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# David Hume and the Naturalness of Religion

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/RF.2018.028>

## 1. Introduction

In the first *Enquiries*, Hume famously wrote that “nature is always too strong for principle”.<sup>1</sup> What may sound merely like a clever aphorism is indeed a strong normative claim. What Hume had in mind was the belief that we were basically natural beings endowed with instincts and passions that take the better of us in many given situations where we should be morally constrained. The same exact sentiment led some French Enlightenment thinkers (Marquis de Sade is one of the most obvious examples<sup>2</sup>) to consider nature as inherently immoral in the normative sense: ultimately, there is no right or wrong, good or bad, or rather what civilised societies perceive as good has nothing to do with the ontological level of natural reality that is rather oblivious towards our ethical categories and moral imperatives. Hume’s words sound dangerously similar but, unlike de Sade, he was optimistic in his assessment of human moral capabilities. The passions and emotions which are part of our natural condition (what today some would call our biological constitution) are the elementary particles of peaceful social life just as different percep-

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116.

<sup>2</sup> See Bogdan Banasiak, *Filozofia integralnej suwerenności. Zarys systemu Markiza de Sade* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2007).

tions are the atoms of successful cognition. In the famous passage from the *Treatise on Human Nature*, when he writes that “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them”,<sup>3</sup> Hume does not welcome anarchy, quite the contrary. But still, the natural virtues have to be supplemented with the artificial ones (like justice), based on convention and stemming from „a general sense of common interest”,<sup>4</sup> and the sensory data must be ordered by the workings of reason even if these workings are themselves inherently natural (instinctual).

I do not think the distinction of natural versus artificial virtues is necessary or rather I do not think it is necessary to maintain the absolute character of this distinction. The latter are the products of a very natural mechanism (the sense of interest and the need of preservation) and of course, the convention that redirects the natural sentiments. Thus, ultimately we may as well call them both natural in two different meanings of the word: direct and indirect.<sup>5</sup> As the overview of his position on religion will show, Hume is a naturalist through and through, even beyond what his sceptical epistemology permits, and a careful analysis of the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiries* shows that every theoretical concept can thus be reduced to some basic, instinctual background that it stems from. It follows that the same can be said of religion.

## 2. What Does It Mean to Be Natural According to Hume

But first, we have to consider what “naturalness” means for Hume. Hume uses the words “natural” and “nature” very often, perhaps too often, mostly describing the workings of human understanding and human sentiments. Different uses have different theoretical implications although, as we will see ultimately, they are all reducible to a relatively coherent naturalistic perspective. Basically, we can distinguish:

- (A) natural as worthy of moral approbate (or at least morally justifiable on a purely descriptive level: “your anger is only natural”);

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<sup>3</sup> David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), II, 415.

<sup>4</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, III, 490.

<sup>5</sup> In clear opposition to Mackie’s interpretation suggesting that even the natural virtues are artificial because they are influenced by convention. See J.L. Mackie, *Hume’s Moral Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). Convincing critique of Mackie’s position may be found in Ken O’Day, “Hume’s Distinction between the Natural and Artificial Virtues”, *Hume Studies* XX, no. 1: 121–142.

- (B) natural as being the end of an intellectual enquiry (meaning lying beyond an explanation or rather being the end of the intellectual process of explaining: instinctual nature of a habit may serve as a good example)<sup>6</sup>;
- (C) natural as innate, in this sense the passions and sentiments are natural (as the natural virtues and vices);
- (D) natural as arising from the innate passions and sentiments via convention and education (as the sense of justice);
- (E) natural as appearing in our consciousness from apparently external sources (as impressions – sensations, passions, and emotions – that enter our minds with most force and violence);<sup>7</sup>
- (F) natural as arising from the intrinsic structure of the subject (in this sense, the operations of mind on the perceptions are natural).<sup>8</sup>

It is easy to see that the first two meanings of „natural“ are persuasive rather than descriptive. The meaning (A) stems from the basic language association of what is morally permissible with what is observable. In light of other definitions, we can easily see that this meaning is simply mistaken (possibly leading to moral permissivism Hume was not condoning) or metaphorical. The meaning (B) is also a little bit troublesome, because when we consider further uses of the term (i.e. C, D, E, & F), we can see a rather radical inconsistency: operations of mind (F) are strictly speaking natural but that rightly does not stop Hume from enquiring about them and drawing the map of their workings. Thus, we can see that what he means by (B) is rather being further unexplainable in the sense that we cannot pinpoint the real cause of a given event/phenomenon present in our consciousness (or indeed the very consciousness itself).<sup>9</sup> All these meanings suggest that natural is something that ‚could not be otherwise‘.

The meanings from (C) to (F) all refer to the ontological and epistemological status of the given phenomena. Take notice that the meaning (D) clearly suggests that „natural“ should not be interpreted as a simple opposition to „artificial“ as artificial may generally be reducible to „natural“, as we have seen. What is it then opposed to? In my opinion, natural means „not-theological“ and „not-metaphysical“, or, as Hume puts it, not „forced“ and not „unnatural“. <sup>10</sup>Original perceptions (sensations, passions, and emotions) are natural which means that there is no

<sup>6</sup> See Hume, *Enquiry*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, I, 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, I, 10–13.

<sup>9</sup> „From what impression could this idea [of the self – T.S.] be derived? This question tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity“, *ibidem*, I, 251.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, I, 185.

transcendent source of their presence in our consciousness. It also means that for Hume there is no „soul”, some special, immaterial, epistemological, and moral entity responsible for the way we perceive, think, and act. Hume, thus, uses the word „natural” to get as far as possible from either theological associations of knowledge or metaphysical associations of continental philosophy and thinkers such as Berkeley and Butler, but also to escape from his own scepticism by declaring (not proving) that the course of reality (whatever it metaphysically may be) is somehow mysteriously uniform with the course of our understanding.<sup>11</sup>

But the most important aspect of Hume’s naturalism consists of the fact that the „natural” also refers to the method of describing physical,<sup>12</sup> social and psychological phenomena. In this sense of the word we can justifiably say that „natural” means not only „what is” on the ontological and epistemological as well as psychological levels – as in (C), (D), and (E) – but also how to explain and describe it on the methodological level. In this sense, we can say that Hume is a methodological naturalist which means that his description of human related phenomena either narrows down to natural events – (C) & (E) – or is reducible to them (D).

Now, these both senses of „the natural” play important part in Hume’s reconstruction of religion. Both of Hume’s works on religion have the word „natural” in their titles. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*<sup>13</sup> are written to show the impossibility of proving God’s existence from the earthly design, while the less philosophically sophisticated but much more forward thinking *The Natural History of Religion*<sup>14</sup> is an attempt to explain religious sentiments and continuing existence of religions from the purely naturalistic perspective.

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<sup>11</sup> „Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature. Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life” (Hume, *Enquiries*, 39–40).

<sup>12</sup> Though it must be said that Hume is not interested in natural philosophy as much as Hobbes, Locke or his French translator Baron d’Holbach. The reason of avoiding metaphysical speculations is of course grounded in his skeptical stance towards the possibility of gaining absolute knowledge of the workings of the universe.

<sup>13</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (London: A. and H. Bradlaugh Bonner, 1889).

### 3. The Study of Religion

On the methodological level Hume's idea of natural history of religion is a theoretical breakthrough because religion is treated as any other natural object conceived by – Hume would say – natural philosophy: what we would call a (social) scientific exploration.

Daniel Dennett's book *Breaking the Spell*, subtitled "Religion as a Natural Phenomenon", was a well-known and widely discussed manifesto for the scientific study of religion. Dennett defines religions as "social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought."<sup>15</sup> But why study it? Dennett's answer – being in fact the argument of the whole book – is the answer that Hume could well give himself:<sup>16</sup>

It is high time that we subject religion as a global phenomenon to the most intensive multidisciplinary research we can muster, calling on the best minds on the planet. Why? Because religion is too important for us to remain ignorant about. It affects not just our social, political, and economic conflicts, but the very meanings we find in our lives. For many people, probably a majority of the people on Earth, nothing matters more than religion. For this very reason, it is imperative that we learn as much as we can about it.<sup>17</sup>

But, in many ways, Dennett's manifesto was untimely: it was too early for some Christian scholars to accept the dominion of science over the domain of theology and religion, but on the other hand Dennett's idea had already been successfully implemented in many areas of scientific research from physics, continuously narrowing down the scope of religious claims, through evolutionary biology and anthropology of religion (Pascal Boyer, Scott Atran), where it sought to explain religion as an adaptation or a by-product of some other adaptations, to cognitive sciences, especially the cognitive science of religion and its endeavour to scientifically explain acquiring, holding and dissemination of the religious beliefs as (by)products of the workings of human cognitive capabilities.<sup>18</sup> What is interesting is that one of the key steps in this „scientific

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell. Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin, 2007), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Hume begins his *The Natural History of Religion* stating, that "every enquiry which regards religion is of the utmost importance" (Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, 1).

<sup>17</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 14–15.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance Konrad Talmont-Kamiński, *Religion as Magical Ideology: How the Supernatural Reflects Rationality* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2013) and recently

turn" in the study of religion was made by none other than Dennett himself in his 1995 book, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea. Evolution and the Meanings of Life*.<sup>19</sup> Dennett meticulously described the threat which the new Darwinian science of biology poses to traditional religious beliefs and institutions and to the traditional theological view of the world. Hume is cited many times along the way in both of Dennett's books, especially in the *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, where Dennett often refers to Hume's devastating critique of natural religion ("religion supported by natural sciences") in general and the argument from design in particular.<sup>20</sup>

Those frequent references to Hume are not surprising as Dennett's project of naturalization of (the study of) religion is in fact a direct descendant of Hume's methodological attitude. While Hume, unlike some modern day naturalist,<sup>21</sup> was conscious of the fact that applying one methodology to all branches of human knowledge<sup>22</sup> is impossible, he nevertheless applied the same empirical standard to what is theological and/or methodological. Hume scholars call this standard a „copy principle“.

When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion, that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?* And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion. By bringing ideas into so clear a light, we may reasonably hope to remove all dispute, which may arise, concerning their nature and reality.<sup>23</sup>

For any idea (philosophical concept) not to be meaningless it has to refer to (or be ‚caused‘ by) a primary perception such as impression. In the *Treatise* we see how Hume uses this rule to deal with the metaphysical concepts of soul or substance and, indeed, with the concept of "cause" itself. If one cannot pinpoint the impression out of which the idea arises it means that philosophically speaking, the idea is meaningless (which of course does not presuppose that it is also not true on some metaphysical level – Hume's scepticism forbids such a conclusion), and therefore, it has no place in the scientific (philosophical) discourse.

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published H. van Eyghen, G. van den Brink, R. Peels (ed.), *New Developments in the Cognitive Science of Religion. The Rationality of Religious Belief* (Springer, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea. Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, 28–34.

<sup>21</sup> See for instance Victor Stenger, *God. Failed Hypothesis. How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> See H.O. Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Hume, *Enquiry*, 15.

In our present context, it is interesting to notice that when Hume explains this mechanism he uses – in a somewhat deceitful manner – the example of the idea of God and in a way that noticeably bears resemblance to future analyses by Ludwig Feuerbach:

The idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom.<sup>24</sup>

It is easy to see how the copy principle may serve in Hume's critique of objectivisation of religion and theology. Most theological concepts (most because, for instance, some moral concepts used by religions are natural in (C) and (D) sense) do not live up to the copy thesis standard and thus are beyond the scope of natural philosophy. When we consider his famous treatment of the idea of causality we can see that his main interest in *The Natural History of Religion* is not the truth of the idea of God (epistemic value which is of course very limited in the light of critique of proofs for God's existence in the *Dialogues*<sup>25</sup> and of what can be gathered from careful reading of *Treatise*)<sup>26</sup> but rather the very sources of that idea and its popularity. Thus, his interest is neither epistemological nor ontological but anthropological and sociological.

Hume's analysis in *The Natural History of Religion* is at once philosophical (as a philosopher he is still prone to generalizations), historical (rich on factual details), but most of all sociological, which means that, in general, Hume treats religions in a manner very similar to that of Dennet's: as *social systems*, therefore seeking their explanation in psychological and social surroundings rather than their justification in the epistemological value of particular religious claims. As Robert Segal puts it:

Hume's *Natural History of Religion* is a pioneering work not only because of the answers it offers to the questions it broaches but, even more, because of the question themselves. [...] Hume strives to differentiate what will become the questions of the social sciences from the questions of history and philosophy. His attempt to disentangle the question of recurrent origin from that of historical one, the question of effect from that of intent, and above all the question of explanation from that of justification,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, 14. Similar line of argument is presented in *Natural History of Religion*, where Hume writes: "by abstracting from what is imperfect, it [the mind] forms an idea of perfection: and slowly distinguishing the nobler parts of its own frame from the grosser, it learns to transfer only the former, much elevated and refined, to its divinity." (*Natural History of Religion*, 4).

<sup>25</sup> See Tomasz Sieczkowski, *David Hume. Krytyka episteologii* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017), 134–161.

<sup>26</sup> See Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise. Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 279–289.

together with his differentiation of an empirical from a non-empirical approach to these questions, foreshadows the emergence of the social scientific study of religion.<sup>27</sup>

Thus what Hume proposes is a relatively consistent use of naturalistic explanation rather than philosophical justification. (Which of course does not prevent him from using the former while construing the latter, for instance in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which, contrary to *The Natural History of Religion*, was an impressive exercise in *philosophical* argumentation). What we finally get is a proto-scientific description of the origin and development (or degradation) of religion about which we do not have to be sceptical about, no matter if (any) god exists or not. As Hume's scholars put it recently, "his naturalistic story – one not involving supernatural, transcendent beings – is sufficient to explain the existence of religion on this planet."<sup>28</sup> Let us now see how it works.

#### 4. Religion as a Natural Phenomenon

Having refined his philosophical critique of theological claims in the *Dialogues*, Hume concentrates on human religious history. That is why, in his ground-breaking and innovative *The Natural History of Religion*, Hume traces religions to their roots in human psychology and points towards different factor that governed their (quite natural) evolution from simple anthropomorphic beliefs motivated by fear and ignorance to more sophisticated forms of polytheism, and finally to monotheisms.

Hume begins with the surprising vindication of natural theology and the argument from the design which was the very subject of refutation in the *Dialogues*,<sup>29</sup> but soon he goes on to establish the origin of religion(s) and polytheism as the original form of religion<sup>30</sup>. Moving to

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<sup>27</sup> Robert A. Segal, „Hume's *Natural History of Religion* and the Beginning of the Social Scientific Study of Religion", 1994 (24): 231. The philosophical approach was the one demonstrated in the *Dialogues*, and despite the title Hume does not propose the historical approach, because "he refers to the origin of religion 'in human nature' rather than in any particular time and place" (ibidem, 226).

<sup>28</sup> A. Bailey and D. O'Brien, *Hume's Critique of Religion: 'Sick Men's Dreams'*, The New Synthese Historical Library 72, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 167.

<sup>29</sup> He does it to mislead his critics and entertain his supporters, as *Dialogues*, while written simultaneously with *Natural History of Religion*, were to be published posthumously.

<sup>30</sup> Polytheism, on which he writes – inaccurately – "It is a matter of fact incontestable, that about 1,700 years ago all mankind were polytheists. [...] The farther we mount up into antiquity, the more do we find mankind plunged into polytheism." To which he adds: "No marks, no symptoms of any more perfect religion." (Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, 2).

theism, Hume declares – in what is a remarkable example of his peerless irony – that „the corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst.”<sup>31</sup> Let us look closer at Hume’s claim that religion is a natural phenomenon. Where does it come from and why does it persist? Are those reasons entirely natural?

First, let us consider the sources of religion. The origins of religions are natural and, we might say, practical, not theoretical. In *The Natural History of Religion* Hume says:

in all nations which have embraced polytheism, the first ideas of religion arose, not from a contemplation of the works of nature, but from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and fears which actuate the human mind.<sup>32</sup>

The first „obscure traces” of divinity are not born from passions such as intellectual curiosity, but from „the ordinary affections of human life; the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries.”<sup>33</sup> These are all natural, if unpleasant, sentiments, but shaping those „obscure traces” into more or less mature conception of deity is also mediated by imagination and not by (demonstrative) reason

We hang in perpetual suspense between life and death, health and sickness, plenty and want, which are distributed amongst the human species by secret and unknown causes, whose operation is oft unexpected, and always unaccountable. These unknown causes, then, become the constant object of our hope and fear; and while the passions are kept in perpetual alarm by an anxious expectation of the events, the imagination is equally employed in forming ideas of those powers on which we have so entire a dependence.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, we are led to the first (polytheistic) religious beliefs not by the power of reasonable speculation or intellectual scrutiny but rather by natural (natural because being part of our human nature as well as being a reaction to natural events) hopes and fears of future events mediated by the operations of imagination. In short, „religious beliefs are not derived via reason.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, 42, cf. 44. Almost the same passage can be found in his openly anticlerical essay *On Superstition and Enthusiasm* (*Selected Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 38.

<sup>32</sup> Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, 8–9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> Bailey and O’Brien, *Hume’s Critique of Religion*, 176.

The fact that religions arose from natural hopes and fears in face of adversity and uncertain future may be counted as one of the reasons of their cultural persistence. If their grip on the imagination is strong enough they bring a kind of solace and satisfy the need for an answer. But it is not the only factor responsible for enduring religious beliefs. Other factors are, nevertheless, equally natural (a & b) or at least have equally natural background (c).

- a) *Admiration for the supernatural and unexplainable.* While explaining the enduring charm of miraculous events in his decisive critique of miracles, Hume points out to the specific and somehow paradoxical characteristic of human mind. While in our daily routines we are concerned mostly with familiar and empirically reliable cause-and-effect associations, our minds nevertheless like to, so to speak, wonder away in a strange awe when introduced to events apparently unexplainable and mysterious. This natural principle of human mind, says Hume, works in such a manner that

when anything is affirmed utterly absurd and miraculous, it [the mind – T.S.] rather the more readily admits of such a fact, upon account of that very circumstance, which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of *surprize* and *wonder*, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived. And this goes so far, that even those who cannot enjoy this pleasure immediately, nor can believe those miraculous events, of which they are informed, yet love to partake of the satisfaction at second-hand or by rebound, and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, no matter what rational arguments against the supernatural reason might produce, human enchantment with the mysterious and unexplainable – along with the consequential popularity that spreading extraordinary news might bring – will always (or as long as they are led that way by priests) prevail and be the reason of forming beliefs that find no justification in the course of experience but only in the declarations of holy scriptures and religious authority figures.

- b) *Habit.* These conceptions of deity are then hardened by the mechanism of habit (custom), a primary instinctual principle of human nature, which Hume calls “the great guide of human life.”<sup>37</sup> Once we are accustomed to religious beliefs (as we are accustomed to seek causal rela-

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<sup>36</sup> Hume, *Enquiry*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, 32.

tions in the natural events of life) it is very hard to get rid of them or exchange them for a new religious or irreligious outlook.<sup>38</sup>

c) *Exploitation (utilisation) by priests.* The origins of the institution of priesthood or clergy itself Hume ascribes to natural condition of human beings. In the essay *On Superstition and Enthusiasm* he writes:

superstition is founded on fear, sorrow, and a depression of spirits, it represents the man to himself in such despicable colours, that he appears unworthy, in his own eyes, of approaching the divine presence, and naturally has recourse to any other person, whose sanctity of life, or perhaps impudence and cunning, have made him be supposed more favoured by the Divinity. [...] Hence the origin of *priests* who may justly be regarded as an invention of a timorous and abject superstition, which, ever diffident of itself, dares not offer up its own devotions, but ignorantly thinks to recommend itself to the Divinity, by the mediation of his supposed friends and servants.<sup>39</sup>

Both, natural propensity to the supernatural and force of habit, by which we form and harden supernatural (religious) beliefs, are further enhanced by the institutional power of priesthood: by encouraging opinions on cruelty and power of deities to keep the believers submissive,<sup>40</sup> and on authority and the riches of churches that makes their mission easier,<sup>41</sup> as well as on the political authority which Hume conceived to be a threat to the moral course of society.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Hume concludes in *On Superstition and Enthusiasm*, the only remedy for this institutionally supported religious malady is reason and philosophy as superstitious religious attitude is invariably dangerous to civil society.<sup>43</sup>

So, we can trace back the sources of religion in human nature and the various historical courses of religious beliefs and institutions to natural (if deformed) sentiments. But we have one more bump on the road to the wholly natural explanation of religion. In the introductory remarks to *The Natural History of Religion*, Hume states that unlike natural sentiments (self-love, gratitude, sexual drive, and the like), religious instinct is not universal, as “some nations have been discovered, who entertained no sentiments of religion”. As Hume concludes, it is a sign that religious sentiment is a not primary instinct; it is rather subject to circumstantial

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<sup>38</sup> I wrote about the religious function of habit more extensively in „Suma wszystkich instynktów. Hume, nawyk i naturalizacja religii”, *Hybris* 31 (2015): 37–57.

<sup>39</sup> Hume, *Selected Essays*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Hume, *Dialogues*, 98.

<sup>42</sup> Hume, *Essays*, 61–63.

<sup>43</sup> Hume, *Selected Essays*, 40, 42.

causes.<sup>44</sup> Does it imply that religion is not natural? Not in the least because, as we saw with the natural/artificial vices, religious principles, even if „secondary“, can be traced back to their origin in human nature and primary instincts.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the origin of religion (in human nature as well as in human societies) can be explained in purely naturalistic terms which leaves the theological and metaphysical analyses of God's existence and his qualities totally irrelevant. The same is true of the historical changes in religious beliefs and social structures the description of which is possible in isolation from the theological content of religious claims. As far as *The Natural History of Religion* goes, none of these makes religious content false, but the truth of religious dogma is watered down by the explanatory success of emerging sciences.

## 5. Conclusion

If we distrust Hume's distinction between the natural and the artificial, perceiving the latter as a philosophical trick to morally justify some attitudes and actions and stigmatize others, we can see that religion is natural in both senses. Firstly, it appears from the natural instincts and natural curiosity, and while the speculative metaphysics involved in it deforms those sentiments, the basic mechanisms of religion are still reducible to them. Secondly, and far more importantly, because Hume's sceptical epistemology tends to reduce the metaphysical overhang, what remains of religion is purely of this world and as such is prone to be the subject of natural sciences, just like the physical world is prone to be the subject of natural philosophy. So, the spirit of Hume hovers not only over modern day sceptics, like Schellenberg,<sup>46</sup> but also on modern day naturalists trying to express the religious in the scientific manner.

And while theology proposes the study of religious belief so to say from the inside, trying to explain and justify their ontological and epistemological value in terms of the integrity of the system that itself is not being questioned, Hume suggests the cold gaze of objective scientific scrutiny. Surely a commendable effort and the one that only a century later proved to be fruitful.

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<sup>44</sup> Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, 1–2.

<sup>45</sup> Though in my opinion there is no doubt that these opening sentences suggest the possibility of purely irreligious and moral society – a suggestion Hume would be afraid to vocal openly.

<sup>46</sup> See esp. his *Evolutionary Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

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## Summary

In the paper, Hume's naturalism on both empirical and methodological levels is traced. By ignoring the absoluteness of Hume's distinction between the natural and the artificial, we can see that religion is natural in both senses. Firstly, it appears from the natural instincts and natural curiosity, and while the speculative metaphysics involved in it deforms those sentiments, the basic mechanisms of religion are still reducible to them. Secondly, and far more importantly, because

Hume's sceptical epistemology tends to reduce the metaphysical overhang, what remains of religion is purely of this world and as such is prone to be the subject of natural sciences, just like the physical world is prone to be the subject of natural philosophy.

**Keywords:** David Hume, religion, scepticism, naturalism

## David Hume i naturalność religii

Artykuł poświęcony jest naturalizmowi Hume'a rozpatrywanemu zarówno na płaszczyźnie empirycznej, jak i metodologicznej. Jeśli uznamy, że poczynione przez Hume'a rozróżnienie pomiędzy tym, co naturalne i tym, co sztuczne nie ma charakteru absolutnego, dostrzeżemy, że religia jest naturalna w obu powyższych znaczeniach. Po pierwsze, pojawia się ona na bazie naturalnych instynktów oraz naturalnej ciekawości i o ile zawarta w niej spekulatywna metafizyka zniekształca owe uczucia, tak czy inaczej podstawowy mechanizm religii można do nich sprowadzić. Po drugie, co jest o wiele ważniejsze, ponieważ sceptyczna Hume'owska epistemologia ma tendencję do redukcji naleciałości metafizyki, to, co zostaje z religii, ma charakter całkowicie doczesny i jako takie może być przedmiotem nauk szczegółowych dokładnie tak samo, jak świat fizyczny może być przedmiotem filozofii naturalnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** David Hume, religia, sceptycyzm, naturalizm