



## **The Empiricist Turn**

### **Professor Keith Ward DD FBA**

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So far all the philosophers I have talked about have agreed that an ultimate and irreducible element of reality is mind or consciousness, and that this consciousness may be the one ultimate source of all reality. If that is so, it will have power to bring about all that exists, and as it is aware of all possible states, and able to discriminate between good (rationally desirable) and bad states, it will itself be a reality of supreme perfection and value. This ultimate reality of supreme power and goodness is God.

Most of the philosophers who form part of the classical canon of Western philosophy have indeed agreed with this general view. But there is a significant minority report, which also finds its roots in ancient Greece, in the writings of Democritus and Epicurus. Rejecting the idea of a supreme Good or of a creator God, they held that everything that exists is composed of atoms, without consciousness, purpose, or intelligence. Human beings, and consciousness itself, are by-products of the complex interplay of atoms. Human existence has no objective purpose, and when all human life comes to an end, all will end as it began, with the ceaseless circling of atoms in the void, unseen and undirected by any mind, human or divine.

It would be churlish to ignore this tradition altogether, and its existence demonstrates the odd fact that humans disagree fundamentally about the nature of the reality of which they are part, and their disagreements seem to be unresolvable by reason. This suggests that the function of reason is to bring out the axioms and implications of general systems of thought that are adopted on non-rational grounds. But reason of itself cannot resolve the ultimate questions of what reality is like, or of how humans ought to live.

That conclusion fits the thought of David Hume, the eighteenth century Scots philosopher who stands firmly in the Epicurean tradition, and whose sustained attack upon arguments for the existence of God is still a major intellectual influence in the contemporary world.

Hume had a low estimate of the place of reason in trying to understand the ultimate natures of things. 'Human understanding', he said, 'is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects' (An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 1758, section 1). What then takes the place of reason? 'Custom is the great guide of human life' (Section 5). 'Our author concludes', he says of himself, 'that we assent to our faculties and employ our reason only because we cannot help it. Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian [skeptical], were not nature too strong for it' (From 'An Abstract of a Treatise on Human Nature').

Hume undertakes to show that reason is unable to establish most of the beliefs that we take for granted in our everyday lives. There is no way of proving that the future will be like the past, or that there are necessary causal connections between physical objects. Indeed, reason cannot prove that there are any physical objects, which exist when we are not observing them. It cannot prove that there exist any other minds, which have ideas in them, or that we have free will, or any sort of continuing selves at all. There is not very much that reason can establish.

What, then, are we to do? Hume seems to suggest that we should just follow the 'lively conceptions' we have, that have been produced in us by habit or custom. We must believe what we do about external objects, other minds, and the laws of nature, because we cannot help it. We cannot prove or justify any of our basic beliefs, but when we stop doing philosophy, we realise that we cannot get by without them, and so accept them anyway.

This is a very strange recommendation, that there is no point in trying to justify any of our beliefs rationally, so we should just believe whatever is customary or habitual with us. It opens the door to believing whatever our society has taught us to believe, since our habits will be largely socially conditioned. It is a perfect defence of unthinking theism. If Hume had not disliked religion so much, his arguments would provide a complete defence of religious belief. For belief in God is certainly habitual with many people, and reason is powerless to undermine such a belief.

Accordingly, when Hume wrote his 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion', he was only concerned to deny that reason could establish the existence of God. Hume would have to accept the argument that belief in God is just as reasonable as belief in an external world, and that we are perfectly entitled to adopt it because it is part of our habitual or common-sense worldview.

It would, however, also follow that any habitual belief is acceptable, as long as we do not pretend to have a rational justification for it. And that might unsettle a theist who thinks that belief in God really is more reasonable than many alternatives. There must surely be some way of distinguishing crazy beliefs, however habitual, from sensible ones. But what could it be? I do not think Hume ever solved that problem. But one possibility is that sensible beliefs are those that are not disconfirmed by experience, that help us to make sense of the 'buzzing blooming confusion' of sense-experience, as William James called it, and that are useful to the conduct of life.

That was the argument of Thomas Reid, a contemporary and admirer of Hume, who was much better known as a philosopher than Hume at the time and for many years afterwards. Reid was a major proponent of the Scottish 'common-sense' school. He argued that we are entitled to accept common-sense beliefs like the existence of an external world and of other minds, and indeed the existence of God. For it is a natural inclination of the human mind, he held, to think that the wonderfully organised complexity of nature is the product of a wise creator. Belief in God is a common-sense belief. It is not contradicted by any experience, it helps to make sense of the apparent order and complexity of the world, it is confirmed by the experience of a good part of humanity, and it is conducive to moral commitment, and to mental health and well-being. So it possesses the only sort of rational justification that we can ask for in the area of ultimate worldviews.

This is a largely pragmatic defence of belief in God. Such belief is 'useful', insofar as it produces moral action and human fulfilment. But it also expresses Thomas Reid's rejection of Hume's basic philosophy, the 'philosophy of impressions and ideas'. For the fact is that Hume was not, after all, a total skeptic. He had a view of the nature of reality and of human knowledge which was, he thought, more rational than any other.

Hume had an extremely rigorous conception of the nature and limits of human knowledge. When he said that reason had nothing of its own to contribute to human knowledge, he was following, in a much more extreme way - indeed, in the most extreme possible way - the empiricist philosophy of Locke and Berkeley. John Locke held that 'knowledge seems to me to be nothing but the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas. In this alone it consists' (An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book 4, chapter 1, 1). For the British Empiricist philosophers, all human knowledge must not only begin with experience, it must be confined to the limits of possible experience. All knowledge must derive from the senses, and it must deal only with the relations between various sense-experiences.

Locke was not consistent in his application of this principle. He allowed, for instance, knowledge of God - who is certainly not a sense-experience - and accepted the existence of an external world of primary qualities, like position, velocity, and mass, as a rational inference from sense-experience. That external world was dispensed with by Berkeley, who argued that if all knowledge is confined to sense-experience (to 'ideas'), and if all ideas are held within some perceiving consciousness, then we have no reason to think there is an external material world. We only have ideas and minds that perceive them: 'to be is to perceive or to be perceived'.

Hume continued to purge knowledge of all but experience by claiming that in fact we have no ideas of a perceiving mind. He distinguished ideas from impressions, which are the original data of experience. He then insisted that there is no impression of a substance, the mind, that perceives. There is only a succession of feelings, sensations, thoughts, sentiments and perceptions. For Hume, to be is to be one of a set of contingently connected impressions. There is no longer any 'perceiver' or 'perceived'. There is just a flow of impressions.

All knowledge consists in the 'association of ideas', in a natural association of ideas because of resemblance between them or because of contiguity, the fact that one idea is close to another, or because of a habit of expecting past successions to be repeated (causality). God, the world, the self, the laws of nature, and the existence of successions of impressions unperceived by us (the minds of others), all lie beyond the narrow bounds of knowledge as defined by Hume. This is as far from common-sense as it is possible to go, and common-sense can only be restored by putting aside philosophy and playing pool until the fevered philosophical brain has cooled down a little.

I began by suggesting that Hume stood in the Epicurean tradition, but this is only true to a limited extent. Hume, like Epicurus, resolves the whole of reality into simple basic atomistic elements that are connected by chance and accident, and that depend upon no mind that contains them or intends them to be as they are. But for Hume, unlike Epicurus, the basic atoms are not objective unobserved physical entities. They are impressions, contents of consciousness (except that there is no consciousness in addition to the impressions; the consciousness just is the collection of impressions). We do not have colourless atoms with position and mass. Instead we have patches of colour, blasts of sound, rushes of sensation, and flushes of feeling, all strung together in an unplanned and accidental sequence. In such a world, it is a miracle that reason can find any foothold at all, and it is not surprising to find that Hume describes reason as 'the slave of the passions'.

It seems to me that there is something wrong with any philosophical theory that issues in such consequences, and that Hume's theory is thereductio ad absurdum of radical Empiricism. I agree with Thomas Reid that we are certain that there is an external world that necessarily acts in accordance with general laws of nature, there are other conscious minds and other impressions of which we can have no personal experience, and there is an active and continuous self that reflects upon its impressions and ideas, perceives resemblances between them, and constructs philosophical theories to account for their existence. I am sure David Hume thought so too. Why, then, did he have a theory that reduced rational certainty to mere habit and custom, and pretended that an obscure and radical Empiricism, founded upon highly contentious premisses, was actually the certain foundation of all human knowledge?

In short, if Hume was going to be skeptical about the capacities of human reason, why was he not more skeptical about his own dogmatic Empiricism, about the extraordinary opinion that every item of genuine knowledge must be traced back to the occurrence of specific and discrete impressions?

The obvious alternative to Hume's theory is that knowledge does not result solely from the passive occurrence of impressions. Knowledge results from the activity of the mind, considering and comparing its experiences, and imaginatively constructing models that can clarify and explain how and why our experiences occur as they do.

Hume says that we have no impression of a self, so that there is no justification for postulating one. But the self is known precisely in the activity of considering questions like that of whether all our knowledge derives solely from self-impressions. The self is the active agent that asks what can best account for its experiences. This does not foreclose the question of whether the self is physical or spiritual, a property of the brain or a thinking substance. But it establishes that we have knowledge of the self, not by having a particular discrete impression of it, but by reflecting on the activity of thinking. We find ourselves attending, concentrating, focussing on a problem, to a greater or less degree. These are not things that happen to us. They are things we do. And the agent, known precisely in its activity, is continuous at least over large enough stretches of time to enable us to complete a process of thought - so that the same agent who begins a thought-process brings it to an end, perhaps years later.

Knowledge of the self, in other words, derives from reflection on experience, but not from any discrete experience. It derives from reflection on what is presupposed by different sorts of experience, and what underlying, but perhaps unperceived, reality can best account for the experiences we have. The self is a postulate of reason, reflecting on its own nature. If this is so, then Hume is wrong to say that 'Our conclusions are not founded on reasoning or any process of the understanding' (Inquiry, section 4, part 2).

In opposition to Hume, then, I would say that many of our beliefs are founded on reasoning and reflection, and any adequate theory of human knowledge must admit that fact. The existence of a continuous reasoning self is one of those beliefs. The existence of other similar selves, whose rational activities we do not directly experience, is another. And so the postulate of God, as an agent who perhaps actively envisages and reflects upon all possible worlds, is a postulate founded on reflection. It is a very natural postulate, for the world known to science is highly ordered and mathematically intelligible. The world has a rational structure, and does not seem to be just one random thing after another. It seems to science to be

governed by intelligible laws. God might very well be a postulate that explains this fact in a satisfying way.

Knowledge does begin by reflection on experience, and in some way all knowledge must be traced back to experience. But common-sense beliefs are not confined to comparing particular impressions or ideas. They rather postulate an unobserved world of objects in space and time, interacting in accordance with general laws. They also commonly, though not universally, postulate that there are objective moral and mathematical truths. And many social groups postulate that there are gods and spirits that can interact with human minds, or that there is one God who is apprehended in prayer, in and through beauty, the intelligibility of nature, the events of personal history, and in revelation through prophets or enlightened sages.

These are reflective postulates that help us to order and interpret experience, and see it not as an accidental sequence of transient and discrete data, but as the impression upon our minds of an external reality that is discernible by understanding, and not by the senses alone.

Modern science departs much further than this from sense impressions and ideas. Quantum physicists speak of electrons as probability-waves in Hilbert space. Particle physicists speak of a 10-dimensional curved space-time in which most of the energy ('dark energy') is completely unobservable. Cosmologists speak of a multiverse, in which different space-times can all exist, each of them originating by quantum fluctuations in a vacuum, a vacuum paradoxically filled with the quantum laws that govern the fundamental constants of many universes, and with whatever it is that becomes, in our universe, a set of amazingly fine-tuned gravitational, electro-magnetic, and weak and strong nuclear forces.

Is this almost unimaginable world of which physicists speak the real world? When Stephen Hawking suggests that the universe could be finite in imaginary time but without boundaries or singularities, what sense could Hume make of what he is saying? Hawking says, 'This idea that time and space should be finite 'without boundary' is just a proposal...like any other scientific theory, it may initially be put forward for aesthetic or metaphysical reasons, but the real test is whether it makes predictions that agree with observation. This, however, is difficult to determine' (A Brief History of Time, p. 141).

Modern physics is based on reason writ large. It proposes mathematical models that describe a large number of phenomena on the basis of a few simple postulates. These models are so complex that we do not know how to interpret them. Some physicists would not even try. They are partly chosen for their mathematical elegance and beauty. Yet they work. They produce predictions that can be tested - or, as Hawking admits, they sometimes issue in comprehensive models that are very appealing to mathematical physicists, because of the promise that they might unite many diverse phenomena in one relatively simple and comprehensive theory. But we are not yet even very sure how we would set about testing them (as with some versions of String Theory).

It seems to me that physicists are trying to speak of the nature of reality, and that what they have shown is that reality is very different both from what we ordinarily experience (our 'impressions and ideas') and from our common-sense beliefs. It is reason that tells us this, though of course reason has to be tested by experience. That may be very difficult to do in practice, however. Some very general theories, like M Theory, or the Multiverse hypothesis, may only be testable rarely, with difficulty, by few, and perhaps never conclusively. There may be tests that we could never in fact be in a position to carry out.

If you concede so much, it is hard to rule out the postulate of God as quite different in kind from the most general postulates of physics. I am not saying that God is part of physics. Only that the postulate of God is like some postulates of physics, inasmuch as God may be a postulate for helping to understand the nature of experienced reality (where experience may include what seem to be experiences of a transcendent personal reality). The postulate may be in principle testable, since at some far-future time either the universe will achieve the goal of consciously attaining God's purpose, or it will not. In addition, there may be present experiences (of divine grace or of great suffering, for example) that help to confirm or disconfirm the postulate. But the interpretation of such experiences may remain disputable and theoretically inconclusive.

So God is a meaningful postulate, but one that cannot in this life be conclusively confirmed or disconfirmed. This is significantly different from Humean skepticism about reason. For Hume, in his skeptical mood, reason can establish nothing. But on this alternative account, reason can distinguish between comprehensive, fruitful and well-worked out postulates that have some explanatory force, and postulates that have virtually nothing to be said for them, but rest on blind affirmation. Reason can show, I think, that the postulate of God has explanatory force, though not conclusive force. That suggests that the decisive

factor is not going to be pure reason, but the sorts of experiences you have, and the ways of interpreting them that seem most fitting and plausible to you. But reason nevertheless has a vital function in articulating the postulate of God, of refining it in the light of new knowledge, and of drawing legitimate consequences from it in a careful and considered way.

In the light of this discussion, what can be said about what has become Hume's classic attack on arguments for God, the 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion'? I would say straight away that, insofar as the attack depends upon Hume's metaphysics and theory of knowledge, it will lack force, as it would undermine modern science as much as it undermines belief in God. Insofar as the attack depends upon Hume's actual common-sense beliefs, it will justify belief in God as much as it justifies any commonly held belief. Insofar as the attack is upon rational speculation about the nature of reality, it will be self-defeating, since Hume himself speculates about the nature of reality when he publishes his proudest invention, the theory that all knowledge must rest solely upon an association of impressions and ideas.

Hume begins the 'Dialogues' with his usual complaint that reason is too frail a faculty to decide ultimate questions about reality. 'With what assurance can we decide concerning the origin of worlds?' (Part 1). It is scientific cosmology that gives the reply: with a great deal of assurance. Physicists now routinely publish papers about the originating Big Bang, the accelerating inflation, and the ultimate demise, of our universe. Mathematics is the key to understanding the universe as a whole, and reason does unlock the mysteries of the physical order. Human brains may be small and feeble, but they propound mathematical theories that reveal the structure of the universe as a whole, and narrate its past and future history with confidence.

Hume protests that we can never have any sense-impression of the origin of the universe, so we cannot have any knowledge of it. So much the worse for Hume's theory that all knowledge must be traceable back to some impression. For mathematical models constructed by reason give us knowledge of the origin and end of our universe, and enable us to assess with some precision the probability of its fundamental laws and constants being as they are.

The consensus is that the probability is vanishingly small, and physicists are actively seeking some wider theory that might make the existence and specific nature of this universe less improbable. There are at present a number of candidates that promise to do this. One of them is the existence of a cosmic mind that could envisage all possible universes, and select this one in order to realise some purpose that has great value. Such a hypothesis would make the existence of this universe, a universe that produces intelligent and morally free persons, vastly more probable than it would otherwise be, indeed virtually certain. Any hypothesis that makes the existence of a process more probable is a good hypothesis. Therefore the hypothesis of God is a very good hypothesis indeed.

The problem for physicists is that it is not a hypothesis in physics, since it appeals to a non-physical cosmic mind as its final explanation. Yet it may well be that any truly ultimate explanation will have to move beyond physics, since it will have to include considerations of value, purpose, and consciousness, with which physics does not deal. This is in fact an additional strength of the God hypothesis. It does not just appeal to order, intelligibility, and necessity, the basic values of physics. It also appeals to consciousness, value, and purpose, proposing as a reason for the existence of the universe the fact that the universe is consciously aimed at the realisation and enjoyment of distinctive values.

There is dispute about whether the universe does realise sufficiently great values to make its existence rationally desirable. Doubt about this accounts for much of the reluctance of some physicists to accept the God hypothesis. There is little doubt, however, that choosing something because it is intrinsically good and desirable is a good explanation for the existence of that thing. I think this is a distinctive sort of explanation - some call it axiological explanation, explanation in terms of value - that cannot be reduced to nomological explanation - explanation in terms of ultimately necessary laws of nature. If so, axiological explanation would have to be part of any ultimate explanation for the existence of the universe. And if that is so, this again makes God a better hypothesis than one (like a purely physical one) that omits all mention of consciousness and value.

Hume naturally mentions the problem of how it could be that an omnipotent God could create a universe containing great evils. It is a problem, but it is wrong to suggest that it shows some inconsistency in the God hypothesis. All that is needed is to show that the distinctive sorts of value that exist in this universe could not exist without the possibility of the evils that exist. We might want to stress that many possible evils need not become actual, and may even be forbidden, though they cannot be excluded, by God. And we might want to add that all evils can be sublimated or compensated by overwhelmingly greater goods, beyond this life, for all victims of evil. Then we could show that the values of this universe, including the

existence of the human species, could not exist in any other universe. This would in effect be an appeal to a 'final theory', in Steven Weinberg's sense, of a theory that shows that the basic laws of this universe are the only ones mathematically consistent with the existence of carbon-based intelligent life-forms.

Weinberg does not think that the value of human life is worth the suffering that goes with it. But it is part of the God hypothesis that all the sufferings of this life are as nothing compared to the glories that are to come. If we were really convinced that we could not even exist without the possibility of suffering, and that there is eternal beatitude to come, I believe we would all say that this universe is eminently creatable by a good God.

But how can an omnipotent God be bound by such necessities? Hume argues that 'whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent' (Part 9). And whatever we can conceive without self-contradiction, can exist. But we can conceive a God creating a world without any evil in it, and nothing exists by necessity in the real world. So evil cannot be necessary, and God did not have to create it. If God did create it, or even allow it, then God is not good.

On the contrary, however, a major reason for postulating God is that we are looking for something necessary to account for the contingency of the universe. This search is common to physics and theology. Einstein wrote that one aim of physics is to know 'why nature is thus and not otherwise...thereby one experiences, so to speak, that God Himself could not have arranged these connections in any other way' (in a Festschrift for Aunel Stadola).

The reason for seeking something necessary is that any truly ultimate explanation for something would have to show both that it is good that it exists (the axiological element) and that it could not have been any other way (the necessity element). If and only if we could show this, we would have an explanation that did not call for some further explanation.

But what of Hume's argument that we can always conceive of anything as not existing, and thus as being other than it is? It is irrelevant, and is due to Hume's mistaken idea that whatever we can think, can exist, that human imagination is a reliable guide to what can exist. In fact this idea contradicts the other Humean idea that the human mind is too weak to conceive of ultimate realities, and that the 'ultimate springs and principles [of nature] are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry' (Inquiry, Section 4, Part 1). If that is so, we could never know whether some things, including God, exist by necessity or not.

I have argued that Hume is too sceptical about reason, for human thought is on the whole a reliable guide to what exists. But there are peculiar difficulties about thinking of things existing by necessity. I can, for instance, think without self-contradiction of something existing, call it X, that could not fail to exist, that exists in every possible world. I can also think without self-contradiction of possible worlds that do not contain X. I can think both these things. But they cannot both be so. If the former is the case, then there can be no possible worlds without X. But if the latter is the case, then X cannot exist at all. My thinking does not decide the issue of whether or not X does, or can, exist.

All we can say is that it seems conceivable that there could be a being, now call it God, that could not fail to exist and be what it is. But thought alone cannot decide whether or not God actually exists. For all we know, there can be necessities in nature. And Hume in his common-sense mood thinks that there are necessary connections described by the laws of science. The laws of mathematics seem to be necessary, as do the basic principles of morality. So if we can root reality in the necessity of God, who has to be as God is, it is perfectly conceivable that the necessities internal to the divine being are reflected in the general mathematical structure of this universe.

It is because God exists by necessity that the question, 'What caused God?' does not make sense. Beings that exist by necessity need no cause. Like mathematical equations, they are causeless and changeless in their existence and general nature. If we could comprehend them fully, we would see at once why they simply have to exist. And it is because the universe is contingent, and could easily have been other than it is, that it requires explanation.

Hume objects that a creator God would have to be at least as complex as a universe, and so it would require as much explanation as the universe does. This argument is repeated by Richard Dawkins as though it were conclusive. But it misses the point. The complexity of the universe is contingent, and the universe is composed of separate parts that did not have to be related in the amazing and wholly improbable complex and seemingly intelligible ways they are.

God, on the God hypothesis, is necessary, and the ideas of possible worlds that form part of the content of the divine mind are not arbitrarily connected and separate elements. They are the necessarily connected, exhaustive set of all possible worlds, and they are essentially parts of one unitary consciousness that is indivisible and indestructible. It is for that reason that God has been seen by the vast majority of classical philosophers as a coherent ultimate explanation for the universe.

The God hypothesis is precisely that the cosmic mind that selects a universe for the sake of its distinctive values exists by necessity, that all the possible worlds that constitute the mind of God are necessarily what they are, and that the necessary connections of things according to the basic laws of physics are rooted in the necessity of the divine mind.

Any definition of divine omnipotence must be consistent with the existence of such divine necessities, which are unknowable by us. Even an omnipotent being cannot do what contradicts a divine necessity. The possibility of many evils, and the actual existence of some, may be necessary in our universe, which is, given the fact of its internalisation in the eternal life of God, of distinctive and overwhelming value. It therefore cannot be shown that the existence of evil contradicts the omnipotence or goodness of God.

It is wholly understandable, nevertheless, that humans should evaluate human life in different ways, depending upon their own experiences and their attitudes to them. A believer in God sees all experience as an encounter, however indirectly, with the mind of the Creator. Belief makes an enormous difference to how life is seen. If you see in morality the inviting voice of a loving God, if you see in the beauties of nature the artistry of a creative spirit, if you see in science the wisdom of a cosmic intelligence, and if you sense in and through all the events of life a presence that seeks to lead you to ever greater life, joy, compassion, and courage, then your life will be different and better.

Hume saw belief in God as a purely theoretical and weak inference from sense-experience to a cause which bears 'some remote analogy to human intelligence' (Part 12). More enthusiastic forms of religion he thinks of as 'vulgar superstitions', leading to immorality, hypocrisy and intolerance. Hume was a man of great virtue, even if he had a low opinion of the masses, whom he saw as largely lost in ignorance and folly. His hatred of religion must have its basis in the real follies and failures of religious individuals and institutions. Of these he was an unceasingly stern critic. But what he did not see or appreciate was that living belief in God is not an inductive inference to an unseen intelligence. It is an encounter with a personal reality that transcends all finite experience, and that proposes a value and purpose to human life that is worthy of unreserved commitment.

What 'natural religion' adds is that this personal reality is most adequately interpreted in terms of the God hypothesis, a construct of reason that claims to have explanatory power in terms of ultimate necessity, ultimate causal power, and ultimate value. The hypothesis is not the minimal inference that we can derive by induction from sense-experience. That might indeed not go far beyond the many competing spirits of some tribal religions. The God hypothesis is the most compelling integrating postulate that provides a rational interpretative scheme for all the diverse forms of human experience, and that justifies belief, when it does, by the rational basis it gives for those apprehensions of transcendent value and life-transforming intimations of human fulfilment that are the life-blood of religion.

Hume did not have, and did not want, that life-blood. But what I have been concerned to say in this lecture is that Hume's arguments against the rationality of belief in God are far from compelling. They rest largely upon general philosophical principles that would undermine science and common-sense as well as belief in God. And it is worth noting that they do not say that reason can show the non-existence of God. They rather say that reason can show nothing at all - and that is perhaps not entirely reasonable.

Hume is perhaps the greatest of those philosophers who reject the mainstream tradition with regard to God. But part of his greatness, in my view, lies precisely in the clarity and enormity of his mistakes, and in the way they point to the necessity for a philosophy that takes reason much more seriously. Contrary to what is said by some of the philosophically naive atheists of our own day, it is faith that asks for the restoration of reason, and it is the Epicurean hypothesis that threatens to deprive reason of its power.