

Causation, Cosmology, and the Limits of Philosophy: the Early Eighteenth-Century British Debate 

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Abstract and Keywords

For well over a century the dominant narrative concerning the major thinkers and themes of early modern British philosophy has been that of “British Empiricism,” where the great triumvirate of Locke, Berkeley and Hume is taken to stand united in opposition to their counterparts in the “Continental Rationalist” tradition. This chapter argues that this way of categorizing the thinkers and issues in question distorts and misrepresents this period and the core philosophical concerns and aims of the philosophers involved. Not only does the schema of “British Empiricism” encourage us to overlook some key thinkers who cannot be easily categorized in these terms (e.g. Samuel Clarke), and to group together thinkers with fundamentally different and even opposing aims and objectives (e.g. George Berkeley and David Hume), it places heavy emphasis on epistemological concerns as they relate to the philosophy–science relationship at the expense of the theological problems that were of primary interest for the thinkers concerned. This chapter examines the philosophical systems of Clarke, Berkeley and Hume as they relate to the issues of causal reasoning, theological speculations and the limits of philosophy. An examination of these salient themes and key philosophical figures of the early eighteenth century suggests that we need to radically revise and amend the dominant perspective and framework for interpreting these thinkers and the movements that shaped and directed their various philosophical systems.

Keywords: causation, cosmology, creation, divine creation, limits of philosophy, Samuel Clarke, George Berkeley, David Hume, atheism, speculative, British Empiricism

25.1 Religious Philosophers and Speculative Atheists: The Seventeenth-Century Background

THE period stretching from the middle of the seventeenth to the early eighteenth century has been described as “the golden period of English theology” due to the close alliance

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that was forged between reason and Christian theology (Stephen 1962: Vol. 1, 66). It was, as Leslie Stephen puts it, the ambitious task of divines at this time to show that the fundamental tenets of the Christian religion could be demonstrated as a body of necessary, certain truth. These ambitious philosophical aims were themselves in large measure a response to the emergence of a strong skeptical tradition that stood in opposition to these forms of Christian rationalism. The most important and influential representative of this skeptical tradition at this time was Thomas Hobbes.

In England, the great representative of destructive opinion was Hobbes, one of the acutest of all English philosophers, and a man whose influence in stimulating thought it would be difficult to overestimate. Whatever may have been Hobbes's real sentiments...he was universally set down as an atheist. He was regarded as the living (p. 600) exponent of the old atomic philosophy of Epicurus, and was, therefore, a convenient anvil for the hammers of orthodox opponents. (Stephen 1962: Vol. 1, 67)

From the point of view of Hobbes's critics, the doctrines that lay at the heart of his atheism were materialism, necessitarianism, ethical relativism and, especially, his skepticism about natural and revealed religion. These doctrines, it was argued, served to discredit the most fundamental articles of the Christian religion. Any thinker who embraced doctrines of this kind was, therefore, liable to be branded an "atheist."

Hobbes's influence throughout the late seventeenth century was not simply destructive and he had a number of followers and disciples based in England (see, e.g., Edwards 1695: 128–9; Gildon 1705: dedication). The most important thinker to become closely associated with Hobbist atheism was, however, the Dutch-Jewish philosopher Benedict Spinoza. In his *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), Spinoza pursued a number of Hobbist themes, including biblical criticism, skepticism about miracles, and a strong anti-clericalism. In his posthumous *Ethics* (1677), Spinoza's naturalism, as well as his necessitarianism, were also identified as Hobbist views that led directly to atheism. Given there were important points of resemblance, Hobbes's English critics were quick to link the names of Hobbes and Spinoza and they viewed "Spinozism" as little more than a variant of "Hobbist atheism."

The linkage between skepticism, naturalism and atheism is an important feature of late seventeenth-century philosophy in Britain and it did much to shape the structure and trajectory of the philosophical debates in the century that followed. With this in mind, it is especially important to give some account of the character of Hobbes's skeptical views on theology. The most striking aspect of Hobbes's position is his claim that we have no image or conception of God and consequently God is incomprehensible to us (Hobbes 1994: 3.13; 1839–45: Vol. 4, 11.2; 1839–45: Vol. 2, 15.14). Consistent with this view, Hobbes provides a minimalist and negative theology. The human situation, with respect to our idea of God, is like that of a blind man trying to frame some idea of fire. It is not possible for this person, Hobbes says, "to have any imagination of what kind of thing fire is; yet he cannot but know that somewhat there is what men call fire, because it warmeth

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him.” (Hobbes, 1839–45: Vol. 4, 11.2; 1994: 11.25) All we can understand by the word God, therefore, is “the cause of the world” (Hobbes 1839–45: Vol. 2, 15.14; 1994: 11.25). Since God is the cause of the world, this implies both existence and omnipotence. Beyond this, we can say only what God is not. The general force of Hobbes’s position is that philosophy excludes theology. Philosophy, as Hobbes understands it, is concerned to “search out the properties of bodies from their generation, or their generations from their properties,” and so “where there is no generation or property there is no philosophy” (Hobbes 1839–45: Vol. 1, 1.2). In the case of God, who has no parts, motions, or place, it follows that there is nothing to divide or compound, and so he is beyond the scope of philosophy (Hobbes 1839–45: Vol. 1, 26.1).

Arguably, Hobbes’s most radical application of his empiricist principles in support of his brand of theological skepticism, is his denial of incorporeal substance on the ground that it is insignificant and meaningless (Hobbes 1994: 3.12, 4.21, 34.2, 34.24) (p. 601) This position commits Hobbes to the view—although is not explicitly stated—that God is a material being (Hobbes 1994: 46.15). A rigorous materialism of this kind constitutes a form of “Stratonic atheism,” as described by Bayle. “The Stratonians,” says Bayle, “had the deadly advantage of being able to confront their opponents with the agreed assumption, *ex nihilo nihil fit*, that nothing is made from nothing, and that matter is consequently uncreated” (Bayle, 1705: §106 quoted in Kemp Smith 1947: 85). According to Bayle’s account, the central tenets of atheism, as found in the systems of Strato and Spinoza, are clear: nature is self-existent, self-ordering and self-moving. Human beings are part of the natural order and, as such, are governed by necessity. The natural order is not designed or created with any particular view to the ends and needs of human beings, nor does it promise any future state where the virtuous are rewarded and the vicious punished (see, in particular, Bayle 1705: §149).

As the foregoing observations indicate, by the end of the seventeenth century speculative atheism appeared in two aspects that were intimately connected with each other. The first mode of atheism, which was widely associated with Sextus Empiricus and Hobbes (and later with Bayle), insists on the limits of human understanding and of philosophy in relation to theology. The other mode of atheism was a (“Spinozistic”) naturalism that presents nature as self-existent, self-ordering and self-moving, and also maintains that human beings are part of this natural order and governed by its causal laws. It was this general philosophy of atheism that served as a target for the most distinguished representatives of the flourishing school of Anglican latitudinarian thought throughout the second half of the seventeenth century. The most important and influential figures of this school were the Cambridge Platonists Henry More and Ralph Cudworth. Cudworth’s work *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) was especially influential in this regard. Its subtitle—“Wherein All the Reasons and Philosophy of Atheism Is Confuted; And Its Impossibility Demonstrated”—conveys the substance of his aims. Cudworth’s *System* is a vast and detailed work but the central thread of his argument is clear enough: it is a version of the cosmological argument constructed around the principle that “nothing can come from nothing.”

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Perhaps the most important development in the late seventeenth century relating to the war against the atheism of Hobbes, Spinoza and their followers was the establishment of the Boyle Lectures (1739). Robert Boyle, the distinguished scientist and prominent member of the Royal Society, founded these lectures for the purposes of “proving the Christian Religion, against notorious Infidels, viz. Atheists, Theists, Pagans.” The first Boyle lecturer was Richard Bentley, the eminent classicist and colleague of Newton. Bentley used the occasion of his sermons, published as *The Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism* (1692–3), to carry on this battle against Hobbism, and he followed the same general tracks laid out by Cudworth. By the early eighteenth century these lectures had become the focus for the debate between the Newtonians (the intellectual heirs to Hobbes’s early critics) and the radical freethinkers in the tradition of Hobbes, such as John Toland and Anthony Collins.

In 1690, shortly before Bentley gave the first Boyle Lectures, John Locke published his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke shared the same general Anglican (p. 602) latitudinarian outlook as the Cambridge Platonist and Boyle lecturers and he also aimed to provide a dogmatic philosophical defense of the basic tenets of the Christian religion. This is, indeed, a central concern of Locke’s philosophical project in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he aims to extend demonstrative reasoning from mathematics into the spheres of metaphysics and morals in defense of Christianity. Locke’s efforts to employ demonstrative reasoning, in tandem with the similar ambitions of Cudworth and other like-minded Anglican latitudinarians at the close of the seventeenth century, served to lay the foundation for the most gifted and influential of the Boyle lecturers, Samuel Clarke. In Clarke’s work we find a continuation of the seventeenth-century battle against the philosophy of atheism, and a more or less seamless transition into the central concerns of British philosophy in the early eighteenth century.

25.2 Nothing from Nothing: Clarke and the Argument A Priori

From a present-day perspective, Clarke is not viewed as a thinker of the first rank. Now he is remembered primarily for his famous correspondence with Leibniz, which was a particularly significant exchange in the wider “war” between Leibniz and Newton. Clarke was, however, like Bentley, a close friend of Newton, and throughout the eighteenth century he was recognized as the most able defender of the Newtonian philosophy and its theology. After the death of Locke, he was widely regarded as the foremost living English philosopher. Although Clarke’s method of philosophical reasoning is a paradigm of philosophical rationalism—and cannot, therefore, be placed under the umbrella of “British Empiricism” (i.e. alongside Locke, Berkeley and Hume)—he was, nevertheless, closely associated in the minds of his own contemporaries with Locke. While there were some specific and important differences between Locke and Clarke (e.g., their divergent views on whether it was possible to demonstrate the immateriality of the soul) there were significant affinities in their aims and arguments. Whatever their differences, both were com-

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mitted to the fundamental project of defending the rational credentials of the Christian religion by means of demonstrative reason, in opposition to skeptics and atheists such as Hobbes. The most notable aspect of this was their shared and similar effort to articulate a satisfactory version of the cosmological argument, or argument a priori for the being and attributes of God.

Among his own contemporaries, Clarke's reputation was based, first and foremost, on his Boyle Lectures of 1704–5. His lectures of 1704 were published as *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* and the second series of 1705 was published as *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion and the Truth and certainty of Christian Revelation*. Both series were published together under the title *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God*. The subtitle of both the (p. 603) *Demonstration* and the complete *Discourse* describes his work as an "Answer to Mr. Hobbes, Spinoza and Their Followers." Clarke says that his objective in the *Discourse* is, quite simply, to prove or establish "the Truth and Excellency of the whole superstructure of our most Holy Religion" (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 596). The method he employs, he says in his preface to the *Demonstration*, is "as near to mathematical [method]. as the nature of such a discourse would allow" (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 517). Each link in his chain of reasoning is understood to depend on the previous links that he has already forged. Considered in these general terms, Clarke's fundamental intentions in this work are twofold. On one hand, he seeks to defend Christian metaphysical and moral doctrine, while on the other, he seeks to refute the opposing doctrines of the atheist (i.e. materialism, necessitarianism, moral relativism, etc.). Both dimensions of this project were to be carried out on the basis of his method of demonstrative reasoning. Although his arguments in defense of the Christian religion range over a large number of issues and philosophical problems, he makes clear that the key question that divides the (Christian) theist and the atheist is whether or not the self-existent and original cause of all things is an immaterial and intelligent being or senseless, inert matter. This puts his version of the cosmological argument at the heart of his entire project—which is where he begins.

Clarke's statement of the cosmological argument, as presented in his *Demonstration*, has been described by one contemporary commentator as "the most complete, forceful, and cogent presentation of the Cosmological Argument we possess" (Rowe 1998: 8). The *Demonstration* consists of twelve propositions, which can be divided into two components. The first, contained in the first three propositions, is an argument designed to establish the existence of a necessary, self-existent being (i.e. one that is "absolutely necessary"). The propositions that follow are designed to prove that this necessary being is, among others, omnipotent, intelligent, free and morally perfect. The negative side of Clarke's argument, as with Cudworth and Locke before him, is to prove that this necessarily existing being is not (unintelligent and inactive) matter. His argument begins from the simple premise that "something now is." On this basis he goes on to argue that it is evident "that something always was: otherwise the things that now are, must have been produced by nothing, absolutely and without cause: which is a plain contradiction in terms" (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 524). The next proposition Clarke proceeds to demonstrate is that "there has existed from eternity, some one unchangeable and independent being."

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The proof of this is that “either there has always existed some one unchangeable and independent being...or else there has been an infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings produced one from another in an endless progression, without any original cause at all.” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 526) According to this view of things, there is nothing in the universe that is self-existing or necessarily existing. It was, therefore, “originally equally possible, that from eternity there should never have existed anything at all, as that there should from eternity have existed a succession of changeable and dependent beings” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 527). This implies that the existence of the succession of beings “was determined by nothing; neither by any necessity in the nature of things themselves, because ’tis supposed that none of them are self-existent; nor by any other being, because no other is supposed to exist” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 527). The idea (p. 604) that the existence of such a series is determined by nothing is an “express contradiction,” hence there must of necessity have existed from eternity “some one immutable and independent being” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 527). Since this immutable and independent being cannot “arise out of nothing, absolutely without any cause...it must of necessity be self-existent” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 527). To be self-existent is to exist “by an absolute necessity originally in the nature of the thing itself...it being a plain contradiction to suppose the contrary” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 527–8).

Clarke believes that he can readily prove that the first and original being cannot be the material world. It is evident that the material world does not exist necessarily, he maintains, because there is no contradiction involved in conceiving it not to be, or to exist in some other form than it now exists (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 530–1). It is perfectly possible for us to conceive of the material world as not existing or as existing in some other form (i.e. as some other contingent series of beings). By means of this reasoning Clarke takes himself to have proved, with mathematical certainty, that the first and original being is necessarily an *immaterial* being, and so cannot be the material world. However, this still leaves Clarke needing to prove that this necessarily existing, immaterial being is an intelligent being—an issue which constitutes “the main question” dividing theists and atheists (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 543). To prove this point, Clarke argues as follows:

[S]ince in general there are manifestly in things various kinds of powers and very different excellencies and degrees of perfection, it must needs be that in the order of causes and effects the cause must always be more excellent than the effect. And consequently, the self-existent being, whatever that be supposed to be, must of necessity (being the original of all things) contain in itself the sum and highest degree of all the perfections of all things. Not because that which is self-existent must therefore have all possible perfections (for this, though most certainly true in itself, yet cannot be easily demonstrated *a priori*), but because it is impossible that any effect should have any perfection which was not in the cause. *For if it had, then that perfection would be caused by nothing, which is a plain contradiction.* (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 543; my emphasis)

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Having established this general line of reasoning, Clarke goes on to argue that since intelligence is one of these perfections, the original of all things cannot be unintelligent, and “consequently the self-existent being must of necessity be intelligent” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 543).

It is a fundamental tenet of Clarke’s (Newtonian) system that matter is inert and incapable of any active powers. By matter Clarke understands “a solid substance, capable only of Division, Figure and Motion” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 563). So considered, matter has no “real proper, distinct Positive Powers, but only Negative Qualities, Deficiencies or Imperfections” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 545). On this basis, Clarke argues that thinking and willing, understood as “positive powers,” must necessarily be “faculties or Powers of Immaterial Substance: seeing they cannot possibly be Qualities or Affections of Matter” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 561). In the second part of his *Discourse*, in the context of his discussion of miracles, Clarke explains his views concerning the motion and operations (p. 605) of the material world. According to Clarke, matter is incapable of any powers, except the single negative power “that every part of it will, of itself, always and necessarily continue in that State, whether of *Rest* or *Motion*, wherein it at present is” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 697). It follows from this, he claims, “that all those things we commonly say are the Effects of Natural Powers of Matter...[are indeed] the Effects of God’s acting upon Matter continually and every moment, either, immediately by himself, or immediately by some intelligent Beings” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 697). In this way, it is Clarke’s view that “the Course of Nature, truly and properly speaking, is nothing else but the Will of God providing certain Effects in a continued, regular, constant and uniform Manner” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 698). According to Clarke’s ontology, a fundamental distinction must be drawn between immaterial intelligent agents capable of possessing active powers of thinking and willing, and inert, passive material beings incapable of any “positive powers” of these kinds (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 545). In itself, the material world is entirely inert and passive, devoid of all agency and intelligence. Whatever is done in the world is, therefore, “done either immediately by God himself, or by created Intelligent Beings.”¹

25.3 “Esse is Percipi”: Berkeley’s Immaterialism

A few years after Clarke gave his Boyle Lectures, George Berkeley, another Anglican divine, published two important works that were also intended as a philosophical defense of the “great articles of religion” and a refutation of skepticism and atheism. The first of these works was *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) and the second, a re-working the same basic themes and arguments, was his *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713). The subtitle of the latter work states that it is written “In opposition to Sceptics and Atheists.” The atheists he specifically has in mind are Hobbes, Spinoza and those associated with them (Berkeley 1998a: #93; 1998b: 98). Berkeley’s general project in these works may be understood as an effort to stand Hobbes’s materialist system on its head, by way of showing that material substance has no existence and (p. 606) is contradictory and impossible and that “there is not any other substance than, spirit, or that

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which perceives" (Berkeley, 1998a: #7; 1998b: 114–17). Berkeley maintains that the materialist hypothesis is a fundamental source of error and confusion that needs to be corrected on the basis of his own "immaterialist" principles (Berkeley 1998a: #85, 92, 96, 133; 1998b: 98, 141–2). Although Berkeley recognized that many sincere defenders of the Christian religion, such as Locke and Clarke, maintain the existence of matter (i.e. dualists who believe in the existence of both material and immaterial substance), he claims that this doctrine paves the way for skepticism and atheism. Considered in these terms, Berkeley's basic project is to defend the Christian religion by way of refuting the doctrine of matter and thereby avoiding the wide range of philosophical difficulties and conundrums that it generates (Berkeley 1998a: #50, 96; 1998b: 137).

Berkeley's philosophical defense of the Christian religion has two dimensions. The first is a (negative) critique of the hypothesis of materialism. The second is a (constructive) account of the principles of immaterialism, which serves as his alternative ontological scheme. In the Introduction and early sections of *The Principles of Human Knowledge* Berkeley makes clear that just as the errors of skepticism and atheism rest with belief in the existence of matter, the root source of our (philosophical) suppositions about matter is itself a product of the doctrine of abstract ideas (Berkeley, 1998a: #5). Against philosophers such as Locke, Berkeley maintains that all our ideas are *particular* in their content. More specifically, he denies that we have any abstract ideas, where this is understood as an ability to "conceive separately, those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated; or that I can frame a general notion, by abstracting from particulars in the manner aforesaid" (Berkeley 1998a: #10). Why is this of any relevance to the question of the existence of matter? Just as Hobbes had used his own critique of abstract ideas to show that we have no idea of immaterial substance and that all such talk is absurd and senseless speech, Berkeley aims to use the same weapon against (Hobbist) materialism (Hobbes 1994: 4.21; 5.5). In effect, Berkeley aims to show that matter is an "abstract idea" that lacks any determinate or coherent content. The supposition of matter is not only empty and meaningless, it is contradictory and impossible.

There are two modes of abstraction that Berkeley is particularly concerned with. First, there is, he claims, no "nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the *existence* of sensible objects from their *being perceived*, so as to conceive them existing unperceived" (Berkeley 1998a: #5). All things in this world that are known to us—houses, mountains, rivers, etc.—are nothing other than things that we perceive by sense (Berkeley 1998a: #4). It is a "manifest contradiction" to suppose these things exist wholly unperceived, independent and distinct from any and all minds. According to Berkeley, in respect of all such objects in the world "their *esse* is *percipi*"—we cannot conceive of "any sensible thing or object distinct from the sensation or perception of it" (Berkeley 1998a: #5).

...all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all these bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind—that their *being* is to *be perceived* or *known*; that consequently so long as they are not (p. 607) actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of

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any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit—it being perfectly unintelligible, and involving all the absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit. [Berkeley 1998a: #6; Berkeley's emphasis]

In short, as Berkeley understands it, “sensible things...are nothing else but so many sensible qualities, or combinations of sensible qualities” (Berkeley 1998b: 63). As these sensible qualities are nothing other than ideas of sense, and it is impossible for ideas to exist without the mind, it follows that nothing exists without the mind. As matter is understood to be “an extended, solid, figured, moveable substance, existing without the mind,” the very notion of it involves a contradiction (Berkeley 1998a: #9; 1998b: 109).

The other mode of abstraction that lies at the root of the supposition of matter is the distinction drawn by philosophers between primary and secondary qualities. As Berkeley presents this distinction, primary qualities are understood to be qualities of extension, figure, motion, rest, solidity, impenetrability and number, all of which are taken to really exist in bodies (Berkeley 1998a: #9; 1998b: 74–5). In contrast with this, secondary qualities include colors, sounds, tastes and all other qualities that exist in the mind alone, and depend upon or are occasioned by the combination of primary qualities in matter (Berkeley 1998a: #9, 10). Berkeley denies that any such distinction is conceivable or possible.

Now if it be certain that those original [primary]. qualities are inseparably united with the other [secondary]. sensible qualities, and not even in thought, capable of being abstracted from them, it plainly follows that they exist only in the mind...But I desire any one to reflect and try whether he can, by any abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body without all other sensible qualities. (Berkeley 1998a: #10)

In general, Berkeley maintains that since it is impossible to frame an idea of extension, motion, or any other primary quality without reference to some secondary quality, the former are necessarily no less mind dependent than the latter. All the arguments (e.g., from relativity) that are supposed to show that secondary qualities cannot exist independent of some mind that conceives them apply with equal force in the case of the primary qualities (Berkeley 1998a: #14, 15; 1998b: 80–1).

When we abandon the hypothesis of bodies and a material world we are spared any number of skeptical difficulties—both in relation to philosophy and religion. Apart from the question of how we could ever know that such mind-independent substances really exist (since neither reason nor senses can settle this), it is also impossible to know if our ideas resemble or represent bodies as they really are in themselves (Berkeley 1998b: 128). Nor can we explain how “matter should operate on spirit” and produce or cause our ideas, or how a material thing could think (Berkeley 1998a: #25, 50, 85, 133; 1998b: 101, 138–9). Moreover, in relation to religion, it is unclear how God could create matter out of nothing—as atheists have argued (Berkeley 1998a: #92; 1998b: 137). The same materialist hypothesis also encourages us to doubt freedom of the will and (p. 608) the immortality of the soul (Berkeley 1998a: #93, 141). Finally, and most importantly, the result of embracing this hypothesis is that it “screens off” God from human kind by removing him from

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“the affairs of the world” (Berkeley 1998a: #75), whereas in truth, God is immediately present to us at all times (Berkeley 1998a: #147–56; 1998b: 97–100, 138–9).

Having shown that the suggestion that sensible objects may exist in themselves without the mind (i.e. unperceived) is either meaningless or contradictory, Berkeley moves on to give a defense of his own constructive “immaterialist” doctrine. There are, according to Berkeley, only two kinds of being or existent in the world: spirits and ideas (Berkeley 1998a: #2, 89). These two kinds of entity are entirely distinct from each other.

The former are active, indivisible substances: the latter are inert, fleeting, or dependent beings, which subsist not by themselves, but are supported by, or exist in the minds or spiritual substances. (Berkeley 1998a: #89, 138)

Berkeley goes on to argue that while we know our own existence “by inward feeling or reflection,” whereby we are aware of ourselves as perceiving and acting substances, we must reason to the existence of other minds or spirits (Berkeley 1998a: #89, 140; 1998b: 115–16). This reasoning is based on analogy with our own minds.

...it is plain that we cannot know the existence of other spirits otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us. I perceive several motions, changes, and combination of ideas, that inform me there are certain particular agents, like myself, which accompany them and concur in their production. Hence, the knowledge I have of other spirits is not immediate, as is the knowledge I have of my ideas; but depending on the intervention of ideas, by me referred to agents or spirits distinct from myself, as effects or concomitant signs. (Berkeley 1998a: #145)

With respect to knowledge of our own mind and that of other spirits we have no ideas—since there is no possibility of something as inert and passive as an idea representing an active being such as spirits (Berkeley 1998a: #27, 135, 138, 142; 1998b: 114). We have, nevertheless, a *notion* of souls or spirits, as well as operations of the mind (willing, loving, hating, etc.) and of relations (Berkeley 1998a: #27, 89, 140, 142; 1998b: 114–16). With this basic ontological distinction drawn between ideas and spirits—the “two heads” of human knowledge (Berkeley 1998a: #86)—Berkeley proceeds to explain the secure foundation of our certain knowledge of God.

The notion of a spirit, which we derive in the first place from reflection on our own mind, is understood as that of active and thinking being that is indivisible, incorporeal and unextended, and so incorruptible and naturally immortal (Berkeley 1998a: #89, 141). Clearly this serves one of the principle articles of religion (Berkeley 1998a: Preface; 1998b: 138). But how does this ontology secure our knowledge of God? The route that Berkeley takes begins with our experience of ideas themselves and moves to knowledge of God—a “being whose spirituality, omnipresence, providence, omniscience, infinite power, and goodness, are as conspicuous as the existence of sensible things, of which (p. 609) (notwithstanding the fallacious pretensions and affected scruples of sceptics) there is no more reason to doubt than our own being” (Berkeley 1998b: 138). His core argument begins with the claim that all our ideas are “visibly inactive—there is nothing of Power or Agency included in them” (Berkeley 1998a: #25). As our ideas are all passive, and we observe a constant change in the series and succession of ideas, we require some explana-

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tion for the production of these ideas in our mind. It is evident that we are not the “author” of these ideas, as this does not lie within the power of our own will (Berkeley 1998a: #29). As it is also evident that ideas themselves are inert and that (meaningless and incoherent) material substance cannot explain the source of these ideas, it follows from this, Berkeley maintains, that there must be some other mind or spirit that wills these ideas to be “exhibited” to us (Berkeley 1998a: #26; 1998b: 100). Although human agents may produce some ideas in us, it is obvious that the whole “works of nature” cannot be produced by or dependent on the wills of other human beings (Berkeley 1998a: #36, 146).

From all of which I conclude, there is a mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions I perceive. And from the variety, order and manner of these, I conclude the author of them to be wise, powerful, and good, beyond comprehension. (Berkeley 1998b: 100)

In this way, according to Berkeley’s scheme of immaterialism, God is known to us “as certainly and immediately as any other mind or spirit whatsoever distinct from ourselves”—or, indeed, far more evidently “because the effects of Nature are infinitely more numerous and considerable than those ascribed to human agents” (Berkeley 1998a: #147). Berkeley emphasizes the point that the order, regularity, coherence, harmony and beauty of Nature serves as a kind of “language” by means of which God speaks to us all and by means of which we may all “see God” (Berkeley 1998a: #36, 66, 148, 151). The entire hypothesis of materialism, so far from serving as a basis of our knowledge of God’s existence, power, wisdom and goodness, serves only to obscure and hide God’s immediate presence and activity from us (Berkeley 1998a: #151; 1998b: 98, 128, 138–9).

Much of Berkeley’s entire immaterialist system turns on the crucial assumption that we must draw a sharp distinction between real causes and mere “occasions” (Berkeley 1998a: #62, 64, 69, 70; 1998b: 104–5). We have, Berkeley claims, “no notion of any action distinct from volition” and we cannot conceive of volition except where there is some spirit. It follows from this that the only active beings are *spirits*—a particularly important point about which Clarke and Berkeley are both agreed. Where we observe effects produced, there are actions; where there are actions there are volitions; and where there is volition there must be a spiritual being with a will (Berkeley 1998b: 231). However regular, uniform and orderly nature may be, as presented through our ideas and experience, no idea is in itself ever a real or true cause of another—as this always requires some spirit with a power of volition and agency. According to the principles of immaterialism, therefore, God is as much the creator, mover and preserver of this world, as experienced through our sensible ideas, as he is on Clarke’s Newtonian scheme, which is erected upon the doctrine of matter. As Berkeley sees it, postulating the existence of (p. 610) matter while draining away all activity from it, serves the purpose only of supposing “an innumerable multitude of created beings, which they acknowledge are not capable of producing any one effect in nature—a suggestion that makes Matter as redundant as it is contradictory and meaningless.”²

25.4 “Any thing may produce any thing”: Hume on Causation and Causal Reasoning

There can be little doubt that David Hume’s views on the subject of causation serve as the “main pillar” of his philosophical system (Reid 1967: Vol. 2, 627–8). About this, both his contemporaries and our own are generally agreed. There is, however, significant disagreement as to when Hume first applied his views about the nature of causation and causal reasoning directly against the arguments and doctrines of theology or “religious philosophy.” For more than a century it has been widely accepted that that it is only in his *later* works, beginning with the last few sections of the first *Enquiry*, that Hume specifically applied his views on causation to issues of religion (having “castrated” his *Treatise*, which was published almost a decade earlier, of any discussions that may be found “offensive” by the orthodox) (Hume 1954: #1/1–3 (December 1737)). In contrast with this, Hume’s earliest critics were very clear that his account of causation, as first presented in the *Treatise*, was directly relevant to the efforts of various prominent philosophers and theologians to provide a dogmatic defense of the fundamental doctrines and articles of the Christian religion. His early critics were especially alive to the fact that Hume’s “skeptical” views about causation served to discredit the argument a priori and all similar arguments that aim to demonstrate the being and attributes of God (see e.g., Hume 1967: 4–18).

Contrary to Locke, Clarke and others, Hume maintains that it is entirely possible for us to conceive of something beginning to exist without any cause. To deny “the necessity of a cause to every new existence” implies no contradiction or absurdity and, therefore, (p. 611) this principle is neither intuitively nor demonstratively certain (Hume 2000a: 1.3.3.2–3). Granted this is correct, it follows that we cannot show that it is inconceivable or absurd to suppose that the whole universe lacks any ground or cause of its existence. From this it follows that it is logically possible that there exists a causal series that came into existence uncreated or has always existed without any further cause or ground of its existence. This is not to say that the world is created or produced by nothing; nor is it to say that the world is produced by itself—as both these claims would be absurd. All that is claimed is that it is *conceivable* that the world is not created or the effect of anything. On this view, as far as we can tell a priori, the world may have come into existence without any cause whatsoever. There is no contradiction or absurdity in supposing this.

According to Hume, “the mind can always *conceive* any effect to follow from any cause, and indeed any event to follow upon any other” (Hume 2000a: *Abstract*, 11). All that there is to causation, as we experience and know it, is the constant conjunction or regular succession of resembling objects. In other words, to say X causes Y is to say that in our experience we discover that objects resembling X’s are always prior to and contiguous with objects resembling Y’s (Hume 2000a: 1.3.14.28–31). Our idea of causation as it exists in the world reaches no further than this.

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Any thing may produce any thing. Creation, annihilation, motion, reason, volition; all these may arise from one another, or from any other object we can imagine....Where objects are not contrary, nothing hinders them from having that constant conjunction, on which the relation of cause and effect totally depends. (Hume 2000a: 1.3.15.1; cf. 1.4.5.30)

In adopting the maxim that, reasoning a priori, “any thing may cause any thing,” Hume stands Lucretius on his head, with a view to refuting those “religious philosophers” who aimed to refute Lucretius’s atheism using his own causal principle.

That impious maxim of ancient philosophy, *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, by which the creation of matter was excluded, ceases to be a maxim, according to my philosophy. Not only the will of the supreme Being may create matter; but for aught we know a priori, the will of any other being might create it, or any other cause, that the most whimsical imagination can assign. (Hume 2000b: 12.29)

Clearly, under cover of rejecting Lucretius’s general causal principle, Hume has established that a priori it is not impossible for matter and motion to produce thought and consciousness. Indeed, not only is it possible for matter to be as “active” as thought and consciousness, and actually produce thought and consciousness, this is exactly what we discover from experience (Hume 2000a: 1.4.5.31). The obvious implication of all this is that there is no basis for the (a priori) claim that the material world is incapable of activity or producing thought and consciousness. Although Clarke, on one side, and Berkeley on the other, were fundamentally divided on the ontological issue relating to the existence of the material world, they were, nevertheless, in broad agreement about the role of God as the (necessary) source of activity and motion in the world (i.e. as constituted by either bodies or sensible ideas in (p. 612) the mind). Clarke maintains that the evident inactivity of matter (i.e. its *vis inertiae*) plainly reveals God’s constant presence and activity in the world. Similarly, Berkeley holds that since all our ideas are “visibly inactive,” and we are not ourselves the source of these ideas, it follows that their cause must be “the immediate hand of an Almighty Agent” (Berkeley 1998a: #28-33, 53, 66, 148-51; 1998b: 200-2, 252-3). According to both these systems, it is crucial that we distinguish between mere “occasions” and “real causes” (Clarke 1738: Vol. 2, 545, 697-8; Berkeley 1998a: #36, 64-6, 69, 108). The only real causes that exist, according to these religious philosophers, are spiritual agents with powers of volition and will.³

Hume’s account of causation discredits all religious hypotheses based on reasoning of this kind. In his search for the origin of our idea of necessity (power, force, energy, etc.) he begins by considering three possible sources of this idea: “the known qualities of matter,” “the deity” and “the will” (Hume 2000a: 1.3.14; 2000b: 7). In the case of the operations of bodies we are, he says, unable to discover any power or energy in these external objects (Hume 2000a: 1.3.14.4-8; 2000b: 7.6-8). Having failed in this conjecture, some philosophers (e.g., Clarke and his followers) have claimed that as matter is entirely inactive, and since the power that produces the motions and effects that we observe must be placed somewhere, “it must lie in the Deity, or that divine being, who contains in his nature all excellency and perfection” (Hume 2000a: 1.3.14.9). This “curious opinion,” as

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Hume (sardonically) describes it, is also found wanting. Although we are ignorant of the manner in which bodies operate on each other, we are equally ignorant of any force, efficacy or active principle in the deity—since we plainly lack any impression that could serve as the relevant source or origin of that idea (Hume 2000a: 1.3.14.9–10/160; 2000b: 7.25). While some have argued that we derive such an idea from reflection on our own will and volitions, and then apply and “enlarge” it in the case of the deity, Hume rejects this suggestion as well (Hume 2000a: 1.3.14.12; *Abstract*, 26; 2000b: 7.9–20; cf. Locke 1975: 12.21.4/235; Berkeley 1998a: #148–9). According to Hume, our minds provide us with no more notion of energy or power than matter does. If we consider our will or volitions a priori, he argues, we are unable to infer any effect from it. The influence of the will is a fact, which like all other natural events, can be known only by experience and can never be discovered by way of some energy or power in the cause. All that experience reveals to us, in cases of this kind, are objects contiguous, successive and constantly conjoined. In sum, Hume makes clear that “we have no idea of a being endow’d with any powers, much less of one endow’d with infinite power” (Hume 2000a: 1.4.5.31; cf. 2000b: 7.25).

With this (skeptical) point established, Hume goes on to provide an alternative account of the source of our idea of necessity or power. The source of our idea of power, he says, is not to be discovered in the causes themselves, nor in the deity, but rather in the mind of those who observe the constant conjunction or regular succession of objects.

(p. 613) Tho’ the several resembling instances, which give rise to the idea of power, have no influence on each other, and can never produce any new quality *in the object*, which can be the model of that idea, yet the *observation* of this resemblance produces a new impression *in the mind*, which is its real model. (Hume 2000a: 1.3.14.20)

The idea of necessity arises, therefore, from an impression of reflection produced by the feeling of transition in our thought from the idea of the cause to the idea of the effect. It is this natural inference of the mind, resulting from our experience of constant conjunctions of objects, that is the true source of our idea of necessity. While “there may be several qualities both in material and immaterial objects, with which we are utterly unacquainted,” conjectures of this sort are, Hume maintains, “of little consequence to the world.”⁴ The crucial point remains, nevertheless, that we have a clear idea of power and efficacy as understood in terms of those connexions that we feel in our mind as a result of our experience of constant conjunctions. We are “led astray by a false philosophy” when we try to define our account of causation in terms that reach beyond these limits of human understanding.

In the closing passages of the last section of the first *Enquiry* Hume sums up the significance of his observations about the “narrow reach” of human understanding (Hume 2000b: 12.24–34). With respect to demonstration, he condemns all attempts to extend this form of knowledge beyond the bounds of mathematics (i.e. contrary to Locke and Clarke).

All other enquiries of men regard only matters of fact and existence; and these are evidently incapable of demonstration. Whatever *is* may *not be*. No negation of fact

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can involve a contradiction. The non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence. (Hume 2000b: 12.28)

The most obvious application of this conclusion is to all those arguments that purport to demonstrably prove the existence of God—a point that Hume explicitly made earlier in the *Treatise* and repeats later in the *Dialogues* (Hume 2000a: 1.3.7.2, 1.3.7.3n20; 2007: 9.5). From this Hume proceeds to argue that the existence of any being can be proved only by arguments from cause and effect and that all arguments of this kind are based entirely on experience. “It is,” Hume says, “only experience, which teaches us the nature and bounds of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another.” (Hume 2000b: 12.29) With respect to the claims of divinity and theology, insofar as it aims to prove the existence of God, all such arguments must be based on causal experience as Hume describes it.

(p. 614) Whereas the cosmological argument, as advanced by Locke, Clarke and others, aims to prove the existence of God by means of a priori, demonstrative reasoning based on causal principles that Hume rejects, the arguments from design has at least the merit of being based on experience and analogical reasoning. The essentials of Hume’s critique of this argument are first presented in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Sect. 11) and given a more elaborate statement in the *Dialogues*. The design argument begins with the claim that we observe analogy or resemblance between the world and man-made machines and creations (e.g., watches, buildings, etc.) in respect of their shared features of order, structure, harmony and the evident way that their parts are suited to perform some functions or serve certain ends. (See, for example, the observations of “Cleanthes,” one of the characters in Hume’s *Dialogues*, 2.5: “Look around the world...”) When we discover an object that has these features (i.e. order, structure, etc.) we infer that these objects have not arisen just by chance but have been produced by human intelligence. We must allow that when we discover resembling effects we may reasonably infer that the causes also resemble each other. On this basis we may conclude, says the proponent of the design argument, that the cause of this world must be “somewhat similar to the mind of man” (Hume 2007: 2.5; 2000b:11.11).

The fundamental flaw in this argument, Hume argues, rests with the weakness of the analogy involved.

In human nature, there is a certain experienced coherence of designs and inclinations; so that when, from any fact, we have discovered one intention of any man, it may often be reasonable, from experience, to infer another, and draw a long chain of conclusions concerning his past or future conduct. But this method of reasoning can never have place regard to a Being, so remote and incomprehensible, who bears much less analogy to any other being in the universe than the sun to a waxen taper, and who discovers himself only by some faint traces or outlines, beyond which we have no authority to ascribe to him any attribute or perfection. (Hume 2000b: 11.26/146; cf. 2007: 2.2–3, 2.7)

In these circumstances, when we reason on the basis of such a weak and over-extended analogy, we are vulnerable to the following dilemma. On one side, there is a tendency to anthropomorphize our conception of God and attribute human qualities and attributes to

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him (e.g., passions, faculties, etc.) without any plausible grounds or experimental basis for this (Hume 2007: 3.12–3, 4, 5.9–12, 12.5–6). We are, in particular, liable to attribute perfections to God which our limited and narrow experience of the universe, in respect of both time and space, cannot possibly justify or license (Hume 2000b: 11.25–7, 12.25–6; 2007: 1.3, 12.7). On the other side, when we are duly and appropriately constrained in these conjectures, we will inevitably collapse into a form of mysticism, which maintains the “mysterious incomprehensible nature of the Deity” (Hume 2007: 4.1). In this way, as the tendency for anthropomorphism is to become a form of “idolatry,” and for mysticism to become indistinguishable from a skepticism that claims “that the first cause of All is unknown and unintelligible,” both forms of (p. 615) theism are liable to collapse into plain atheism (Hume 2007: 4.4). It is this general line of argument that serves as a central thread throughout Hume’s *Dialogues*.

The key lesson to be learned from Hume’s account of causation, and causal reasoning, is that the existence of any being can be proved only on the basis of arguments founded on our experience of cause and effect understood in terms of constant conjunctions of objects and events. All efforts to establish matters of fact and existence based on a priori, demonstrative reason are flawed and without any foundation. It follows from this that the only plausible basis, methodologically speaking, for the theological claims of religious philosophers is our experience of this world and the analogies this may suggest to us. Hume is equally clear, however, that this line of reasoning takes us well beyond the narrow limits and confines of human understanding and should be rejected. The practical recommendation with which he concludes his first *Enquiry* is that all the volumes of “divinity or school metaphysics...contain nothing but sophistry and illusion” and we may, therefore, “commit them to the flames” (Hume 2000b: 12.34/165). It is, in this way, a core contention of Hume’s philosophical system that there exists a deep, unbridgeable chasm between philosophy and theology—a conclusion that Hume shares with “sceptics and atheists” such as Hobbes and Bayle in opposition to the fundamental aims and ambitions of religious philosophers.

25.5 British Empiricism and Speculative Atheism

For well over a century the dominant narrative covering the major thinkers and themes of early modern British philosophy has been that of “British Empiricism,” within which the great triumvirate of Locke–Berkeley–Hume are taken to be the dominant figures. Although it is now common to question this schema as a way of analyzing and understanding the period in question, it continues to command considerable authority and acceptance. (One likely reason for this is that no credible or plausible alternative structures or schemas of analysis have suggested themselves.) Be this as it may, the foregoing analysis of the rival systems of Clarke, Berkeley and Hume makes clear that this narrative, however deeply entrenched it may be, is wholly misleading and both distorts and obscures key themes and figures in the period in question.

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On the orthodox schema, as framed around the idea of “British Empiricism,” the dominant philosophical problematic of the period is primarily epistemological, where concerns about the scope and limits and human knowledge focus primarily on the relationship between philosophy and science. From this general perspective, the central aim of the British Empiricists is understood to provide an account of the philosophical foundations of (modern) science, consistent with their shared empiricist principles and in opposition to the rationalist tendencies of “Continental” thought, as represented by the rationalist triumvirate of Descartes–Spinoza–Leibniz. The trajectory of the British (p. 616) Empiricist tradition, culminating in Hume’s philosophy, is read as taking the form of a radical skepticism about the scope and limits of human knowledge in respect of this subject matter. This familiar grand narrative reaches its climax, on the orthodox account, with Kant’s triumphant synthesis of empiricist and rationalist elements in his “critical philosophy,” in which Kant is presented as finding a middle ground between their respective skeptical and dogmatic tendencies (see e.g., Hamlyn 1988: 218). While this general narrative has proved fertile in relation to later philosophical developments, the costs of adopting it are, nevertheless, very high (see Russell 2012).

The opposition between empiricists and rationalists presents a one-dimensional framework in which the significant contributions to the philosophical debate during this period are supposed to all fall neatly on one side or the other of this (particularly salient) divide. Our analysis of the views of Clarke, Berkeley and Hume makes clear that this simple schema must be rejected. There are three overlapping objections that are especially important. First, the empiricism–rationalism dichotomy narrows our perspective in such a way that we are required to neglect or overlook thinkers and themes that do not fit neatly into this framework. This is particularly evident in the case of Clarke, who is an English rationalist with little interest in the specifically epistemological issues that serve as the focus of attention for the empiricist–rationalist split. While Clarke is, methodologically speaking, an obvious paradigm of rationalistic methodology, his concerns rest primarily with ontological issues relating to proofs for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, along with other matters of a broadly religious nature. His specific observations and remarks relating to the foundations and limits of human knowledge are both cursory and tangential. At the same time, Clarke’s philosophy—particularly his version of the cosmological argument—shares much with the philosophy of Locke, a thinker who is generally regarded as a key figure in the British Empiricist tradition. Another (background) thinker who is awkward to place neatly on one side or another of the (reductive) empiricist–rationalist divide is Hobbes, and for this reason his influence and role in this context tends to be neglected or downplayed.

A related difficulty with the empiricist–rationalist dichotomy, as generally presented, is that it scrambles the *groupings* of philosophers in this period in a wholly implausible and unconvincing manner. For example, we are encouraged, on the orthodox account, to group Berkeley and Hume together in opposition to “rationalists” such as Clarke. But this is, at best, highly misleading. Both Clarke and Berkeley, as we have noted, are primarily concerned to provide a dogmatic defense of the Christian religion, thereby refuting skeptics and atheists such as Hobbes and Spinoza. For neither Clarke nor Berkeley is the is-

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sue of epistemology and the empiricist-rationalist opposition a matter of central importance. These epistemological issues arise for them only insofar as they serve their more fundamental theological aims and objectives. Although Hobbes and Spinoza were widely linked together throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the orthodox empiricist-rationalist dichotomy almost entirely ignores this and makes it difficult to comprehend the relevant basis of this linkage (i.e. with respect to the issue of “atheism”). In general, because the empiricist-rationalist dichotomy is taken to be both fundamental and more or less comprehensive, in respect of covering the major (p. 617) figures and core themes of this period, the central importance of the opposition between religious philosophers and speculative atheists is largely neglected. In consequence of this the major figures concerned are grouped in ways that are entirely alien to their own primary concerns and self-understandings.

Finally, as the points above suggest, the deepest failing of the empiricist-rationalist dichotomy, considered as a way of framing an interpretation of early eighteenth-century British philosophy, is the way in which it presents the fundamental skeptical challenge of this period primarily in terms of the philosophy-science relationship and the associated epistemological worries arising from this. On this view of things, the skeptical challenge as it relates to the more specific philosophy-*religion* relationship is understood as being of secondary importance or derivative concern (i.e. relating to the scope and limits of human understanding etc.). The very labeling of the major parties in terms of their epistemological and methodological orientation, as opposed to their theological commitments, is indicative of the *priority* given to epistemological issues over theological matters as such. With respect to thinkers such as Clarke and Berkeley, on the side of religion, and Hume, on the side of irreligion, this gets things the wrong way round.

The objections that I have presented against the (one-sided) grand narrative of the empiricist-rationalist dichotomy as a way of understanding eighteenth-century British philosophy may be illustrated in this way. On the familiar orthodox or established reading, the great triumvirate of “British Empiricists” stand opposed to the great triumvirate of “Continental Rationalists,” generating a fundamental split that is taken to dominate the period in question (Figure 1).



Figure 1 The Simple View

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As we have noted, this schema tends to ignore or overlook awkward figures who cannot be easily pigeonholed on one side or the other of the given divide. Figures such as Hobbes and Clarke, for example, drop out as peripheral or more marginal figures, and others, such as Joseph Butler, are not regarded as part of the mainstream debate at all. All of this is plainly at odds with the way in which those involved in the eighteenth-century debate would have viewed the more prominent and pronounced features of the philosophical landscape at this time. A careful reading of the three important figures we have considered makes clear that, at the very least, there is another fundamental division that needs to be mapped onto any schema that purports to identify and describe the main themes and figures of this period in terms that they might have recognized and acknowledged: viz. the opposition between religious philosophers and speculative atheists (where both these camps are understood to contain highly diverse groupings with their own internal oppositions). A schema that is (modestly) revised along these lines looks like Figure 2.

The precise way each of the (four) parties is characterized and described will, of course, be a matter of some debate and contention. Nevertheless, the basic divisions are themselves clear enough and, for reasons we have considered, the atheism/theism opposition would have been more salient and significant to many of those directly involved in the early eighteenth-century British debate.

Whereas the division between empiricists and rationalists is for the most part an alien construct, imposed by post-Kantian interests and concerns, the opposition between theists and atheists was one that was entirely familiar to the eighteenth-century figures we have considered, and it serves to identify them in terms of which they could readily recognize and acknowledge. When the philosophical terrain is carved up in this way we acquire a much more satisfactory and accurate way of locating major figures (and issues) in relation to each other. Clarke and Berkeley both belong together on the top half of the box, given their shared theological aims and objectives. To the extent that they are divided, it is a matter of their philosophical methodology and ontology, but not their more basic common cause to defend religion and refute atheism. Similarly, Hume belongs squarely in the bottom half of the box, where he stands firmly in opposition to the theological aims and ambitions of Clarke, Berkeley and other religious philosophers (for an extended defense of this claim, see Russell 2008). While there are significant methodological differences between Hume and irreligious predecessors such as Hobbes and Spinoza, from the perspective of the religious philosophers Hume belongs in this company even though his empiricist methodology and commitments put him on the same (right-hand) side as Locke and Berkeley in this respect.

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Figure 2 The Complex View

The only question that remains to be asked concerns the relative *priority* we give to the two dimensions under consideration. From the point of view of our own concerns, as historians of philosophy, to get an adequate and accurate account of the thinkers and themes at issue, the best way to answer this question is to consider how the philosophers (p. 619) involved would identify themselves. That is to say, what is it that *most mattered to them*? As our account of three key figures makes clear, for them, the religious-irreligious dimension that is of considerable concern and salience. For some, such as Clarke, the empiricist-rationalist opposition is entirely secondary and only of peripheral importance. The general issue of the scope and limits of human understanding are not what animates and directs his philosophical energies and attention. For others, and this *perhaps* includes Berkeley and Hume, a more mixed or nuanced assessment may have to be given—one that allows that they had concerns reaching beyond the philosophy-religion relationship. On no account, however, should we accept an analysis or interpretation of British philosophy in the (early) eighteenth century that fails to give the religion-irreligion opposition equal weight and standing in its importance alongside the well-established and deeply entrenched focus on the empiricist-rationalist dichotomy. An appreciation of the debate relating to cosmology and causation, as it involved leading figures such as Clarke, Berkeley and Hume, serves to show that any one-dimensional perspective of this kind must be rejected as incomplete and inadequate picture of the dominant and most significant philosophical controversies of the time as they were understood by the principal parties involved.

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ Clarke had a number of influential followers during the first half of the eighteenth century. Among the most important works written in this vein was William Wollaston's *Religion of Nature Defended* (1724). By the early 1730s, however, both Clarke and Wollaston were dead and the most respected champion of the argument a priori still active was the Scottish philosopher Andrew Baxter. In his *Enquiry Into the Nature of the Human Soul* (1733) Baxter presents a systematic defense of Clarke's basic project in the *Demonstra-*

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tion, sharing Clarke's aim to provide a (dogmatic) defense of the Christian Religion and refutation of the atheism of Hobbes, Spinoza and their followers. Baxter was a neighbor of Hume's in the Borders area of Scotland in the early 1730s. It is especially significant that among his closest friends and admirers was William Warburton, one of Hume's most vociferous enemies and critics. Further details on the relevance of Baxter for understanding Hume's philosophy can be found in Russell, 2008, *passim*.

(²) Although the early impact of Berkeley's immaterialist doctrine was not great in England, it attracted considerable interest in Scotland. The first extended criticism in English came from Andrew Baxter, who devoted the entire penultimate chapter of his *Enquiry into the Human Soul* to a refutation of "Dean Berkeley's scheme against the existence of the material world." It is Baxter's general view that Berkeley's scheme constitutes the "wildest and most unbounded scepticism" and that it no more serves as "an antidote to atheism" than "putting out the eyes is the best cure for dimness of sight" (Baxter 1733: 7.11). Among our own contemporaries it may be taken for granted that Berkeley is clearly a superior thinker to Baxter, who is now largely forgotten. It is worth pointing out, however, that this opinion was not universally accepted in the eighteenth century. William Warburton, for example, compares Berkeley's "miserable sophisms" unfavorably in comparison with the "great genius" of Baxter. For further details on Baxter and Berkeley, and the relevance of their respective philosophical systems for Hume's philosophy see Russell (2008), especially Chapter 13.

(³) Both these thinkers allow that finite spirits may be real agents or causes (contrast Malebranche 1980: 450; 1992: 96).

(⁴) Hume's concession that there *may* exist unknown "secret causes" or powers in objects makes clear that his scepticism takes the form of neither denying nor asserting the existence of such powers. On this account, ontological hypotheses of this kind are both practically irrelevant and theoretically meaningless, given that from the epistemological perspective all such powers are wholly unknown to us.

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