5

David Hume

On Human and Divine Things

LOUIS MIDGLEY

> In reality, it is the gospel, and the gospel alone, that has brought life and immortality to light.[1]
>
> David Hume

Daniel C. Peterson is a superb editor, expert writer, and solid scholar as well as a genuine friend. I am pleased to honor him with an essay that I hope he and others will find fresh and interesting.

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I will begin by telling the story of my first chance—or perhaps providential—encounter with some of what David Hume (1711–76) published on politics, about which he wrote much, and then on what he often called

1. David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty*Classics*, 1985), 590. (Liberty*Classics* is the publishing agent for the private Liberty Foundation whose headquarters is currently located in Indianapolis, Indiana.)

"religion." I have found that my opinions on politics, as I will indicate, have been strongly influenced by Hume. I will identify his opinions first about some of these human things that have come to fit rather snugly my own way of setting out and explaining politics and then also his critical appraisal of what is known as "natural theology," which I hope to demonstrate is consonant with the grounds of Latter-day Saint faith.

A mere glance at the epigraph to this article should alert readers that *some* of Hume's opinions, which turn out to be at least puzzling but which Hume seems to have placed in some of his essays and books, are mostly ignored or brushed aside by those commenting on his opinions about natural theology. One reason these have been ignored is that they have been seen as merely Hume's effort to keep from getting into serious trouble in Scotland for his heresies. These statements are actually very similar to those that Saints make—that is, in response to questions that can be answered in a genuinely satisfactory way by the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and hence through divine special revelation.

These questions include the proper understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ as it is set out in the Book of Mormon. There Christ's Atonement is described as a victory over death in all its forms, including mortal and spiritual death, on certain conditions, of course—hence *not* by some mere theory of atonement, of which there are quite a few. One such theory is the standard Protestant Reformation Penal Substitution Theory advanced by both Martin Luther and John Calvin. In the Lutheran, or Evangelical, tradition, the incarnate Son of God is believed to have become guilty of all human sin, past, present, and future, with God the Father, in his wrath, having had God the Son murdered—that is, crucified—thereby nullifying sin on the basis of *faith alone* for those who confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. In the Calvinist, or Reformed, tradition, this terrible murder was for those destined for salvation at the moment of the presumed creation out of nothing. One must keep in mind that Hume was born and raised in Scotland, where a very harsh version of Calvinism was solidly in control.

THE STORY BEGINS . . .

I will begin with the story of how I came to appropriate much of what Hume wrote about human things, especially politics. I will call special attention to some of his opinions about divine things that just happen to fit snugly with my own Latter-day Saint faith. For reasons I will set out, I am not uninterested in what Hume thought about the "religious hypothesis"—that is, what is traditionally known as natural theology. The reason is that I very much agree with his reservations about this powerful religious ideology.

If Hume happens not to have believed all of his own strikingly faith-affirming remarks about divine things, which is possible, I actually prefer my own "misunderstanding" to what he may have truly believed.

AN OCEAN VOYAGE

On June 25, 1950, the day on which I had what was then known as a missionary farewell, the Korean War began. This subsequently resulted in a slight delay in my boarding the SS *Sonoma*, a World War II freighter that was fitted to accommodate twelve passengers, on which I was assigned to travel to New Zealand. The holds of that ship had been filled to the weather deck in San Francisco, where four of us Latter-day Saint missionaries had boarded—two were headed for Pago Pago on Tutuila Island, American Samoa, and two of us for New Zealand. The next day, at a naval base in Oakland, "supplies for the Korean War"—much of which turned out to be beer, in addition to actual war materials—were strapped on deck to just slightly below the bridge level of the ship. This resulted in some serious pitching and rolling before all this cargo lashed to the deck was offloaded at Pearl Harbor in Oahu, Hawaii, where I assume it was soon on its way to Japan or Korea.

Prior to leaving for New Zealand in August 1950, I had quite often consulted the Book of Mormon, especially while having sometimes lively conversations with my father, particularly after attending Church services on Sundays. When we disagreed, which sometimes happened, we both turned to the Book of Mormon for answers. If we could not find an answer there, we assumed that we were probably struggling with the wrong question. This wonderful ocean voyage provided me with ample time to read

the Book of Mormon slowly and carefully as well as to test its historical soundness and its moral instruction. Subsequently, as a missionary I used the Book of Mormon to both teach and understand the restored gospel.[2]

At the end of that month-long voyage from San Francisco, with stops at Pearl Harbor and American Samoa, we eventually arrived in Wellington, the capital of New Zealand. On the morning of my first full day in New Zealand, I briefly visited the bookstore Whitcombe and Tombs,[3] where I purchased an inexpensive used copy of the *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, by David Hume, a famous Scottish philosopher, essayist, historian, diplomat, and economist—a genuine polymath. From that moment I have cherished David Hume's *Essays*.[4]

HUME AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

The first thing I discovered when I opened this then-sturdy little volume of 616 pages was that "Publius"—that is, James Madison—had been very deeply influenced by David Hume. I realized that Hume had set out much that Madison in particular later included in the *Federalist Papers*, the famous and truly remarkable letters to the editors of New York newspapers carefully explaining the contents of the proposed Constitution in the hope of New York's ratifying it. For example, Madison's famous *Tenth Federalist* lifted arguments from Hume about, for instance, the "mischiefs of faction."[5] Hume described various kinds of factions as well as the unruly passions that drive them, some of which, if unchecked, could yield virtual or even actual civil war.

---

2. I also became an avid follower of Hugh Nibley's scholarship. And I also tried my best to introduce Nibley's writings to the Saints in New Zealand.
3. Which is now known as Whitcoulls. It has become the major chain of bookstores in New Zealand. There might now be more than a dozen in the Auckland area.
4. David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (London: Grant Richards, 1903). Since this is no longer available and my prize copy is now, much like me, falling apart, I will refer to the truly excellent edition of Hume's *Essays* that was published in 1985 by Liberty*Classics*.
5. Most specifically from Hume's essay entitled "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 54–63.

Hume also showed how republican regimes are in need of what Madison called a "lesson of moderation"[6] and how a well-constructed republican regime can assist in mitigating the mischiefs of faction. Hume called attention to the old and proper political maxim

> that, in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controuls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, co-operate to public good. Without this, . . . we shall in vain boast of the advantages of any constitution, and shall find, in the end, that we have no security for our liberties . . . , except the good-will of our rulers; that is, we shall have no security at all.[7]

Hume described this as "a just *political* maxim, *that every man must be supposed a knave*: Though at the same time, it appears somewhat strange, that a maxim should be true in *politics* but false in *fact*."[8]

Hume also insisted that people are more honest "in their private than in the public capacity, and will go greater lengths to serve a party, than when their own private interest is alone concerned."[9] So the lawgivers or legislators who constitute a regime must make a skillful division of powers to facilitate real checks on avarice, ambition, and other violent and

---

6. Moderation is not one of the four famous so-called cardinal virtues, at least as set out in great detail by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), but it is a crucial personal and civic virtue—Publius, at least, thought that moderation was a crucial virtue for republican regimes. See the first of the *Federalist Papers*. These four virtues were first stressed by the one known as "An Athenian Stranger" in Plato's *Laws* (at 965c), who asks, "What is it that we assert is one in courage, moderation, justice, and prudence, and is justly called by the name, virtue." The Greek word for "virtue" is *arete*, which refers, for humans, to moral excellence. (Our English word *virtue* comes from Latin, not Greek.) To these four initially pagan virtues, Christians added three more: faith, hope, and love. See especially Moroni 7–10.
7. David Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 42.
8. Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," 42–43.
9. Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," 43.

malevolent passions. "If, on the contrary, separate interest be not checked, and be not directed to the public, we ought to look for nothing but faction, disorder, and tyranny from such a government."[10] This is merely a very small sample of what James Madison, in framing our Constitution, drew from Hume's *Essays* and then set out in the *Federalist Papers* in an effort to explain the new, "more perfect" union.[11]

Early on I had no idea that James Madison not only managed to set in place many of the essential features of the Constitution of the United States but also was able to articulate them in a very clear and forceful way in the *Federalist Papers* through a careful reading of David Hume's *Essays*.

Instead, I assumed in 1950 that I had missed something in the excellent lectures on the founding of the United States by G. Homer Durham,[12] under whom I studied at the University of Utah immediately prior to my proselytizing endeavors in New Zealand. At that point in time I had not heard (or read) a thing about David Hume being the major intellectual source for basic elements that James Madison was able to place in our Constitution. What I did not realize then—and only discovered later, years after my first mission in New Zealand—is that no one had yet discovered that James Madison borrowed language and arguments from David Hume's *Essays* that ended up constituting the core of Madison's own crucial essays in the *Federalist Papers*, which have become a kind of official commentary on our Constitution and fortunately are often cited in decisions issued by the Supreme Court of the United States.

Instead, like others, I was taught that the Constitution was somehow derived from the famous social contract theory set out by John Locke

10. Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," 43.

11. For almost twenty years I taught a course on the *Federalist Papers* once or twice a year, alternating with a course on Alexis de Tocqueville's truly remarkable *Democracy in America*.

12. Professor G. Homer Durham (1911–85), who had a significant influence on me, was a distinguished scholar. He founded the then-excellent political science department at the University of Utah and became the academic vice president there. He later served as president of Arizona State University (1960–69). Later he was called as a member of the Quorum of the Seventy (1977–85) and served as the seventeenth Church Historian and Recorder for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1982–85).

(1632–1704). The problem is that very little, if anything, in the *Federalist Papers* even hints at the social contract theory. In addition, it was years later that Douglass Adair (1912–68), a very gifted historian at the College of William & Mary, became justly famous for essays in which he drew attention, among other things, to James Madison's crucial dependence on David Hume's *Essays*.[13]

ANOTHER TWIST IN THE STORY

I stayed for about a week in Wellington, where I briefly joined the missionaries then assigned to Lower Hutt.[14] With one brief stop in Palmerston North, I reached Auckland by train. There I introduced myself to Gordon Young, my first mission president, who sent me—by myself—to Whangarei, the provincial capital of what is known as the Northland, after I had equipped myself with a new bicycle. Whangarei was near the wonderful Bay of Islands, where Reverend Samuel Marsden (1765–1838), on Christmas Day 1814, launched the Anglican Christian Missionary Society's very important effort to bring Christian faith to the Maori. This was the place where that all began. It was also the wonderful place in which I had my first encounter with the Maori in and around the Bay of Islands.

However, even before I began my adventure among the Maori, I was able to read and even lightly mark some of Hume's *Essays*, including his exceptionally skeptical essay entitled "Of the Immortality of the Soul,"[15] and his very famous essay on "Miracles," which was included in my rather

13. See *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair* (New York: Norton, for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, 1974). This was reprinted by the Liberty Foundation in 1998. Fifteen important articles, essays, and notes are assembled in this book.

14. There I actually engaged in what was then the recommended way of proselytizing that, much like most other missionaries, I soon refused to use. Latter-day Saint missionaries were then urged to use what was called the "Anderson Plan." Along with other missionaries, I found it impossible to use. This had been fashioned by Richard L. Anderson, who later became a prominent professor at Brigham Young University and also a highly valued colleague and close friend. I never spoke of his "plan" with Richard.

15. David Hume, "Of the Immortality of the Soul," in *Essays*, 590–98.

odd version of *Essays*.[16] In Hume's remarks about the immortality of the human soul, I discovered that he insisted that "nothing in this world is perpetual"; hence there is exactly nothing *in nature* that warrants a belief that there is a life after life—that is, that humans are immortal. Instead, he insisted that everything about the natural world, everything known by new natural science, lacks any evidence that humans survive death.[17] However, in the closing lines of this profoundly skeptical essay, Hume suddenly claims that "the want of arguments, *without revelation*, sufficiently establishes the negative." Then he concludes this essay as follows: "Nothing could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to divine revelation; since we find, that no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth."[18]

The moment that I read those words from Hume, both the Book of Mormon and the story of its recovery became for me this very clearly crucial "divine revelation." I was already prepared to make the Book of Mormon the core of what I would teach as a missionary.

More David Hume

After I was back in university two years later, I soon discovered a remarkable book by David Hume entitled *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*.[19]

16. In this essay I will not address Hume's famous deeply skeptical essay "Miracles." The reason is that I am aware of nine essays and books that address it in different ways. But I do not control this literature. I will merely indicate that I believe that there are miracles but that they are not violations of the laws of nature. I see the Book of Mormon as a miracle that necessarily is fully open to public investigation since it is an authentic ancient history. I have also had experiences I see as miracles. At my age I have been able to look back at my charmed life. I now see things I have experienced as the work of divine Providence. I mention some of these in an essay entitled "A Giving of Accounts," which can be found in *Remembrance and Return: Essays in Honor of Louis C. Midgley*, ed. Ted Vaggalis and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2019), xxv–xli.

17. Hume, "Of the Immortality of the Soul," 590–98.

18. Hume, "Of the Immortality of the Soul," 597, 598.

19. David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Henry D. Aiken (New York: Hafner, 1973). I still have this treasured and also heavily marked copy of this paperback. However, I now very much prefer the World Classics assembly of items by David Hume, entitled *Principal Writings on Religion including*

Hume had written these essays in 1751,[20] twenty-five years prior to his death, but had not published them. This book was eventually published in 1779, three years *after his death*. Hume had importuned Adam Smith (1723–90), who was his close friend, to see that this now famous book was published after his death. Adam Smith rejected his friend's request. Hume's nephew then agreed to see that the *Dialogues* were published.

NOW, THE RIDDLE . . .

According to J. C. A. Gaskin, Hume "was brought up a Presbyterian, denied being a deist, expressed surprise that anyone should be an atheist, and yet seemed to *undermine religious belief at almost every point*."[21] It is likely that Hume's natural *religion* is for him the equivalent of the very old and much more standard natural *theology*.[22] In addition, Anthony Flew was confident that the most

> Hume was prepared positively to affirm was the bare existence of a Deity, about the essential nature of which nothing whatever can be known, and which could, surely, not be identified as an entity separate and distinct from the Universe itself. The "*true* religion," to which Hume professed his devotion, was persuasively defined to exclude all actual religious belief and practice. For he made no bones about his disbeliefs in both human immortality and any kind Divine intervention, miraculous or otherwise, in the ordinary course of nature.[23]

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), since it has assembled virtually all of Hume's publications on divine things. I will cite this World Classics edition of Hume's *Dialogues*.

20. Hume, *Dialogues*, xviii.
21. Hume, *Dialogues*, ix; emphasis added.
22. Natural theology is the idea that the order attributed to or found in nature provides solid evidences or even proof that the cause for this order is God. An instance of such "proofs" was provided by Saint Thomas Aquinas, who advanced five such proofs.
23. Anthony Flew, introduction to *Writings on Religion*, by David Hume, ed. Anthony Flew (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992), vii. Incidentally, Anthony Flew (1923–2010) was a strident atheist who eventually shifted from atheism to a form of deism, though not to Christian faith.

ON THE MUDDLE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

In *Dialogues*, Hume's interlocutors—that is, Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo—begin their conversation about the proper education of young men by first agreeing on the existence of God and also that this ought to be part of the education of a young person inclined to engage in philosophy. They continue their conversation by differing in various ways on the proper order in which the elements of philosophy ought to be taught. One follows a traditional maxim—"That students of philosophy ought first to learn logics, then ethics, next physics, last of all, the nature of the Gods." Why this order? "The science of natural theology, . . . being the most profound and abstruse of any, requires the maturest judgment in its students; and none but a mind, enriched with all the other sciences, can safely be entrusted with it."[24]

Then Demea indicates that "the study of natural theology" ought to be postponed because "it is the only science" that is so open to "the eternal disputations of men, the obscurity of all philosophy, and the strange, ridiculous conclusions, which some of the greatest geniuses have derived from the principles of natural reason."[25] Presumably there is no real agreement among those engaged in the science of natural theology, hence there is no agreement on the proper understanding of the nature and attributes of God by those engaged in this science.

Hume's Philo is highly skeptical of what human reason can discover working merely with an analogy between the natural world and the way humans happen to reason. He often exploits this fact by playing Cleanthes and Demea against each other, since they often differ on the nature and attributes of God. They also differ on how unaided human reason, without divine revelation, can make sense of this analogy between the way human beings design things and robust signs of design in the natural world that might perhaps indicate that something, perhaps even a God or gods, created and orders the natural world.

Is it possible that what is called the science of natural theology collapses into what Hume calls "natural religion" because it fails to provide the necessary evidence (or proofs) that the source of the order in the world

24. Hume, *Dialogues*, 32.

25. Hume, *Dialogues*, 32.

is actually divine, but instead at best merely suggests that this is possible? If something like this is true, then we have an explanation for why Hume's *Dialogues* are also focused on identifying good and bad, better or worse, as well as false and true reasons one might entertain for holding that the *cause* or *mover* is known by natural theology instead of the God known by divine special revelations.

Philo eventually casts serious doubt upon how much can be expected from "mere human reason" finding in the natural order of things evidences useful in teaching young people the proper nature and attributes of God so that they would have a proper faith. Keeping in mind that Hume was raised a Scottish Presbyterian, an especially harsh form of Calvinism, he has his Philo set out at the beginning of the conclusion to his *Dialogues* on what he calls "natural religion" that "it is natural to imagine" that human beings "will form a notion of those unknown Beings, suitably to the present gloom and melancholy of their temper, when they betake themselves to the contemplation of them. Accordingly, we find the tremendous images to predominate in all religions; and we ourselves, after having employed the most exalted expression in our descriptions of the Deity, fall into the flattest contradiction, in affirming that the damned are infinitely superior in number to the elect."[26]

Then Hume's Philo affirms that "there never was *popular religion*, which represented the state of departed souls in such a light, as would render it eligible for human kind, that there should be such a state. These fine models of religion are the mere product of philosophy. For as death lies between the eye and the prospect of futurity, that event is shocking to nature, that it must throw a gloom on all regions that lie beyond it."[27]

Put another way, Hume seems to reject certain styles of religious worship—that is, all of what is likely to have been the Calvinist "religion" with which he was familiar in his youth.

And then, at the very end of *Dialogues*, Hume has his Philo explain that the most that can reasonably be derived from a natural theology, at least from the perspective of "the philosophic sceptics," which both Hume and his Philo certainly were, is to "suspend all judgment with regards

26. Hume, *Dialogues*, 127.

27. Hume, *Dialogues*, 127; emphasis added.

to such *sublime and extraordinary subjects*."[28] Why? Efforts to fashion a natural theology, "as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence."[29] But, those who, for whatever reasons, are deeply "religious" may end up giving more than merely an appropriate assent to such a proposition. Some are also deeply troubled that mere unaided human reason cannot go further and settle these momentous questions once and for all.

Hume's Philo—who, like Hume himself, was highly skeptical about what unaided human reason could arrive at when attempting to confront and settle such crucial issues—ends the conversation about natural theology by pointing out that some end up with disdain or contempt for human reason because it cannot provide a genuinely satisfactory solution "with regard to so extraordinary and magnificent a question."[30] Then Philo adds the following:

> But, believe me, Cleanthes, the most natural sentiment, which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion, is a longing desire and expectation, that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance, by affording some more particular revelation to mankind, and making discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the divine object of our Faith. A person seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity: While the haughty dogmatist, persuaded that he can erect a complete system of theology by the mere help of philosophy, disdains any farther aid, and rejects this most adventitious instructor.[31]

Where did David Hume actually stand on this issue? It may not be possible to be certain. However, one can be certain that Hume was aware of the "imperfections of natural reason." This helps to explain why Hume

28. Hume, *Dialogues*, 129; emphasis added.
29. Hume, *Dialogues*, 129; emphasis deleted.
30. Hume, *Dialogues*, 129.
31. Hume, *Dialogues*, 129–30.

has his Philo opine as follows: "To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian."[32] This statement seems to address the question with which the dialogue began: the proper education of youth—and perhaps also child-like adults![33]

It is, I believe, desirable to be skeptical of what is described at the beginning of the Hume *Dialogues* as "mere human reasoning" to properly address, and then somehow settle, questions of the greatest magnitude. One of Hume's more famous opinions is that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."[34] He had in mind, of course, the calm passions and not the often violent and unruly ones, which very often flare up even or especially over both the most trivial and also the most important of issues.

Hume's remarkable *Dialogues* set out a host of objections to classical theism, which goes back at least to Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430). This can easily be found in remarks in Augustine's *Confessions*, in which Augustine addressed the question of what God was doing before he created the heavens and the earth. Augustine's first response—presumably a joke—was that God was fashioning a hell for those who ask such questions. His serious answer was that there was *nothing*, not even time or space, before God created *everything* out of nothing.[35] This places God somehow "outside" of time and space. God is thus understood as a First Thing that presumably explains why there is something rather than

32. Hume, *Dialogues,* 130. From the moment that I read this statement, I have striven to be what Hume identified as "a philosophical sceptic." Put another way, I happen to agree fully with Hume on this.

33. Hume, *Dialogues*, 130.

34. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, book III, part III, section III, "Of the Influencing Motives of the Will"; see sites.pitt.edu/~mthompso/readings/hume.influencing.pdf.

35. Saint Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions: With an Introduction and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. David Vincent Meconi (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 327–64. This is book XI, entitled "Time and Eternity," where God is understood as eternal—that is, timeless. Both Catholics and Protestants are often very fond of Augustine's understanding of divine things.

nothing. When God is imagined as a first cause or mover of everything, *it* is not a being that exists but Being-Itself. I wrote my PhD dissertation on Paul Tillich (1886–1965)—the then famous German-American systematic theologian who insisted that the only statement about God that is not equivocal is that God is Being-Itself. And Being-Itself has exactly nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth, if he even existed, and hence certainly not with his Atonement and Resurrection.

Being-Itself is also *ganz anders*, which is German for "wholly other"—that is, not a being that exists but a being entirely unlike in every possible way anything in the natural and human world who is also fully responsible for all the evils encountered in nature and for what humans inflict upon themselves and each other. When God is understood as Being-Itself, *it* does not and cannot respond to prayer or weep for those who truly suffer during their mortal probation.

Those striving for a natural theology have fashioned a deity that is immutable—that is, unable to change and hence also unable to fix things. Since this is what is entailed in natural theology, then it should be avoided, since it conflicts with what is known about God's loving attention to human beings as set out in our scripture and from our own direct experience with the Holy Spirit.

In the past, those with doubts about divine things seem to have sensed that a public fuss about such things could and perhaps would rend the necessary moral fabric of regimes, which was a good that even the doubters badly needed. Put still another way, doubters seem to have sensed that without the fear of divine retribution, the necessary, salutary, habitual obedience to both moral and legal rules might begin to wither or even collapse, especially for those driven by malevolent passions of greed, avarice, ambition, and so forth. Children, and also childish adults—thus, most everyone—were thought to need additional reasons to support moral and legal restraints on their behavior. This was set out in book X of Plato's dialogue entitled *Laws*.[36] For this reason, I see that portion of the *Laws* as the earliest instance of what eventually came to be known as natural theology.

36. See *The Laws of Plato*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 884a–910d (pp. 280–311). One of the interlocutors suggests that "arguments for God" yield a God that is not all that interested in human beings. It is also more than hinted that the gods of a city are merely the work of the regime's lawgivers.

Those who entertained doubts about divine things may also recognize the social utility of belief in the gods.[37] Divine retribution, rather than generous gifts of love, have been pictured by Plato as a useful myth or "noble lie" that supported and sustained obedience to the legal and moral rules necessary for a civilized society. This tended to make the critical appraisal of a regime a purely private matter.

Hume's hostility to the very harsh Calvinism with which he was once indoctrinated seems to have turned him in a very different direction. He had his Philo end his famous posthumously published *Dialogues* with the following, I believe, true statement:

> If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, *that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*: If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication: If it afford[s] no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance: And if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no further than to the human intelligence, and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the qualities of the mind: If this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition, as often as it occurs, and believe that the arguments, on which it is established, exceed the objections which lie against it? Some astonishment indeed will naturally arise from the greatness of the object: Some melancholy from its obscurity:

One ought also to keep in mind that the first use of what in English is "theology" is found in Plato's *Republic* (see 278a), where the word identifies the tales told by poets in a well-regulated regime. This is not a base but a *noble lie* since it presumably serves to make children—and childlike adults—more likely to obey the laws of a regime.

37. I have previously examined the very old idea that the "truth" of faith in God is to be found in its role as the grounds for a civilized political regime. See Louis Midgley, "The Utility of Faith Reconsidered," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Perry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 139–86.

> Some contempt of human reason, that it can give no solution more satisfactory with regard to so extraordinary and magnificent a question. But believe me, Cleanthes, the most natural sentiment which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion, is a longing desire and expectation, that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance, by affording some particular revelation to mankind, and making discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the divine object of our faith. A person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity: While the haughty dogmatist, persuaded that he can erect a complete system of theology by the mere help of philosophy, disdains any further aid, and rejects this adventitious instructor. To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian.[38]

CONCLUSION

The persons, and the events surrounding them, found in the Latter-day Saint scriptures and especially in the Book of Mormon are fully part of the natural world, just as much as the tides, the moon, the heavens above the earth, and so forth. This constitutes historical evidence *in human history* that includes the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, with all that entails.

For Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon and the account of its recovery provide *real-world evidences* that divine special revelations have been made available to everyone who cares to give proper attention to them. This should also make the Saints more than indifferent to *theologia*, which was first used by Plato in book II of the *Republic* and much more extensively in book X of his *Laws*, which set in place what eventually came to be known as natural theology. There is nothing remotely like this,

38. Hume, *Dialogues*, 129–30. An effort has recently been made by James A. Harris to picture David Hume as a devout atheist. Harris has, unfortunately, ignored entirely all the language I quote above, which ends Hume's *Dialogues*. And Harris has also had to brush aside Hume's remark at the end of his essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul" as clearly "insincere." See James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 446–56, 360–61.

including the English word *theology*, found in the Latter-day Saint scriptures. We should be pleased that the flaws in natural theology were set out for us by David Hume in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, which includes his own very ironic comments about the need for divine revelation. It seems to me that this is what Hume really believed:

> Divinity or Theology, as it proves the existence of a Deity, and the immortality of souls, is composed partly of reasonings concerning particular, partly concerning general facts. It has a foundation in *reason*, so far as it is supported by experience. But its best and most solid foundation is *faith* and divine revelation.[39]

Louis Midgley *served as a missionary in New Zealand from 1950 to 1952, and then, with his wife, Ireta, from 1999 to 2000. He is an emeritus professor of political science at Brigham Young University, where he taught the history of political philosophy. His PhD was from Brown University. He is interested in the ways communities of faith respond to the challenges posed by modernity to faith in God.*

---

39. David Hume, "An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding," in *Essential Works of David Hume,* ed. Ralph Cohen (SNew York: Bantam Books, 1965), 166–67.