

A History of Philosophy

48 Hume on Religion and Ethics

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Let me start by pointing out that his two major works dealing with religious matters are his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and A Natural History of Religion. The dialogues are really about natural theology, the viability of the classic arguments for the existence of God, ontological, cosmological, and teleological. And the thing is cast in the form of a dialogue with three characters who represent, of course, three different positions, one of them somewhat skeptical, one of them sort of Lockean, and one of them something of a Platonic mystic.

And therefore, you get a very vigorous kind of debate. I don't want to go into the details of the argument. There's some comment on it in Stumpf, and you can explore it more fully if you want to in Coblestone.

I think it needs to be said that this is a full-scale critique of the claims of natural theology, a critique of the arguments as such. There are no theological objections to doing it that way. The objections is that the arguments don't work.

The premises don't logically produce the conclusions. And from Hume's day until this, I think it's fair to say that there has been a mainstream in philosophy of religion which has agreed with that assertion, that the arguments are not sufficiently complete, conclusive, clear enough to prove the existence of a first cause, a rational designer, supremely good, and so forth. Now that's not to say that the arguments don't have any weight at all.

In fact, Hume himself, in the last section of the dialogues, admits that yes, they do have considerable weight, and he seems to think that Cleanthes' position is the one he's most inclined to agree with. Because of the kind of impression, and impression is the word in Hume's technical sense of it, because of the impression that the orderedness of nature, predictability, and so forth, has on us. So that from a rational, logical point of view, while the case is by no means clear, logically complete, it's not demonstrated, we don't have demonstrative knowledge of God, as Locke said, yet there seems to be something there which might evoke belief.

Now, the dialogues are concerned with the logic of belief. But the natural history of religion is concerned with the psychology of belief. And if you like, you can see the relationship between those two as established in the first section of the Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, where he distinguishes between abstruse philosophy, with its attempt at logical proofs, and practical philosophy, the sort of things people live by, you see.

And he intends this to be represented by the distinction between the logical arguments of natural theology and the psychological basis for belief, which he develops in the natural history affair. And just as in the first section of the Inquiry, he says that what we need really is some combination of the two, so he seems to be saying with regard to matters religious. Notice what I said about the conclusion of the dialogues.

They're dealing with the logic of the argument, but at the end, he seems to appeal to the psychology of belief, you see. The logic sort of helps you to get clear about where you stand, although the psychological coercion that's involved in belief doesn't come from the logic. It comes from elsewhere.

So the natural history of religion then is dealing with psychological factors that contribute to belief. He has the view that monotheism developed historically out of an earlier polytheism, belief in one god developed out of a prior belief in many gods. And that, I think, is because he finds polytheism easier to explain.

In terms of some natural psychological development. Because after all, as human beings, we have many different concerns common to all of our lives. We need to eat.

We need food. We need some sort of security, peace, and so forth. So that we have a variety of emotions, dimensions, and areas of emotional life.

And there are aspects of our experience within the world of nature which are likely, therefore, to leave impressions, emotional impressions. Impressions that give rise to the notion of a cause, a being, who is doing this. And so a variety of such concerns, such impressions, a variety of gods.

Polytheism is a natural psychological development. Monotheism only develops, however, when the rational, contemplative comes into play. And reflecting on many gods and so forth seems to give rise to some unanswered questions, possible problems.

Because contemplatively, we recognize that nature has something of an ordered unity about it. Contemplatively, we recognize this. And so we come to think of one being behind the ordered unity.

You know, that's the sort of line of thought that the pre-Socratics went through in metaphysics. Why is there one ultimate rather than many? So he sees that in the dialogues, on the other hand, the teleological argument gets to talking about the ordered unity of things. The response that Hume introduces through one of the other characters is, but it's our idea of a unity that's involved.

How do we know there is that actual unity? It's we who combine the various simple ideas into the complex idea and get a unified world, you see. But while logically you cannot prove the ordered unity of the world, you just know the ordered unity of your idea about the world. Complex ideas are not the originating ideas.

While that's the case, psychologically it's still the fact that reflection on that tends to move us from, and accordingly, that historical development. Monotheism, he feels, is simply a rational conception, a speculative notion. Of natural religion resulting from natural theology.

Monotheism, in that sense, isn't going to affect the imagination and produce those impressions, feelings, and consequently monotheism is likely to give way to some kind of polytheism. Now, historically, how do you get polytheism subsequent to monotheism? Well, he is suggesting that the psychological train would naturally lead there. I think in effect what we have is rather monotheism as it loses its vitality, giving rise to what I would call a secularistic polytheism.

That is to say, a secular society that has its gods. It's the god of money, it's the god of sex, it's the god of power, you see. That sort of thing, loss of any unified worldview.

But in history, the fact is that while natural religion cannot long activate the life, what is needed is that there be some historical account of that one God active in history. Hume says that. And obviously, he is referring to the Christian story of God active in history and the Incarnation.

So his point is that religious belief is produced by things that happen in human experience historically and in everybody's experience that arouse emotions, impressions that give rise to ideas about the cause of what's happening. So, a psychological account of religious belief. In the process of all of that, what Hume has done for the history of thought, the history of religion has been working with for the last 200 years.

Namely, the concern is to reconstruct theistic arguments that are indeed valid. The attempt to reconstruct theistic arguments. Discussion as to what sort of God natural theology points towards.

The problem of evil is much more than previously. Because one of Hume's objections to the teleological argument, arguing from the ordered purposefulness of nature, is that evil represents dis-teleology, lack of order, or at least lack of discernible purpose. And so the problem of evil came increasingly into focus.

The relationship between reason and emotion in religion. Obviously, a crucial question. And that includes the question of the evidential value of religious experience.

Arguing from religious experience. And then finally, the question of the relationship between religion and morality. Because he argues that religion tends to divert people's attention from moral and social issues.

The moral outcomes of religious belief aren't at all uniform. He's not saying there are none, but they're not uniform enough. And that sort of question has given rise to attempts at moral arguments for the existence of God.

Arguments for morality towards the existence of God. So the whole agenda, really, that you get into in the philosophy of religion course, really is an agenda that comes out of Hume's dialogues. The point being that so much of this was taken for granted as effectively handled by the scholastic tradition.

That only gradually did it all re-emerge as in need of fresh attention. Now, the new developments in the philosophy of religion were spurred by Hume. But don't say just Hume, you have to say Hume and Kant.

As we'll see in the next two or three weeks. Because by the time Kant is through with his critique of pure reason, he too has given a resounding critique of rational proofs, logical proofs for the existence of God. And he, too, feels that religious belief is based on something other than logical proofs.

And by the time he's through with his writings on ethics, he's given us a moral argument for the existence of God. And by the time he's through with his writings about aesthetics and the beauty of nature, he's given us an aesthetic argument for the existence of God, but not logical proofs. What he does is something short of proof.

Essentially, he's saying that the only way to explain moral and aesthetic phenomena is by means of the postulate that God exists. In other words, you need theism and a theistic worldview to give an adequate account of moral and aesthetic experience. But we'll see that as we get to Immanuel Kant.

So let me pause there and see if there are things in this you want to toss around for a little while. Yeah, Troy. I was wondering when you said that monotheism develops into polytheism.

Was he looking historically at Christianity and saying it went from Judean strict monisms? To Trinitarianism as a form of polytheism. Yeah, and maybe the development of icons and saints. Or was it strictly just psychological? Yeah, you know, I'd have to double-check the text of the thing to make sure.

I don't recall that in it. So that if I were answering off the cuff, I'd say no, this is simply an extrapolation from his psychological explanation of the rise of polytheism first. But let me check that text and get back to you.

I was wanting to re-read it on Monday morning anyway for another purpose. However, let me add this one other thing. When you get to Hegel, who's certainly no empiricist like Hume.

His agenda is vastly different than Hume's. Hegel sees a historical dialectic at work in the history of religion. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis.

Where the thesis is polytheism, the antithesis is pantheism, and the synthesis, which is the highest form of truth, is Trinitarianism. Yeah, part of that, but the Trinity, three in one, one in three. So the question of the historical development of religion certainly is live in this general period, late 18th, early 19th century, around 1800.

And Hume, I think in a significant way, has a hand in spurring inquiry into the history of religion, which previously had not been an interest. History generally was not an interest prior to about 1800. It's just part of what they call belle lettre, good writing.

The historical method as a science began to develop around 1800. In fact, Hume himself wrote a history of England, which is said to involve historical methods by virtue of which Hume might be called one of the first great historical thinkers. The beginnings of history as a science.

So, well, okay. Now, somebody else. David.

Isn't there a section, even though we can't know causal connections for sure, we can still infer things about the nature of God, because as we look at other things in our experience, we see that by analogy. Yeah, that I think is in the section called On a Particular Providence. Which is about God.

Yeah, and I think that's the same sort of line of thought as you get in the dialogues. Now, when he says infer, he doesn't mean logically demonstrate. In fact, earlier on when he's talking about the fact that we experience constant conjunctions and somehow or other conclude that there's a necessary connection.

And he's already said there's no logical step involved. He uses the word infer for that transition. Infer in those contexts seems to mean a step that the mind takes, which may not be a logical step.

So I think that's the case in that thing on special providence. When you say that people after humankind, in the philosophy of religion, when you say that they're dealing with deep issues, they're trying to establish certainty in these arguments? It

varies. There are some who are trying to provide demonstrative certainty, as Locke would call it.

More generally, the appeal is to probability, which puts them in the evidentialist camp. Probability is the weight of evidence. And a lot depends on the epistemology with which they're working.

Now you're going to be reading about Thomas Reid this next week, the Scottish realist. Reid categorically rejects the theory of ideas and impressions. He denies the whole business of representational knowledge.

We have a direct awareness of material bodies. You see? Which means that you don't argue from the idea of an ordered universe. You argue from an ordered universe.

You see? And consequently, he can be much more positive about the outcomes of that. Now, while Reid gave some lectures on natural theology, he didn't do a lot of work in that area. But that Scottish realist tradition affected a lot of people who did.

There was a Scottish theologian by the name of Robert Flint in the 19th century, very influential. His book, *Theism*, was widely used even 50 years ago. You can check it in the library if you like.

And the Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, whose systematic theology is still studied from about the 1860s. The philosophical framework he's working with is Scottish realism. And so, as you would expect for a Scottish realist, he's much more positive about the theistic arguments than somebody with John Locke's theory or David Hume's theory of ideas.

They think they have certainties to start with. So it varies with that tradition. And I think that it's the Scottish realist tradition, represented perhaps by Charles Hodge, but others who came to America, which shaped the American evangelical apologetic that is oriented towards theistic arguments for the existence of God.

Now there are other kinds of American tradition and apologetics. But it came out of that reaction against Hume on the part of the Scottish realists. And some of you may know that Mark Knoll in the history department has done all sorts of historical research and publishing about the influence of Scottish realism on American evangelicalism.

Essays galore. I'm not sure if he has a book on the subject, but he's got parts of books on the subject. So if you do work with Mark Knoll, okay, you'll get into something of that.

Incidentally, the Wheaton College president, J. Oliver Buswell, who was president, let's see, in the 30s, early 40s, was very much the Scottish realist. Very much the Charles Hodge sort of man. Very much so.

So that influence was pretty evident right here at Wheaton. In fact, when I was an undergraduate here, I studied with a man who had been a student of Oliver Buswell's after Buswell left here and taught in the seminar. So, my introduction to apologetics in college was the Scottish realist type.

From which I have considerably strayed. Yes? This is just something that, with what he was asking about what Hume said, I guess it would be more of the cosmological argument for the existence of God. It seemed to me, well, in this little dialogue he was having with his friend, Hume said, his friend went through this speech and explained how we really couldn't infer God's existence or anything of the sort from our world.

And Hume said, ah, but why not? Because you see a half-built house, you can assume that there's an intelligent builder and that he's going to bring it to completion, and this sort of thing. And his friend answered, yeah, but the reason you can't do that with God is that we're dealing with two different mediums here. We're transferring our earthly knowledge with something we have no idea about.

We don't have any impressions to relate to God. And so in that sense, by Hume giving that friend's answer, whether it's his or not, I don't know, it seems that he said that you couldn't infer any particulars about God. But Hume's answer to that friend's latest reply was, though you may not be outgrassed, you can't infer the particulars that way, but because this is a unique creation or a unique building or whatever, this is something that we've never seen before and have no explanation for, we can infer at least a unique and special creator.

Yeah, now you see, that would be the kind of rational speculation which makes belief plausible. But it wouldn't have the psychological impact that would naturally elicit belief. So you find that in combining the two, he moves from the rational to the psychological.

And when everything's on the table, he always seems to come back to the psychological basis. Yeah. Okay, let's turn to his ethics, shall we? And here, the two main works to keep in mind are, of course, the Treatise on Human Nature, which is his early work when he was in his twenties.

Book Three. I think I said here Part Three, I think he calls it Book Three. Book Three of that is about morality.

And then, later in life, he came up with a shorter work, more in the style of the inquiry concerning human understanding. A shorter work, an easier one that he thought was required because of all the misunderstandings that had arisen about the previous work. An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.

An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. Now, the two, it seems to me, say the same thing very much. Different emphases, perhaps, but very much the same.

And let me start by pointing out that the same basic issue about the relationship between reason and feeling comes up in ethics as in religion and every other area of Hume's thinking. In fact, that is the way in which he introduces the subject in the Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. Is morality founded on reason or on feeling? Is morality founded on reason or on feeling? That's the question.

Now, in order to see what he's trying to get at, two kinds of observations are necessary. One, that when he says feeling, or passion, or sentiment, or says that we seem to have a kind of moral sense, that's the vocabulary he's using, what he's referring to is impressions related to reflection. Now, you remember his theory of impressions, that all ideas are really arising as copies or imaginative productions suggested by original impressions, sense impressions.

So that these ideas, which are copies or which are a result of memory, perhaps imagination, are known by reflection on our own mental states. So I may be reflecting indirectly on my impressions. And these ideas themselves leave impressions, which give rise to further ideas.

You remember that story. Okay. So when he says that he's going to be discussing reason or feeling, passion, sentiment, moral sense, that this is dealing with impressions of reflection, what he's talking about is these impressions.

Yes, sir? Impressions of the ideas that ran through our minds in relation to things in our experience. Plainly then, he's going to give an empiricist account of the origin of moral beliefs, if he's going to follow that route. Moral sentiments are impressions of reflections, resulting from earlier sense impressions and ideas of what is happening or might happen.

Now, sentiments can be calm, calm, or they can be violent. And he develops that distinction in Book II of the Treatise, which is entirely on the passions. Passions can be calm, or they can be violent, so that we have calm feelings about beauty.

But on the other hand, there are violent sentiments, violent passions, like love and hatred, pride and jealousy. Violent. Not in the sense that they're hurting somebody necessarily, but in the sense that they're strong, forceful, rather than the calm, steady satisfaction of beauty.

Now, violent impressions may be a direct response to ideas and impressions that are occurring, like the experiences of pleasure and pain that you're undergoing, and you have feelings about that. Or they may be indirect responses. Indirect responses to experience that are mixed with certain other feelings that we have.

A feeling of pride that is mixed with the experience of what somebody has just said about you. And the feeling that comes out of that is therefore one of these indirect things, because it's mixed with something else. So, what he's doing then in raising this question as to whether morality is based on reason or passion is drawing on his theory of the impressions.

Passions, emotions, sentiments, feelings, they are impressions. Impressions. If you like, second-order impressions.

Now, that's the first thing, to give context to it. Context in his own thinking. The second thing is historical context.

Historical context. Because the question, whether morality is founded on reason or sentiment, was the hot issue in the discussion of ethics in his day. That was the hot issue.

The Enlightenment tradition, of course, had tended to say that ethics is founded on reason. John Locke had said moral knowledge is demonstrative knowledge, just like mathematics. Yes, knowledge has to do with the agreement and disagreement of ideas.

So, if you have the idea of the right to property, which according to Locke is a natural right, it's not an artificial construct, it's a natural right, and if you have the idea of theft, then simply by comparing those two ideas, you find that there is disagreement between them, and you know that theft is therefore in violation of the right to property. And so, moral knowledge is simply relations of ideas knowledge. Demonstrative knowledge.

According to John Locke. Now, Hume heartily disagrees, and he disagrees because he doesn't think that anybody in the state of nature, so-called, has a right to property. You see, he seems to think, Locke does, that the right to property is prior to there being any civil society.

Yes, because he has a natural law ethic. But Hume disagrees. He rejects natural law ethics.

He says that the idea of the state of nature is a myth, a fiction. Not only does it historically not exist, but you can't even imagine it the way Locke talks about it, it's so

involved with logical inconsistency, like on the notion of a right to property, when property is a product of organized society, rather than anything else. So, on the one hand, there are those who say that morality is based on reason, like John Locke.

Now, there are also some of the moral sense philosophers of the day that we'll be looking at next week, like Joseph Butler, who argued that our moral judgments, when in conscience we say that would be wrong, you see, that's an immediate awareness of wrongness, but Butler and others in that tradition would say that that is a rational judgment. Thomas Reid, I mentioned, Scottish realist. He maintains we have a direct awareness of wrongness, and it's a rational judgment that we make, and he argues that against David Hume.

So, there are those who contend that moral knowledge is rational knowledge, moral judgments are rational judgments, the basis of morality is in reason, and more basically, of course, natural law of some sort. On the other hand, there is, there are those among the moral sense philosophers, like the famous Earl of Shaftesbury, who had been Locke's patron, and Francis Hutcheson, also incidentally very influential in early American philosophy, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, who maintained that conscience, our moral sense, is more akin to aesthetic feeling than it is to mathematics or demonstrative reasoning. It's more a matter of moral taste than of making rational judgments.

That you can no more argue about the rightness or wrongness of something than that you can argue as to whether a certain piece of music is beautiful with somebody who doesn't have a developed taste for it. Sentiment, feeling, taste. And there are places where Hume uses the word taste.

Also. And it's not surprising, therefore, that people who respond to this emphasis on feeling try to argue that aesthetic judgment is also rational judgment, not only moral judgment. But aesthetic judgment.

So that there is some objective truth about aesthetic values. Something objective about moral values. Now, as far as Hume is concerned, these are all subjective.

And as critics of Hume, like Thomas Reid, point out, what has happened historically is something like this. Once the theory of ideas was introduced, primary qualities became subjective. I'll take it back.

Secondary qualities became subjective. Then, with Berkeley, not only secondary, but primary qualities became subjective. With secondary qualities, subjective, color, sound, and beauty became subjective.

And with David Hume, belief became not a matter of rational judgment, but something subjective, a matter of feeling. And what was left, but for moral belief to

be subjective also. So it's traced to the influence of the theory of ideas, subjectivizing what previously had been regarded as objective all the way down the line.

The Scottish realists hold that primary qualities and secondary qualities are both objective. That aesthetic and moral values are both objective. That belief is a rational intuition, not just a psychological response.

So the issue is pretty well defined in that way. And Hume is trying to formulate his view. Now, Hume is a man of moderation.

He refuses to buy the idea that reason is the basis of morals. He refuses to buy the idea that sentiment or feeling alone is the basis of morals. Sure, and just as it was with the abstruse and the practical, the logical and the psychological, he's like the little boy offered two kinds of pie, which would you like? A little bit of each, if you please.

He wants a combination of the two. Now, you see, he tried to pull that off in religion. Can he pull it off in ethics? That's what he tries to do.

Okay. Well, if reason has a role in relationship to ethics for Hume, what is its role? Well, remember that reason for Hume can produce two kinds of judgments, and only two. Judgments about the relations of ideas and judgments about matters of fact.

So the question about the role of reason is, what knowledge do we have related to ethics, relations of ideas, and matters of fact? Sounds simple. Well, relations of ideas, yes, definitions of moral terms. Definitions of moral terms.

That is to say, if we say justice is such and such, the definition is a relation of ideas, and the subject and predicate agree in the definition. So we can define moral terms. We can talk, for instance, about the relationship of different moral concepts.

The relationship, for instance, between benevolence and self-interest. Why, they don't exactly agree with each other, do they? Knowledge has to do with agreement and disagreement. All right, so that's one thing that reason can do.

The second thing has to do with matters of fact. Reason can describe the circumstances in which we have to act, can provide us with factual knowledge about situations that we face, and with a factual understanding of the possible consequences of actions. So reason contributes in those ways.

Now notice that last phrase, consequences of actions, because one of the main links between reason and feeling is going to be utility. He's a pre-utilitarian utilitarian. At least if you mark the beginning of utilitarianism with Bentham and Mill.

It's from David Hume; they really get the idea. What then can reason not do? Reason cannot justify appealing to consequences and utility, no. Oh, it might as a matter of prudence, might tell you it'd be prudent.

But why do you want to be prudent? It can't really justify appeals to utility. It cannot motivate you to want to do something. And it cannot approve or disapprove an action.

It can just describe consequences. Now, if reason cannot approve or disapprove an action, you can't make moral judgments. Moral judgments approve or disapprove.

So reason can make no moral judgments. And inasmuch as responses of feeling are not judgments, feelings are not true or false, only propositions, judgments are true or false, inasmuch as feelings are not true or false, feelings make no moral judgments. There are no moral judgments.

You see? Now, there are moral sentiments, there are moral feelings, that give rise to utilitarian statements. All right, what about sentiment? What's the role of sentiment? Well, I said that the common ground is utility. And you can see how reason hitches onto utility.

How does sentiment hitch a ride on utility? Well, you see, utility, the consequences that are for the common good of everybody, is based on the feeling of benevolence. Benevolence is wishing, wanting, and willing what is good for others. A sentiment of benevolence.

Benevolence is doing what's good; benevolence is wanting what's good. But why are we that way inclined in our feelings towards others? Hobbes had said, we're not, we're all like ravenous beasts. And Hume argues against egoism.

Hobbes had been accused of radical egoism, and in Hume's day, the term hobbism was an epithet of disdain, for a view that, I don't think, Hobbes held, that there is not a shred of friendliness or anything else in a human being. Naturally, you see. Well, Hume argues against that.

He's arguing that there is a natural benevolence in all human beings. A natural altruism in all human beings. Oh, in varying degrees, he's not saying how much.

It varies greatly in degree. But there is some natural benevolence. Not there, sort of by nature.

How does it develop? And he's dealing with sort of a developmental moral psychology. You see. Well, it develops out of a feeling of sympathy.

Develops out of a feeling of sympathy. Sympathy, which involves, as I feel sympathy, either pleasure for you or pain with you. Oh, I feel for you, we say.

I feel for you. You see. So that there is, yeah, self-interest involved there in the pain or pleasure that I feel.

But why would I feel sympathy? I feel sympathy because reason tells me of factual similarities between you and me, your experience and mine. And remember one of the principles of association? Resemblance. Resemblance.

So when there are resemblances between your experience and mine, the complex ideas that develop in my mind involve both of us. Yeah. And because they involve both of us, I feel not just for me but for you.

And there is a natural benevolence in all human beings. You see. Well, this then is the essence of his position.

His is two ways in which this theory is labeled. This is an ethical subjectivism. And it's an ethical naturalism.

Now, let me explain those terms that are current to this day in ethical theory. Ethical subjectivism is the view that there are no objective moral qualities. That is, there are no objective truths of an ethical sort about objective states of affairs.

But rather when I say something is wrong, or something's good, I'm talking about my own feelings, my own sentiments. So that in this case, you see, we're out of benevolence. I feel with you.

And I say that's too bad what you had to go through. What I'm really doing is saying I'm suffering when I think of what you're going through. I'm not saying that it's wrong that you have to go through it.

I'm saying it's painful to you, and it's painful to me. So wrongness and rightness just have to do with the subjective feelings of those who experience it and talk about it. Now, ethical naturalism, this is as well, though don't equate the two.

Subjectivism is only one kind of naturalism, a subjectivist kind. There are objectivist kinds of naturalism. Ethical naturalism is the view that morality is grounded in nature.

Morality is grounded in nature. And because it's grounded in the nature of our emotional psychology, you see, it's grounded in our emotional psychology, Hume is an ethical naturalist. And he talks about laws of nature.

Now they're not laws of nature in some metaphysical sense, like Aristotle, or innate, as in the Platonists. They're not laws of nature in the sense of being there already when we come into the world. He's very plain that these laws of nature are artifacts.

But they are laws of nature in the sense that they arise naturally in the course of nature. Because of the nature of our psychological development in relation to other people. So he has an ethic based on a natural developmental psychology.

The nature of psychological development and the nature of emotional development are what give rise to ethics. And he's very quick to say that this is universally the same for all human beings, this process of development. Because of the way in which God made us to function.

Now, whether he says God with tongue in cheek, or because he really believes it, of course, is another question. But at least he's saying if there's a theistic basis in your thinking, then all right. But the immediate basis is the universality of the psychological process.

So he's not an ethical relativist. The laws of nature he sees as three. One has to do with property, the stability of possession.

One has to do with transferring it by consent. Another has to do with keeping promises. And so he says this is the way the laws about justice develop.

And he even talks about the laws of the nations. Which is the phrase used in natural law theory from the Romans and Aquinas onwards? Laws of nations are laws pertaining in all nations.

Well, so do these three that he spells out. Because without the security of possession, there would be constant war of all against all. Without transferring by consent, there would be no commerce.

And without keeping promises, there would be no alliances or treaties. So these are laws that apply for utility's sake between the nations. As well as between individuals.

But these laws of nature are but just utilitarian things. Justice is a utilitarian notion. Justice is simply the utility of giving to each what's his due.

Well, there's Hume's ethic. Thank you.