the human mind is or is not capable of.<sup>71</sup> He even suggested that labeling an idea as innate was an attempt to shield it from criticism and make it akin to an attack against God.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, he proposed that only facts gained through experiences can be used to establish moralities.<sup>73</sup> Otherwise, individuals would attempt to hide the obvious behind the numinous and prevent dialogue to the contrary.<sup>74</sup>

However, Locke did make a distinction between two basic types of experiences: outer and inner.<sup>75</sup> Outer according to lock, was anything that could be detected with the five senses, inner was the result of introspection.<sup>76</sup> Amalgamation of these two types of experiences therefore generates the components of resulting ideas. According to Locke, these ideas cannot be reduced and have to experienced directly to be understood.<sup>77</sup>

Hence, Berkeley's solution relied on a return to the basic emotional principle of empiricism suggesting that there is no matter, only perceptions.<sup>78</sup> With regard to religion, Berkeley differed greatly from Hume in that he believed "God" was always watching and was

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 32-34.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 134.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 83-88.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 18-22.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 30-31.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 24-27.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

the ultimate perceiver.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the key element amongst many empiricist ideas was the component of perception. Berkeley, Hume and Locke are just a few well known thinkers that pondered the natural abilities of humans, but they demonstrate how opinions within the same school of thought still can differ greatly.

Although many of these philosophers were responding to the pro-rationalism of the time, their ideas were not fundamentally new. As with most philosophical ideas, their origins have largely coincided with the existence of civilization. British empiricism, as the name implies, is a subsequent addition to the existing philosophies of empiricism with contributions from philosophers within the British cultural domain.<sup>80</sup> However, the basic models of empiricism can be traced as far back as the classical period.

### **Conclusion**

Enlightenment thinkers like David Hume and the French encyclopedists had different views but worked under similar circumstances. Although Hume clearly had a different foundation for his work and most of it gained attention posthumously, it is clear that his ideas motivated others to opine on natural religion. Religion either in the form of an institution or as a set of natural abilities, to some degree influenced most eighteenth-century enlightenment thinkers. Whereas Hume sought to promote and develop the general and inherent good nature of humans, several encyclopedists worked with the concept of a God even with sarcasm to defeat the legal and religious limitations of the time.

Hume also did not face the scrutiny or potential for persecution that some Encyclopedists risked with their writings. Since much of his work was published after his death, there were not

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<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Israel. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*. 232-234.

<sup>80</sup> Hugh Hunter. "George Berkeley's Proof for the Existence of God." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (2015): 183–184. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-015-9527-0>.

the same risks that there were for French encyclopedists. This provides some insight as to the conditions encyclopedists were working under but cannot be assumed, meaning that it is important to consider the possibility of genuinely religious thinkers. It is possible that some of the authors in the *Encyclopédie* actually believed that God was the foundation and reason for using natural human senses to fulfill spiritual obligations.



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