Philosophy is one of the world's oldest disciplines. Philosophers often write on topics considered the 'specialization' of other fields. In fact, most other disciplines are historically rooted in the work of philosophy. The major founders of economic and political theory considered themselves philosophers by trade. Literary and art criticism draws heavily from the techniques of philosophers. Thus, philosophy could be considered the 'big picture' discipline.

Of course, philosophy is a discipline, and should be taken for all in all. There are noble heroes, such as Socrates or Mahatma Gandhi, and there are the infamous, like Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche or Nicolo Machiavelli. Philosophy has camps viciously divided within it, as well as fashions and fads of thought. Yet, at the core, philosophy remains a healthy body of work. Critical thought is in the nature of philosophy, and there is no chance for stagnation.

Thus, without further ado, we present the new on-campus student journal APEIRON. The variety of topics discussed in this journal represent only a fraction of the rich dialogue that is philosophy. Nonetheless, we hope this sample will encourage and entertain.

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Smoke still spews forth, but you smelled always, you want it, lavender.

Happy hour, my half empty.

Dance rotations for the crowd, always. Never know but I think of you somehow.

Hume and I walked past the church near the park. Design completion around and I knew some of the things, then there was peace.

I was sitting in one special, heavenly light.

“He’s at it again.”

“Who’s that?”

“Blaise is.

in the street.

“Pascal means that I didn’t, I wasn’t in.

I said waving.

Kara nodded.

window in the air.

“I can’t.

“Suit yourself.”

while I looked.

bread perfectly.

do. I could.

quickly. “I can’t.

I nodded.

“Have you.”

shook my head.

I nod.”
Happy Hour
Jennifer Sutphin

Smoke snaked its way around the bar, not the thick overly scented smoke that spews forth from cigars and cigarettes, but a lighter, whiter vale of smoke, that smelled always of lavender. At least to me it smelled like lavender. Heaven is what you want it to be, down to every detail, even the smoke that, to me, smelled like lavender.

Happy hour had only just begun in the Heavenly Bar and Grill. I slowly turned my half empty glass around and around in my hand. The ice clinked lightly as my rotations forced it into the glass. It wasn’t much to do, but it filled the time as I waited for the club sandwich I’d ordered and tried to ignore the other bar patrons. You never know who will show up here. Kierkegaard debated with himself not far from me something about the absurdity of belief. I was trying not to pay attention to him. Hume and Paley, and there’s a surprise, Swinburne, had settled themselves at a booth near the pool table. I could feel another disagreement about the argument from design coming on. I could only shake my head and go back to twisting my glass around and around. Don’t get me wrong. It’s not that I mind sitting around with some of the great philosophers. There are times when I relish talking to them. And then there are other times, like tonight, when I’d rather have a club sandwich in peace.

I was sipping my drink placidly when Kara walked in. She, like myself, was no one special, an eternal worker bee if you will, helping with the every day running of heavenly life. She saw me and shook her head as she grabbed the chair next to mine. “He’s at it again.”

“Who’s at what again?” I asked.

“Blase is. Going on about some wager or some such thing. Nearly trapped me in the street,” she said as she took a few deep breaths.

“Pascal again?” I asked. “Someone’s got to do something about him.” It was not that I didn’t like Blase Pascal; it’s just that he had a tendency to corner me just when I wasn’t in the mood to talk. “No wonder everyone’s sticking clear of him in here,” I said waving my hand around the room.

Kara nodded, her breathing finally settling down. “Come on...let’s duck out the window in the ladies room. We’ll just miss him if we go now.”

“I can’t. I’ve got a sandwich coming.”

“Suit yourself then,” she said before standing and slipping away into the restroom while I lounged at the bar. My club came a few minutes later, nice and fresh, the bread perfectly toasted. Then just as I was biting into it, Pascal pushed open the bar door. I could tell he was gunning for me when he walked in. He slipped over to me quickly. “Evening to you,” he said. “Have you seen Kara?”

I nodded in response, “You just missed her, she’s off in the bathroom.”

“Have you heard my wager?” he said as he grabbed the chair next to mine. I only shook my head, hoping my indifference might cue him into the fact that I wasn’t real-
ly in the mood to talk. "Let us," he began, "examine this point, and say, 'God is, or He is not.' But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager?"

"That was a lot to take in all at once, Pascal," I said, then paused, to finish my drink. It sounded an awful lot like a probability problem; well, maybe I was game for a probability problem. "Do I have to wager? It seems like the smartest thing to do is not to wager at all." I bit into my sandwich as if to punctuate my statement.

"Yes," he said, "you must wager. It is not optional." He paused, waiting for me to answer.

"All right, so I have to wager," I said, playing along. "What if I wager too much? I wouldn't want to go broke in just one wager."

"If there are as many risks on one side as on the other, the course is to play even; and then the certainty of the stake is equal to uncertainty of the gain, so far is it from the fact that there is an infinite distance between them. And so our proposition is of infinite force, when there is the finite to stake in a game where there are equal risks of gain and loss, and the infinite to gain," he said. Pascal based his point on simple probability. He set up a fifty-fifty shot: either God exists, or He does not, and the chance He does exist is equal to the chance He does not exist. I thought over his proposition as I munched on my club.

Pascal was aiming for an almost win-win situation. If I were to believe in God, and God existed, then according to Pascal, I get the ultimate gain of eternal happiness. I only lose a little bit in the wager, just some temporal pleasures like being able to drink as much as I wanted to. If I were to believe in God and He doesn't exist, then I missed out on getting to run amuck. But as a believer, I had some purpose in my life. If I chose not to believe in God and God doesn't exist, then my gains and losses are small. I'd be allowed to drink, have sex, engage in all the sensory pleasures I wanted to, and I'd only lose the little bit of purpose believers have. The big loss comes in if God does exist and I don't believe in him. I lose eternal happiness, ending up, not as a heavenly paper shuffler, but as part of a kebob on the eternal deep fryer.

"All right," I said to Pascal after polishing off the last of the crust of my sandwich. "I see your point, and it's not half bad. If there's a fifty percent chance that God exists, and if by believing in Him I only lose a little but gain a big eternal reward, then why not believe in him? It makes sense, but what exactly do I have to do to believe? Just announcing I believe doesn't instantly guarantee me eternal rewards."

"At least," he said, "learn you inability to believe... Endeavor to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions." He paused, turning a little to look me more in the eye. "Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions."

"You mean follow other believers until I start to believe myself?"

"These are people who know the way which you would follow," Pascal paused, "and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured."

"Isn't it all a sham though? Playing as if I believe when I really don't?"
“Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believe, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc.”

“I don’t know if I really buy it, Pascal. I mean, he’s God, he’s going to know whether or not I really believe no matter how much holy water I go through.”

Pascal sighed softly, then spoke: “What harm will befall you in taking this side? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory, and luxury; but will you not have others?”

“What others?” I said as I drained my second drink. In retrospect a bar might not have been the best place to have a conversation about giving up temporal pleasures.

“I will tell you,” he said, “that you will thereby gain in this life, and that, at each step you take on this road, you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognize that you have wagered for something certain and infinite.” With that, Pascal took a step back from the bar, and then slowly moved toward the door to head out.

I shook my head as I watched him leave. Pascal was an interesting man. Setting up probability for God was something only he would do. I sat at the bar, turning my glass around in my hand again. I was deep in thought when Mark, my occasional friend and companion, walked in. “Did he talk to you? Did he talk to you yet?” he asked.

“Blase?” I said. His nod confirmed my guess. “Yeah, he just left.”

“I suppose he filled you in on his wager then?” Mark asked. His voice couldn’t hide his excitement at a chance to discuss this wager. He was always one to take up Pascal’s side in a debate. They’d worked together on several heavenly mathematics problems, and Mark had developed a deep respect for the man.

“He did,” I said, biding my time.

“Well, what did you think?” he asked, pausing to order a drink. “It’s a good argument, no?”

“No,” I said, “it’s not a good argument, though it looks like it is the first time you hear it.”

“What do you mean?” he said. “What more could you want in justification for belief? He’s proved that you can’t lose. Even if God doesn’t exist, you still win.”

“You only win if he’s right about it being a fifty-fifty shot, and I don’t think he is.” I paused, seeing a look of consternation come over Mark’s face. “I’m not saying it’s necessarily a bad argument...it really is a good argument if you come into it from the position of someone who already believes in the Christian God. I’m just saying it has a few week points.”

“Like what? Name just one.”

“Don’t be hostile,” I said softly. “I don’t mean to bash the man, only to point out what I’d have done differently.”

“All right,” Mark said after a moment, “go ahead.”

“Well, the argument hinges on God’s existence being a fifty-fifty shot. Either He exists or He doesn’t, with the chance of His existence equal to the chance of His nonexistence. The problem is that real life doesn’t work that way. Pascal assumes only the Christian God exists, but that’s not the only God available. The religious
traditions of the world are so widely varied. That before you can earn eternal rewards for believing in a God who exists, you have to pick the right God, and follow people who believe in that God to demonstrate your belief. Having to pick the right God changes the odds Pascal’s premises rest on,” I said.

Mark took a moment to answer. “Well, really that objection doesn’t work. The odds are still fifty-fifty that a God exists or does not exist. If you were to decide to believe the wrong God existed, you’d still get some gains. Your life would have purpose and you’d be a better person. You’re entitled to the same gain if you believe in the wrong God that you’d get if God doesn’t exist at all and you believed.” He looked pleased with himself as he stumped me.

“Alright, fair point,” I said, “Pascal’s argument was good enough to anticipate that objection. If I picked the wrong God, I’d still get to have purpose in my life and I’d be a better person all around, but there are still a couple things that bother me. The biggest is that belief is necessary to get the eternal rewards.”

“Well, of course belief is necessary,” Mark, said. “Why should God reward those who choose not to believe in him?”

“Maybe because they were good people anyway. Your actions apart from belief have to be considered before eternal rewards are guaranteed. Belief in God does give people purpose in their lives, but it’s not the only thing that gives purpose. Teachers who deal with administrative suppression in public schools have purpose in their lives because they fight to inspire children. Being an inspiration is a great thing, something that should get some sort of reward, even if there’s no belief in God. There are those people who exist solely to do good things for others; they shouldn’t be over looked in the heavenly equation just because they lack faith. A life spent caring for others shouldn’t earn an eternity in the deep fryer just because it lacks faith.” I sat back pleased with myself.

“You do have a point,” Mark reluctantly admitted. “Pascal’s Wager doesn’t have a place for those who do good while not believing in God.”

“There’s really only one other thing that bothers me about the wager,” I said to him.

“What’s that?”

“The last part bothers me. Pascal says that when you start to believe in God, you should follow the example other faithful people set. By going to masses, and praying, and whatever else, you strengthen your faith and become closer to God.”

“Yeah,” Mark said. “That seems to make sense. By acting as a believer you reinforce your faith and become a better believer.”

“Yes, that much I’ll give you,” I said, “but the type of God Pascal is pushing is supposed to be a sort of transcendent creator, who sees all and knows all. Don’t you think God would know you were pretending to believe? If you die before you’ve reinforced your faith enough that you’re a true believer, then aren’t you in the same position as a nonbeliever?”

“I can see what you are getting at,” Mark said, “but you’ve neglected something in your objection. The God Pascal is pushing, the Christian God, has always been thought of as a personal God who’s interested in human affairs.”

“So?” I said.
“So, even though Pascal doesn’t directly state it, if you want to argue that he’s at fault for pushing the Christian God, then you should at least give him some allowances for what that God is believed to do. The personal God Pascal seems to be referring to would make allowances for those who had just found belief as long as they were trying to act like the faithful.”

“I suppose you’ve got a point there, Mark,” I said as he finished his drink. “At least if I am going to attack his choice of God, I should be charitable enough to grant his God the rights and privileges commonly associated with it.”

Mark nodded. “At least think about the wager a little tonight,” he said. “You’ve raised one good objection, but there’s a lot to be said for the rest of the argument.” I gave Mark a nod as he stood up and walked over to join the ebbing argument from design debate by the pool table. I left the bar not long afterward, and strolling through the cloud paved streets in the dwindling rays of moonshine I realized I did have a lot to think about.

The strength of Pascal’s argument is how well it justifies belief. The odds he sets up and the way he plays out his wager do serve to show that there’s not much you can lose by believing. Even if God doesn’t exist, you’re a better person for believing. There’s not much to lose by being faithful, I’ll admit Pascal does a decent job of proving that, but the problem of being a good person without faith will always weaken his argument. There’s just one other thing that weakens his wager: it’s not nearly as logical as it is emotional, though religion is nearly all emotion. The love of God should justify belief, not just some logic problem.

Notes

2 Ibid., 445.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 446.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
David Hume: Inside the Idea of God
Chris Hayden

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, written by the philosopher David Hume in approximately the mid-eighteenth century, is a piece of philosophical literature that will for an indefinite amount of time have a reverberating impact upon those who study it and, more indirectly, upon the world as a whole. In this work of art, Hume struggles with questions surrounding a subject that is perhaps the most mysterious and problematic of any in the history of mankind: God. To achieve his critical analysis of the questions surrounding God, Hume introduces three characters into the dialogue, each of which brings with him a unique integrated philosophical perspective regarding the existence and the nature of God. These three fictitious philosophers then critically engage one another in verbal combat, each supporting his view against the attacks of the others and each attacking the support given for the views of the others. In the fallout of this battle can be found the general principles that Hume seems to have been attempting to convey through this work. Despite Hume’s presentation of these three very different perspectives regarding God, it remains, throughout the text, unclear as to whether all of these views, none of these views, or some number in between are indicative of the actual views held by Hume.

The first character to be discussed is that of Cleanthes. He holds that a God must, of necessity, exist, and offers as a proof an *a posteriori* argument by design that has as its basis the analogy between the universe and a machine. A machine, as humans know it, can be seen to have a specific and well-crafted design, set in motion to carry out a purpose by a certain creator, in this case a human. Seen analogous to this machine, in the eyes of Cleanthes, is the structure and function of the universe as a whole: “Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine...” The universe operates as if it were an infinitely complex contraption, laced to perfection and far superior to any that could be produced by a creature as feeble as man. However, due to the resemblance between the universe and the machine, certain common properties can be inferred. One of these common properties, Cleanthes claims, is that the universe, like a machine, must have an initial creator to bring to it order and purpose and to implement and set in motion the design in order to attain a desired end. This creator is what Cleanthes refers to as God.

As a foundation for such inference, Cleanthes introduces a manner of reasoning very important not only to his arguments, but to the dialogue as a whole and to humanity as well: like causes generate like effects and like effects are generated from like causes. It is based on this principle that Cleanthes goes so far as to not only claim proof of the existence of God, but also that the nature of such a deity can be made known to us through the use of nothing more than pure reason. The machine and the universe can clearly be seen to be the two like effects. The cause of the machine, as well as the nature of this cause, is known to us through experience. It is humans. Humans possess a linear method of thinking, moving from one thought to the next, as if gliding through a mind twill. They impose moral values on the causes and maintain that we prove or disprove existence.”

The conclusion of the presentation of the characters by these characters is God, and the condition of such a comparison is

Cleanthes also introduces two characters, Atomist and Preserver. Preserver has the same moral qualities as Cleanthes in his suffering from a weakness, that of his pacifism and inability to speak in terms of divinity and the like. He is, however, able, but not as much as the previous two. Preserver’s view is that of a world whole, a world whole, and God, which as a whole is finite in his view, into which the maxim “that which sustains the universe is not indifferent” is woven. The fabric of the universe is therefore not malice or indifference, but resembles a design that works through the means of an unknown force.

The second character is that of the existence and the being caused. Preserver offers a *priori* argument by design. Democritus’s belief is that the world is caused by the causes of things, and that when something is being caused by another, it is just existence.

Democritus believes that only two things exist: nature and matter. This is an idea that stretches back from the *Eliptics* and the possibility of such an idea was already substantiated by the infinite success of the *Eliptics*.**
as if gliding on a continuous curve, and never returning to the same exact state of mind twice. Humans also possess, according to Cleanthes, a structured system of moral values. Cleanthes then states that, based on the similarity of the two effects, the causes of the effects must resemble one another and extends to God those attributes that he observes through experience to be human: "...by this argument alone do we prove the existence of a Deity and his similarity to the human mind and intelligence."

The conclusion he reaches is that God, like humans, must have a linear progression of thoughts and a structured system of moral values. However, he holds that these characteristics, so frail in human beings, are infinitely perfect when applied to God, and that God himself is infinitely perfect in every possible manner. At the heart of such a belief is the infinite perfection displayed by the universe when viewed in comparison to that of manmade machinery.

Cleanthes is later forced to revise his beliefs when scrutiny from the opposing two characters of the dialogue reveals several contradictions inherent in his argument. Perhaps the most powerful challenge is that if God is infinitely powerful and has the same moral values as those of human beings, then there should be no evil or suffering present in the universe. However, such is not the case, and thus a contradiction arises: "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?" As Cleanthes is unable to discover a remedy for such a contradiction, two somewhat altered views are proposed as possibilities. The first is that perhaps God, while immensely powerful and perfect in comparison to human beings, is still finite in his characteristics and capabilities. As a result, the universe he designed to the maximum of his capabilities necessarily possesses unavoidable negative aspects which surface to humans as evil and suffering. The second possibility is that the moral values of God in no way mirror those of humanity. Rather, God is somewhat indifferent to both good and evil, and, as a result, both are inherently present in the fabric of the cosmos: "...that [the first causes of the universe] have neither goodness nor malice." Hume leaves it to the reader to decide whether either of these aspects resembles what truly is. It is here that the arguments generated by Cleanthes remain through the end of the dialogue.

The second character is that of the hard-nosed Demea, a dogmatist who holds that the existence of God is a necessary condition for the existence of the universe and offers a priori methods of proving such a belief. Forming the groundwork for Demea’s belief structure is the notion of causality: all things that have been caused by some other things, which themselves must have been caused by yet other things and so forth: "Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence, it being absolutely impossible for anything to produce itself or be the cause of its own existence."

Demea’s application of this principle to the structure of the universe allows for only two viable possibilities. The first is that there is a chain of causes and effects that stretch back ad infinitum for all eternity. Demea, however, rules out the possibility of such a chain being the source of all things on the basis that the chain of infinite succession of causes and effects must itself have a cause and that cause remains
unexplained by and separate from the chain. Hume writes, "...but the whole chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by anything..." The second possibility, and that which Demea contends is necessarily the truth regarding creation of all things, is there must have been an uncaused cause that holds within itself the reason for its own existence. That is, this thing must exist based solely on its nature: "We must, therefore, have recourse to a necessarily existent Being who carries the reason of his existence in himself..." This uncaused cause is what Demea ardently refers to as God. Demea refuses to speculate concerning the nature of this Deity, for he feels that the human capacity of thought and reason is far too feeble to fathom the perfections of God. In no way can those attributes of a finite and imperfect being, such as a human, be extended to an infinite and perfect being, such as God. Demea's idea of God is highly reminiscent of that presented in *Meditations on First Philosophy* by Rene Descartes. It is ascertained purely from reasoning performed in the mind under the guidance of the limited human capability.

As with the view of Cleanthes, Demea's stance is critically scrutinized. Flaws are presented by each of the other characters, but perhaps the most interesting is that presented by Cleanthes. He states that if one were to show several objects to someone and explain to them the reason for being regarding each individual object, it would be quite ludicrous to then pursue the cause further and request to know the reason of being for the sum of the objects. He extends this argument to denounce the reasoning that led Demea to the conclusion that there must be a cause for an infinite chain of events, claiming that the occurrence of each individual event is sufficient to establish all those that follow and to ensure that a previous event has occurred: "...the uniting of these parts into a whole ... is performed merely by an arbitrary act of the mind, and has no influence on the nature of things." Therefore, one need not seek a cause for the sum of the events, for the cause of each individual event is the event that immediately preceded it.

In the face of intense scrutiny from the other two characters, Demea becomes disgruntled in his dogmatism, refusing to admit the fallacies of his reasoning, and departs from the group. His beliefs are subsequently discussed very little and remain throughout the rest of the dialogue only as food for thought in the mind of the reader.

The final, and perhaps most interesting, character presented by Hume in the dialogues is Philo. Philo's role is that of the skeptic and empiricist, accepting nothing as absolute truth that cannot be vindicated through human experience. Throughout the dialogues, Philo Socratically engages the beliefs of both Cleanthes and Demea on every possible level, throwing at them obstacles which they are unable to dodge, and subsequently establishing the equality of many different belief systems regarding the origin of being.

Philo's purpose in this dialogue is primarily to do the aforementioned, that is, to show that many different belief structures are equally valid when applied to the universe, as well as to demonstrate that for any one person to take a dogmatic stance and claim his or her view as the absolute is, through the use of experience and reason, impossible. Lying at the bottom of Philo's mandate is the lack of human experience surrounding divinity of any form. Inherent in the empiricist system is the belief that the basis for all knowledge is the vast majority of our knowledge is in the form of direct perception. The concept of perception is, according to Hume, circularly.

In the first dialogue, Philo admits that the human mind is limited in its ability to understand all things. He suggests that this is not a problem with the world, but with the mind.

The general pattern of the argument (or the dialogue) takes the following form. There may be many similar instances of object or creations having a particular feature. This feature in the universe can be due to a causal agent of creation. However, it is possible that there is no such causal agent, yet the universe is the way it is. Philo lurks considerably more often in the proportional causality (God does not exist) than in the absolute causality (God exists). He even goes so far as to request to believe in the causation of events, not because there is God, but because the events happen. It can be said that the argument resembles the one that Demea himself be Philo.

It seems that the point of this more general discussion is to illustrate the point that God so well, to illustrate the point that God so well, to illustrate the point that God is in fact unfamilily...
the basis for true knowledge is experience, rather than pure reason. Once again, the vast majority, and perhaps even all, of humans have no experience regarding any form of divinity. Therefore, for humans to reach conclusions regarding divinity and state them as fact is an overextension of their capabilities. These conclusions, according to Philo, are nothing more than faith claims and should be treated accordingly.

In the final section of the dialogue, Philo takes an interesting turn. It is here that Philo admits his belief in some form of divine power responsible for the creation of all things. His basis for such a belief is the experience he possesses from interacting with the world around him, and this experience is, ideally, absent of presuppositions. The general form of the belief structure that Philo embraces is very similar to the argument by design proposed by Cleanthes. However, Philo’s version of this argument takes on a much weaker form. Like Cleanthes, Philo states that there seems to be many similarities between certain human creations and the universe. The human creations he is referring to are those of “our art and contrivance.” On this basis, the universe can be considered a contrivance of God, a beautiful, flowing and brilliant creation. However, the distinction made by Philo that is not made by Cleanthes is that there is also considerable difference between human creations, such as art, and the universe. As human creations and the universe are the effects and between them lurk considerable differences, it is also reasonable to assume the causes contain proportional dissimilarity. Therefore, the nature, specifically the moral nature, of God cannot, in any way, be inferred to resemble that of the human being: “...we have reason to believe that the natural attributes of the Deity have a greater resemblance to those of men than his moral have to human virtues.” This argument lies at the foundation of Philo’s belief that it is impossible to know the absolute nature of the deity, because the deity’s attributes are forever shrouded from the view of the human mind. It can be said with some certainty that if any one character in the dialogue that most resembles Hume in ideas and thought was to be chosen, that character would likely be Philo.

It seems that throughout the dialogue Hume attempts to present several much more general ideas regarding religion that are applicable to everyday life. The clearest of these ideas is Hume’s disgust with dogmatism. How can any one man know God so well as to claim that he holds in his hands the absolute truths, which everyone seeks, without having experienced these absolute truths first hand? Hume asserts that such conclusions are impossible to reach through the use of human reason or experience. Therefore, dogmatism is nothing more than a blind faith that people are unwilling to relent, even in the face of significant and irrefutable criticism. Dogmatism is a plague that destroys the correct manner of practicing religion.

Another rather large concept introduced into the dialogues by Hume is the distinction between “true” religion and “false” religion. According to Hume, false religion is practiced by those who accept religion for its surface presentation without any form of contemplation. It is they, believing that they possess absolute truths, that become dogmatists. It is also they who preach one demeanor, yet practice another. For instance, if Christians preach love and acceptance and tolerance, then how can one explain the wars, such as the Crusades, fought against those of a different faith
without admitting that the true decorum of the practiced religion is separate from and different from that which it preaches? Hume argues that it is impossible and the wars are the result of the false practice of religion. He writes, “The steady attention alone to so important an interest as that of eternal salvation is apt to extinguish the benevolent affections, and beget a narrow, contracted selfishness.”

According to Hume, true religion is that which is contemplated and reflected upon, progressively developed throughout a lifetime, and based on experience. Consequently, each person practicing true religion will have a slightly different belief structure. Indeed, a certain degree of skepticism is necessary for the practice of true religion as it is seen through Hume’s eyes, for without such skepticism from where would the necessary contemplation evolve? “To be a philosophical skeptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound and believing Christian.”12 In the end, it seems true religion is that which brings inner peace to a man and inspires peace and love with all who surround him.

The final general concept proposed by Hume is the possibility that atheism and theism are merely two sides of the same coin separated only by a gap, a fissure caused solely by semantics, and this gap is yet to be bridged. “I next turn to the atheist, who, I assert, is only nominally so and can never possibly be in earnest…”13 At the basis of this claim is the presupposition that all humans, regardless of theological views, must admit a first cause of order. This first cause of order to many is explicitly claimed to be God. Atheists claim, however, that the first cause was something other than a divinity. However, Hume states that whatever the atheists’ claims for the first method of order, they can and should be, interpreted as an implicit recognition of some form of God. Thus, the difference between theism and atheism becomes nothing more than a perspective discrepancy.

Despite Hume’s immense effort to cleanse the philosophical writing contained in Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion of presupposition, there is, at the core of some of the arguments, a general theme which cannot be vindicated. One such argument is that in which Hume attempts to explain the divergence of beliefs held by theists and atheists as nothing more than a matter of semantics. In this argument, Hume contends that the atheist must admit some principle of order to have entrenched itself in the fabric of the cosmos and that from that order all things came to be. This, however, is a rather large and unverifiable presupposition. Suppose for a moment that one admits not order beyond the cosmos, but rather sheer and absolute chaos. All things come to be as they are from random chance alone. The order and structure found in the universe are, therefore, only a side effect of a random collection of chance occurrences. Could Hume contend that this chaos is the ordering principle that he so avidly asserts? But how can chaos be an ordering principle? To claim such is the ultimate paradox. Chaos cannot be an ordering principle, for the very thing known as order is, by definition, excluded from chaos. The two are perfect opposites.

The theory of the atheist then becomes that order arose from this chaos to take on its current form as the universe. The atheist attributes this rising of order to a random chain of events that resulted in a temporary form of order that remains forever unstable and will once again, at some future time, return to its origin as sheer chaos. The theist may contend that it would be impossible for order to arise out of random chance, and theist may then argue that theist may then argue that theist may then argue that theist may then argue that theist may then argue that it is impossible for order to arise through random chance.

Therefore, the theist may then argue that theist may then argue that theist may then argue that theist may then argue that theist may then argue that it is impossible for order to arise. Perhaps our universe is capable of being explained by its formations. Change.

This then is the core of the debate. Nonetheless, Hume’s skepticism still remains. Therefore, it seems to me that the validity of the theological presupposition is in question. Hume’s principle, therefore, is valid.

Another argument often presented by theists is that human intellect and intuitions are always incomplete and that our only basis for making sense of the material world is through the obstacle we impose upon ourselves. Our intuitions are limited to what can be perceived by the human senses. Therefore, we cannot know the true nature of the universe. However, this is a presupposition in human sense. Our intellect is limited. Such a belief is an implicit and not an explicit or an explicit and not an implicit one.

It can be both implicit and explicit at the same time. As a matter of fact, one cannot construct an argument that is both implicit and explicit. Therefore, it is impossible to construct an argument that can be both implicit and explicit.

Through this argument, Hume presents his arguments that theism may be easily dismissed as it is based on personal beliefs. Therefore, the theist is a wise one to dismiss theism as it is as equal to atheism. However, it is also true that theism is as equal to atheism. Therefore, it is possible to find a middle ground or to be shrouded by both theism and atheism, Hume concludes.
chance, and that some ordering force is needed to bring order to the chaos. The atheist may then respond that, given infinite time and infinite opportunities, chaos will, through randomness and of necessity, produce all possible results that can arise. Therefore, one must consider the possibility that the chaos may exist for all eternity and that during this eternity the chaos takes on an infinite number of forms. Each of these forms is temporary and eventually recedes back into the disorder from which it arose. Perhaps an infinite number of universes have been spawned from the chaos. Our universe is perhaps a manifestation of such a stasis. Why then is our universe capable of sustaining life? If it were not, we would not be present to ask such questions. Chance has fallen in favor of life as we know it.

This theory proposed by an atheist may seem outlandish and ridiculous to a theist. Nonetheless, it would be impossible for a theist to refute such an argument. Therefore, based on human experience and reason, this argument must hold as much validity as that of the argument for creation by design or any other that is theistic in nature. Hume’s belief that atheists must attribute the universe to some ordering principle, therefore, can not be upheld and must be accepted as opinion at best.

Another presupposition that Hume makes unintentionally, and which is for all intents and purposes unavoidable in the empiricist philosophical structure, is that the only basis for true knowledge is experience. One is posed with several irrefutable obstacles when adopting this philosophical framework. One thing that must be taken into consideration is the foundation of human reason. Perhaps the foundation of human reason is not found in experience, but rather in something beyond the occurrences of the material world that surrounds us. This is the opinion Descartes proposed in his Meditations on First Philosophy. If this is so, then Hume’s attempts to ground reason in experience could be leading him astray rather than closer to truth. Such a belief, much like beliefs surrounding the existence of God, can never be vindicated, and must accordingly be treated as a faith claim rather than factual information.

It can be seen then that no philosophical system can be claimed superior to any other. As a result, each person must choose where his or her faith will be rooted and construct a unique belief structure upon that faith. What it comes to in the end is that it is impossible for any person to claim knowledge of anything with absolute certainty on any basis.

Through his discussion on Natural Religion, Hume has given the world yet another perspective to be read, studied, and contemplated. The power with which he presents his arguments in the dialogues is superlative indeed, and his claims cannot be easily overturned. By remaining neutral to the situation and refusing to state personal beliefs, Hume has only confounded the mystery. Nonetheless, this decision is a wise one indeed, for Hume’s intention clearly was not to promote one view over another. The purpose of the dialogues can be seen to be the claiming of many beliefs as equal to one another. It is only through intense scrutiny and skepticism that one is able to find the unique truths that he or she seeks. God is a concept that will forever be shrouded in mystery. Regardless of views that have passed and views that will come, Hume’s dialogue will always remain a brilliant philosophical presentation.

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 63.
4 Ibid., 75.
5 Ibid., 54.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 55.
8 Ibid., 56.
9 Ibid., 81.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 84.
12 Ibid., 89.
13 Ibid., 80.

One cannot talk about the law and the law should be the law that is law and also has not been the law of persuasion of anything pertaining to anything.

One cannot talk about Aquinas, Plato, or Aristotle from Aquinas' point of view, that is directed towards today, to help him as a thinker for natural law, that is, a thinker for a self-realization.

When the law is a secular partaking of a natural right regards as a law, only in so far that the law, as a God given right, not a natural right. Augustine's view, of order and law.

This is to say that morality in a natural right view, can be seen that nature is law and not that not law. Augustine in so far that the law is in power. Aquinas' view is not as much as Aquinas' view is not as much as to ordain.

The law is that all law is law and that all law is not a fact. That is to say a fact a fact is to reference to