



## Hume's Fideism; Towards His Mysticism

Siamak Abdollahi<sup>1</sup> , Mansour Nasiri<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. in Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, College of Theology, Farabi Campus, University of Tehran and Lecturer at Azad University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran (Corresponding Author). [abdollahi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:abdollahi@ut.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, College of Theology, Farabi Campus, University of Tehran, Qom, Iran. [nasirimansour@ut.ac.ir](mailto:nasirimansour@ut.ac.ir)

Research Article



### Abstract

Contrary to what has been stated in most accounts that *Hume* intends to make arguments against the existence of God, he aims to attack the claim that religious propositions can be argued; not completely reject these propositions. He considers these propositions epistemologically outside of human knowledge but ontologically accepts the existence of God. With such a view, we can dismiss atheistic-agnostic interpretations and relate him to a kind of mysticism. The key to deciding whether or not *Hume* is a mystic is to determine what criteria we have to consider someone a mystic. Two very influential components here are (1) the belief in the existence of God; (2) the belief that the existence of God is far from our usual reasoning (antirational or irrational). And the second component is enough to call someone like *Wittgenstein* a fideist. We claim that there is clear evidence of these components in *Hume's* works; therefore, what reason do we have to remove *Hume* from the circle of fideism and mysticism? In this study, after an introduction to the concept and types of fideism, we show that *Hume*, based on his works, surpasses skepticism and manifests a special kind of fideism. While there is an emphasis on the mystery of the proposition that God exists, he combines Christian faith, in a form that is inseparable from illogical and mysterious propositions such as the incarnation of God. Thus, Hume can be called a Christian mystic.

### Keywords

Hume, fideism, antirationalism and irrationalism, mysticism, natural theology, argument.

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## Introduction; “What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?”

The contemporary world is embroiled in an antirational-irrational form of fideism; the most important factors are the human need for a full commitment based on faith, and the inability to find a final answer through the empirical sciences and secular political movements (Popkin, 1967, p. 632). In addition to this contemporary approach, the use of skeptical solutions to weaken rationalism and strengthen fideism has been fairly common throughout the history of philosophy, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Konyndyk, 1987, p. 207). Accordingly, in contrast to the classical interpretations of Hume, who is called an atheist or agnostic, today there are fideistic interpretations of his philosophy, and those of Richard Popkin (1967), J. M. Robertson (2011), Terence Penelhum (1992), and James A. Harris (2005) are the pioneers.

Accordingly, *is it possible to read Hume as a fideist?* (**RQ**) To make it easier to trace Hume’s fideism, a symbolism is introduced as follows:

**Table I:** Abbreviations.

No.	Symbol	Description
1	UC <sup>1</sup> →RM <sup>2</sup>	Epistemological arguments do not lead to a definite conclusion; which in religious matters ends in mystery!
2	GE <sup>3</sup>	Accepting the existence of God
3	IV <sup>4</sup> →SS <sup>5</sup>	Inner validity for religion= Self-sufficiency of faith
4	RR <sup>6</sup>	Rejectreasoning about the existence of God→The paradoxical nature of faith, UC & IV
5	IE <sup>7</sup>	Religious propositions are inexplicable and incomprehensible
6	TF <sup>8</sup>	Theological propositions represent facts
7	TS <sup>9</sup>	Rejecting theological systems
8	NA <sup>10</sup>	Rejecting atheistic-agnostic approaches about Hume= GE & IV
9	F <sup>11</sup>	Proof of Hume's fideism= RR= Religious truth is based on faith, not on reasoning
10	M <sup>12</sup>	Proof of Hume's mysticism= GE+RR

1. Uncertainty.
2. Religiously mystery.
3. Godexists.
4. Inner validity.
5. Self-efficient.
6. To refuse reasoning.
7. Unexplainable.
8. Theological propositions represent facts.
9. Theological systems.
10. Non-atheism& non-agnosticism.
11. Fideism.
12. Mysticism.

To prove Hume's mysticalfideism, we have to trace *F* and *M* based on the above symbols. Such a claim is more compatible with Christian fundamentalism, which intimidates reason because of the deviation it has created for the human from his original path (Original Sin) than with Christian theology, insofar as it is entirely based on reason and philosophical-theological arguments. But for now, we must provide a definition of fideism; then, by searching through Hume's works, we will examine the possibility of a fideistic interpretation of him.

### Definition of fideism

The term fideism is derived from *fides*, which is a Latin word for faith and it can also be expressed in the form of faithism.

Richard Popkin, in his entry on fideism in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, gives us Hume's Formula for Faith (HFF), quoting from Hume's essay, *Of Miracles*:

Some forms of fideism denigrate or deny the value of reason and science, and these amount to a kind of irrationalism, as indicated in David Hume's ironic statement at the end of his essay "Of Miracles": [The] Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even to this day can not be believed by any reasonable person without them. Mere reason is not sufficient to convince us of its veracity; and whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience (HFF) (Popkin, 1967, pp. 630-631).

After a review of the three sources, the *Encyclopedia of Britannica* (Britannica, Fideism), the *Stanford Philosophical Encyclopedia* (Amesbury, 2017), and Popkin's article in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Popkin, 1967), definitions of fideism are summarized as follows: it is a philosophical-transcendental view on faith and concerns faith not as a religious belief (which is not fideism) but as the final and appropriate measure of certainty (self-sufficiency of faith); faith is paradoxical, the paradox between what reason understands and what faith is and rational reasoning is worthless (unnecessary and inappropriate). Finally, fideism is:

A philosophical view that considers faith not as a religious belief, but as something transcendental, paradoxical, and self-sufficient (without the need for reasoning).

## Evidence of Hume's fideism in his works

*Why do we consider Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Wittgenstein to be fideists? And not Hume?!*

The problem of fideism, in short, is whether religious beliefs can be justified by rational reasoning. Can reason be used as a criterion of the truth (or falsehood) of religious propositions? The fideist gives a negative answer to these questions. Immediately the next question arises: why can religious propositions not be rationally evaluated? In this research, we will examine these questions in Hume's system of thought to see what the answers are.

"What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Tertullian's statement still gives a classical interpretation of fideism. According to early Christianity, *philosophy is a cheat to beware of (The Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians, 2:8 Douay-Rheims Version)*. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's" (*Matthew, 22:21*); which confirms the separation of faith and reason. These can be considered proofs of fideism in the Bible and early Christianity. Propositions such as the incarnate God, the Trinity, and the miracles of Christ, have mixed Christianity with a kind of mystery from the beginning, and after the third and fourth centuries, created a theological system, along with systematization by the church. A system that found Platonic-Aristotelian aspects in Augustine and Aquinas, and later, by mixing with modern rationality, insisted maximally on a claim that could rationally prove all Christian propositions. This modern theology was inherently different from early Christianity.

Hume begins his project here. According to him, the incarnation of God, which is the most important event in Christianity, was interpreted as a mysterious miracle until the seventeenth century, with a skeptical view of the power of reason (Hume, 2011, p. 61; Hume, 2007e, pp. 426-427; Millican, 2007, pp. xxiii- xxv). This proposition is not meaningful; whether we accept or reject it, we must remain silent because we cannot speak about them! As mysterious matters are inherently beyond the reach of the rational-reasoning intellect, logical language must be silent about them. This is probably why Demea in *Dialogues*<sup>1</sup> speaks less and is more silent than the other two characters!

It is difficult to understand Hume's thoughts about religion, but we have some clues in the *Dialogues*. Cleanthes represents rational religiosity (natural theology) and sees empirical (a posteriori) arguments as useful to prove the existence of God. Philo defends skepticism and Demea is opposed to

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1. Refers to *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

rationalism in religious matters and defends only a priori proofs of the existence of God (Coleman, 2007, p. xxviii). It is very difficult to get an idea of which character expresses Hume but the authors have evidence that Hume's view is an aggregation of Philo and Demea's views and a kind of skeptical fideism.

He gives us some clues to decode his thought. What point does he want to tell us that at the end of the *Dialogues*, explicitly in Philo's words, he considers philosophical skepticism a prerequisite for the beginning of believing Christianity? In a dialogue-oriented book, the character most of the commentary is given on is considered to be Hume's speaker, (Penelhum, 1983, p. 120) crosses the path of faith through the corridors of doubt. Now, if we call Hume a fideist, how will we read the *Dialogues*? Accordingly, the person closest to him is Demea who accepts religion and a priori arguments but rejects the philosophical and rational interventions based on empirical evidence.

The key to deciding whether or not Hume is a fideist, is to determine by which criteria we consider philosophers such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, William James, and Wittgenstein as fideists. We claim that all of these philosophers, regardless of proposition *GE*, are discussed in proposition *RR*; that is, understanding the existence of God is inherently separate from our common rational reasoning and from knowing Him (*RR*) (Amesbury, 2017) based on this point of view that relates someone to fideism if he/she distinguishes between accepting God and reasoning for Him, the key proposition in accepting proposition *F*, is *RR*, and not *GE*. If it turns out that the same is true for Hume, what reason do we have to remove him from the circle of fideism? Even if he was not a religious person, we can at least consider him a fideist as much as Wittgenstein, who was not a religious person (Drury, 1984, p. 79). (*RR*)

What makes Wittgenstein's case interesting in examining any fideism is this question: why has he strongly considered a fideist, even though Wittgenstein never acknowledged his faith? The answer is, although Wittgenstein himself did not have a religious belief, he accepted religion as one of the language games; and considered faith as a separate category, with internal validity and self-sufficiency (*IV + SS*). In the same way, to consider Hume, not an atheist nor an agnostic (*NA*), he must have religious faith himself (*GE*), and for considering a fideist (*F*) like Wittgenstein, he must accept the validity and self-sufficiency of faith and not reduce it to other matters such as philosophy, science, etc. (*IV + SS*). In the tradition of philosophy, the criterion for considering a person as a fideist is this proposition: The basis of religious truth is based on faith, and not on rational reasoning (proposition *F*) which is another formulation of the phrase "What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?" So, our main task in this research is to know whether Hume also

believes in proposition F and separates *Athens* and *Jerusalem* not.<sup>1</sup>

In the last chapter of the *Natural History of Religion*, Hume considers the intention, purpose, and plan in nature as evidence of the existence of an intelligent cause or creator for the world (GE) (Hume, 2011, p. 53). Also in the last pages of the *Dialogues*, he accepts the existence of a cause or causes, which are probably very similar to human intelligence, for order in nature. But firstly, he introduces it as an ambiguous and indefinable proposition (RM), and secondly, strongly rejects rational extension and generalization of it, and extraction of any other proposition from it<sup>2</sup> (GE + RR):

If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at the 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 affords 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 farther than to the human intelligence; and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the other 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? (Hume, 2007c, pp. 101-102).

Thus, in the text of Hume's works, evidence can be found for the acceptance of a cause for the world. In this case, Hume is closer to religious belief and faith than Wittgenstein, who did not consider himself a religious person<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, skepticism in Hume's time was used not to reject religion as a whole, but to reject religious dogmas and it did not conflict with religious faith. Richard Popkin strongly believes that skepticism in the seventeenth and

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1. The idea of Wittgensteinian fideism has been sharply criticized by D. Z. Phillips and others. In the article, we will mention many times that Hume believes in God; so he accepts the GE proposition and it is a powerful difference between him and Wittgenstein. But if someone regards Wittgenstein as a fideist; Hume, by the same criterion, should be thought a fideist too. And after all, based on fideism's definition, faith in God (GE) is not a necessary principle to fideism but RR is crucial.

2. Please see *Natural History* published in 1757 (in *Four Dissertations*) and *Dialogues* published in 1779.

3. A quote from Wittgenstein addressed to *Maurice O'Connor Drury*: "I am not a religious person; but I have to look at everything from a religious point of view" (Drury, 1984, p. 79).

eighteenth centuries, Hume's time, was not incompatible with religious faith and it was used to attack certainty in dogmatic religious claims, both in Christianity and Judaism to reduce the certainty imagined by dogmatists and to make faith and miracles more believable (Hester, 1992, p. 5). It means skepticism is for rejecting religious dogma and not for rejecting the whole of religion and faith.

Although having a determined understanding of Hume's conception of religion is very difficult (Noxon, 1995, p. 3), and it is not simply possible to call him an atheist (Gaskin, 1988, p. 1). Evidence like those given above, which we will deal with, shows us (1) Hume expresses the acceptance of God's existence in his works very delicately; therefore, he cannot be an atheist or an agnostic; and (2), we are not allowed to argue too much about proposition (1) because the existence of God is inherently beyond the reach of the human intellect and requires another realm called faith. The sum of propositions (1) and (2) presents the claim of Hume's fideism, and a kind of mystical-nonpantheistic view! A fideist believes that God exists, but it cannot be understood by the usual rational ways, and must simply be believed and accepted; something close to Kierkegaard's leap of faith, which Hume also believes by emphasizing a kind of mysticism.

To prove our claim (Hume's fideism) we must prove, first, Hume not only does not deny the existence of God but accepts it, (GE). Second, for Hume, reason has no way of proving the existence of God, (RR). We follow RR, GE, and the other symbols of Table I in Hume's work, to finally conclude whether Hume believes in *F* and is a fideist, or not.

### **Evidence of Hume's fideism in his Epistemology**

"To be a philosophical skeptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian" (Hume, 2007c, p. 102).

Among the propositions in Table I, the most common in Hume's epistemology is UC because, in his view, all the human epistemological methods, including causality and rational (logical) arguments, especially induction, do not produce a definite result; whether in epistemological or in religious matters. The point before starting the discussion is, the presupposition that religious-theological propositions are about the real world and their main claim is to inform about reality. For example, for a Christian, the divine incarnation is something that happened in year A, and in place B. So, we will not discuss the presupposition (TF).

As we know, Hume divides the subjects of the human mind into two categories, relations of ideas and matters of fact, and enumerates three important differences between them:

**Table II:** The differences between relations of ideas and matters of fact

No.	Differences	Ideas	Matters of Fact
I	The Criterion of Truth	Pure Reasoning	Experience
II	Certainty	✓	✗
III	Necessity	✓	✗

According to TF, the criterion for the truth of theological propositions is empirical, and they are not certain and necessary because in Hume's thought, the necessity exists only regarding a priori propositions such as a triangle has three sides. But there is no necessity regarding fact propositions like the sun will rise tomorrow. This means that theological propositions are not certain so religious faith can't be based on them (UC). From Hume's skeptical point of view, if reason is the only way to understand the truth, the desire for certainty is a kind of abnormal liking (UC) because it is an exaggeration of what reason can achieve:

The academics always talk of doubt and suspense of judgment, of danger in hasty determinations, of confining to very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice. ... There is, however, one species of philosophy, which seems little liable to this inconvenience, and that because it strikes in with no disorderly passion of the human mind, nor can mingle itself with any natural affection or propensity; and that is the Academic or Sceptical philosophy (Hume, 2007a, p. 30).

He explains antecedent and consequent skepticism; the former is an essential introduction to any research and the latter takes a skeptical look at any human finding, concerning the certainty of the ways of human knowledge as fruitless greed (UC). Antecedent skepticism is a doubt regarding the human intellectual system which wants to obtain the truth and is necessary for the study of philosophy. Only this corridor of doubt can pave the way for certainty; a path that passes through doubt but after passing it, it can reach stability and certainty; of course, this certainty is not of the intellect. Otherwise, any other path taken will only lead to speculation (Hume, 2007a, pp. 109-110).

Hume's skepticism, in his time, shows the futility of rational systems and natural theology (UC) and is a requirement of fideism. The way to overcome this skepticism and reach fideism is by grasping human nature that manifests itself as common sense. From Hume's point of view, reason cannot provide knowledge of the external world, the uniformity of nature, or personal identity

(UC). But human nature, through common sense, makes them possible. If it was not so, we would all be victims of lethargy, doubt, and anxiety. Skepticism of reason shows that belief in God is not rooted in human nature, and those empirical arguments cannot support such a belief (RR).

From this point of view, faith begins with philosophical skepticism but considers reason not appropriate to achieve definite results and counter it (RR). Reason has many limitations; like the problem of causation and induction and the explanation of facts (UC), so when we add reason to religious matters, we must accept its limitations. It is very important to know that the intellect is effective for starting the project of fideism and not for living faithfully and this is more obvious in the case of Christianity, which is inherently mysterious.

Of course, reason also has positive benefits; it can remove the annoying theories and prejudices of popular religion, establish a kind of formal and familiar piety that strengthens social adjustment (harmony), and allow the same respect that classical Pyrrhonian skeptics gave to the gods of their time (Penelhum, 1992, p. 108). For Penelhum, social adjustment is a very important issue and if it is not possible to speak clearly of the acceptance of minimal deism Hume<sup>1</sup> since he highly values social harmony, will be willing to concede deism because it enables him to live a life of the social and moral agreement with moderate theologians, as Cleanthes represents them. "What is clear is that Hume, who valued social harmony, is willing enough to concede this deism formally in preference to adopting the abrasively unbelieving stance of such thinkers as the French philosophes of his time" (Penelhum, 1983, p. 138).

We act in life based on common sense, not because we understand it or its principles; but because it makes life possible; which philosophy and skepticism do not give us. Hume's emphasis on common sense in life, rather than rationality, is due to man's need for certainty in practical life, which is not derived from the theoretical methods of logic and this means the separation of the thought and action in his thought. Also, religion is a universal coexistence whose certainty must be sought by practical life in itself and not in something theoretical and outside; like logic and philosophy (RR + RM).

Hume, while using skepticism, opposes an extreme usage, and sees common

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1. The authors think we can infer a new kind of deism from the original version. The original version of deism says we are deists if we believe in God only with human reason to reject believing in systematic religions. I think the essence of the definition is opposition to systematic religion and emphasizing reason is related to this opposition. Accordingly, we can introduce a second version of deism that only emphasizes opposition to the systematic religion; which can be named minimal deism.

sense and nature parting ways with such skepticism. On this basis, he strongly rejects official religions that have dogmatic and general laws which do not accept individuality and skepticism (TS), but he is open to a kind of fideistic deism. He is therefore opposed to the extreme Pyrrhonic-Sextus skepticism because such skepticism casts doubt on everything, creates meaninglessness and disbelief, and ultimately spoils the peace of life. On the other hand, life itself will destroy such skepticism: “The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism* or the excessive principles of skepticism is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life” (Hume, 2007a, p. 115).

About induction Alston’s view is noteworthy. He believes that from the time of Hume, induction was no longer accepted as a proper way to obtain certainty; both in religious and other matters (UC) (Alston, 1992, p. 18):

- Religious faith is inherently certain;
- Induction does not produce certainty;
- Induction is contrary to the nature of faith;
- So, induction is not a good way to gain faith (UC)

Hume also relates the causality principle, which is one of the most important principles in theological arguments, to the mental world, not to the real world because he believes that causality arises not from the necessity of the relationship between cause and effect, but from the experience of constant conjunction and creation of the concept of necessity between the two (Abdollahi, 2011, pp. 47-49), and it is very clear that causality in this interpretation will not open the way to religious certainty (UC) because theological propositions are related to the real world (TF) and causality is related to the mind. Therefore, all theological propositions based on the causal relation will not produce certainty and they are inclined to achieve their goal, which is a certainty for the believers. Thus, according to the *Enquiry*, the understanding of the truth of religion and the obtaining religious certainty through reason, that is, what rational theology claims and pursues, stems from man’s pride in his rational powers, and is a kind of exaggeration (Hume, 2007a, p. 30).

So in the case of metaphysics (philosophy) and theology, if a claim is made about matters of fact (which is possible), insofar as it relies on experience, it is epistemic, and of course, uncertain, and the rest are illusions and will have no end but fire (referring to Hume’s quotation that theological books are set on fire) (Hume, 2007a, p. 120). And so, according to Hume’s skepticism, there is no room for any kind of rational certainty (UC).

We conclude the review of Hume’s epistemology on the subject of his fideism, by stating that in the author’s view, the common understanding of him has been accompanied by a kind of misunderstanding; especially those

who have looked at him only from Kant's point of view. Hume's skepticism cannot be denied, but it seems that his main purpose was not a destructive one because he wanted to create a more complete scientific method in philosophy. From this perspective, Hume's skeptical epistemology carries over the message that if we are looking for the shore of certainty, the sea of rational knowledge does not have such a shore!

## Evidence of Hume's fideism in his philosophy of religion

So far, to examine Hume's fideism, we have shown that, according to his epistemology, human rational research is not certain, neither in the realm of religion (natural theology) nor in any other field. This means proving the proposition of uncertainty (UC) from Table I. All that has been mentioned is an introduction to checking the possibility of Hume's fideism by examining the propositions of his philosophy of religion.

### 1. In the origin of religion

If the main concern in the course of Hume's fideism is to find his opinion about God's existence, the main questions are (1) does he believe in God? and (2) what is his view of the origin of the idea of God (or belief in God)? Hume's answer to question (2) is quite clear and only one word: *fear*. In *Natural History*<sup>1</sup> and *Dialogues*, Hume acknowledges that it is fear, dread, and hope that is driven from it which has given rise to religion, God, and related ideas. With this psychological interpretation, he has considered that arguing for such issues is just an exaggeration and a justification of the exaggeration (RR). (Hume, 2011, pp. 18-19 & 21 & 31; Hume, 2007c, p. 68; O'Connor, 2001, pp. 165-166):

I am indeed persuaded, said Philo, that the best and indeed the only method of bringing everyone to a due sense of religion is by just representations of the misery and wickedness of men. And for that purpose, a talent of eloquence and strong imagery is more requisite than that of reasoning and argument (Hume, 2007c, p. 68).

As for question (1), it must be said (as stated earlier) that it's very difficult, and in some cases impossible, to find Hume's positive view of religion, especially the proposition of the existence of God. But according to signs of his fideism, GE, the proposition that God exists, is in the last chapter of *Natural History*, and the last lines of *Dialogues*. Because of the importance of this section, we quote Hume's text and then critique it. The text is from the last

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1. Refers to Natural History of Religion.

chapter of *Natural History*, entitled General Corollary, which he explicitly summarizes and concludes the previous chapters:

Though the stupidity of men, barbarous and uninstructed, be so great that they may not see a sovereign author in the more obvious works of nature, to which they are so much familiarized; yet it scarcely seems possible that any one of good understanding should reject that idea, when once it is suggested to him. A purpose, an intention, a design, is evident in everything; and when our comprehension is so far enlarged as to contemplate the first rise of this visible system, we must adopt, with the strongest conviction, the idea of some intelligent cause or author. The uniform maxims, too, which prevail throughout the whole frame of the universe, naturally, if not necessarily, lead us to conceive this intelligence as single and undivided, where the prejudices of education oppose not so reasonable a theory. Even the contrarieties of nature, by discovering themselves everywhere, become proofs of some consistent plan and establish one single purpose or intention, however inexplicable and incomprehensible (IE) (Hume, 2011, p. 53).

Of course, he emphasizes the complete entanglement of goods and evils but calls it the “uniform law of nature”, and that transgression is very exceptional. But there are still exaggerations of this, issues such as human nobility that man is the image of God on earth, the privilege of the human reason to understand God, inferencing author-creator from the works of nature, etc, all of which are common beliefs in theology, and they are religious principles based on dreaming; what man wants to call himself wise through. All of this indicates Hume’s opposition to rationalism (RR), natural theology, and, in his own words, opposition to theological systems and not to faith or religion generally (TS) (Hume, 2011, pp. 53-54).

The last paragraph of *Natural History* explicitly considers the truth of the universe to be an unexplainable mystery (IE), and doubt, uncertainty, and suspension of judgment are the only results of our scrutiny (UC). This is due to the weakness of human reason (RR), which not only creates doubts but also cannot even confirm them. Thus, natural theology opens the way to illusions and then philosophy comes to comfort:

The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, and suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject. But such is the frailty of human reason, and such the irresistible contagion of opinion, that even this deliberate doubt could scarcely be upheld, did we not enlarge our view, and, opposing one species of superstition to another, set them quarreling; while we, during their fury and contention, happily make

our escape into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy (Hume, 2011, p. 54).

We critique these statements, based on the symbolism of Table I:

1. Hume states explicitly the existence of a smart and powerful cause, the author, which can be called the God of religions (GE+NA).
2. He believes the best evidence for God's existence is experiencing intelligent design in normal life, and not reasons and arguments that it is common in educational systems such as Christian theology (RR+TS).
3. Such experiences, even if there are inexplicable and incomprehensible contradictions in them, (IE+M) show the necessity of faith in the existence of God (F).

Therefore, by accepting the existence of God while rejecting its reasonability, Hume is a fideist based on the definition. He also can even be called an extreme fideist because he also considers contradictions to strengthen faith in God. This is where his fideism manifests mysticism because it speaks of a plan and purpose that cannot be explained by reason (IE); however, it strengthens faith in God and you just have to believe to understand (M).

## 2. In Arguments for the existence of God

A large part of Hume's philosophy of religion is about the critique of the arguments for the existence of God; these arguments are considered to be in charge of proving the existence of God, and therefore their critique is very necessary for someone who wants to deny the rational view of religion. Of course, in this section, our main task in understanding Hume's fideism is not in the search that has been the author's usual method so far but in changing the default view of the reader; to read and interpret him not as an atheist or an agnostic, but as a fideist. From this point of view, these arguments all lose their effectiveness in proving the existence of God, and Hume is also considered a criticizer, not of the existence, but of the common way of looking at God (NA + RR). Here we may use a claim from the philosophy of science that the theory of Hume's mystical fideism has more of an explanatory and predictive power to understand him, than when he is read as an atheist or agnostic.

Such a view manifests itself in all these arguments. In Anselm's ontological argument, it is attacked for being a priori (Waxman, 2006, p. 509); in the cosmological argument, by rejecting causal necessity and generalization, knowledgeability of causality and induction is denied (UC) (Waxman, 2006: 510) and in the argument from design, Hume proposes such cases in which the

main principle of this argument (causality principle) is nonempirical (uncertain) (UC) and useless (ungeneralizable) (Hume, 2007c, p. 21; Hume, 2007a, pp. 103-104). All of this indicates a full rejection of the positivist-rational view of God's proposition (RR).

Hume clarifies that reasoning based on these arguments cannot help to prove the existence of a kind of divine agent, as taught by religions (RR). But in the end, he concludes his critique by accepting that, although the argument from design does not cover what it claims, it is somewhat convincing. The order in nature, although not conclusive proof of the existence of its author, is parallel to the fact that "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence" (Hume, 2007c, p. 101). As Philo puts it in the last part of the *Dialogues*: "The divine being, as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance and artifice of nature" (IE+RR+GE) (Hume, 2007c, p. 89).

Hume, therefore, accepts the existence of God (GE+NA) but emphasizes that we have no way of extending and generalizing it to prove the characteristics of this cause or causes (UE+RR). God exists, and his existence is not dependent and related to our understanding; rather, it must be believed like any other inexplicable being (IE+F):

"To know God is to worship him" (Hume, 2007c, p. 101).

### 3. In the problem of evil

One of Hume's main discourses, which has fueled his reputation for atheism, is his explanation of the problem of evil. But what is important about the problem of evil is to change the way we look at him. So let us read this issue with a presumption that is consistent with the claim of this research; that is, if Hume is a fideist, what would be his interpretation of the problem of evil? If Hume was an atheist, he, like Russell, should have confined himself to expressing the problem of evil (Russell: 1931: 105). Not only has Hume accepted the existence of God previously, but he also offered solutions to the problem, which, whether they are right or wrong, show his concern for answering the problem.

He gives us the best and most guidance in this direction. According to him, reflection on the nature and attributes of the author goes beyond human talent and intelligence, and with the tools of reason (which we use for other things), we do not have access to such a subject. We cannot rationally prove that, firstly, there is a God, and secondly, that God has so-called attributes: "These subjects exceed all human capacity, and that our common measures of truth and falsehood do not apply to them; a topic which I have all along insisted on (RR) (Hume, 2007c, p. 76). And this is what Demea emphasizes throughout the *Dialogues*; that is, accepting a priori arguments for the existence of God

(though not an Anselmian account), and rejecting any empirical a posteriori ones (Abdollahi, 2018, p. 114).

Demea considers the mystery of the nature of God, or more precisely, the holy cause, and the rejection of human criteria for understanding such a nature, to have commonalities with Philo: "I joined in alliance with you, to prove the incomprehensible nature of the divine being, and refute the principles of Cleanthes, who would measure everything by human rule and standard" (Hume, 2007c, p. 87). And in the tenth section, Philo describes his agreement with Demea after elaborating on the multiplicity and variety of evil for Cleanthes: "None but we *mystics*, as you were pleased to call us, can account for this strange mixture of phenomena, by deriving it from attributes, infinitely perfect, but *incomprehensible*" (Hume, 2007c, p. 74).

The phrase "holy cause" accurately indicates the fideists' position; which is, there is a god (GE) but it is holy. There is no reason why; by the standard of reason, neither can it be said it is nor can be said it is not; there is a kind of mystery in it that deprives us of the possibility of rational understanding; you just have to be silent (RR+IE).

Also, when Hume proposes the Manichaean dualistic system as a solution for the problem of evil, he accepts the existence of God, but rejects the unity of the author; or even acknowledges the existence of a God who our reason understands only as limited and not as absolute (GE):

Here the Manichaean systems occur as a proper hypothesis to solve the difficulty: And no doubt, in some respects, it is very spacious, and has more probability than the common hypothesis, by giving a plausible account of the strange mixture of good and ill, which appears in life. But supposing the author of nature to be finitely perfect, though far exceeding mankind; a satisfactory account may then be given of natural and moral evil, and every untoward phenomenon be explained and adjusted (Hume, 2007c, pp. 86, 78).

In these ways, Hume's main line in religious matters is clearly seen; the position that religious propositions are not rationally provable and the goal is not to reject God's intellect but to say that we cannot know anything about whether God is good. Because just as in the case of human beings, consciousness does not show anything about morality, so in the case of God, it is not possible to reach God's moral properties from his consciousness (Hume, 2007d, pp. 109-110). This is why if we avoid applying unity and absoluteness to the existence and properties of God and do not extend infinity to them by rational examination, evil will not be a problem for God (Abdollahi, 2018, pp. 115-118).

Based on the previous statements:

1. Hume accepts the existence of God because logically the existence of God takes precedence over the acceptance of consciousness for him (GE).
2. Hume says that from God's consciousness, his moral properties cannot be inferred (RR).

What Hume emphasizes on the problem of evil is the logical problem (or the problem of inference); which is pursued as one of the main topics in the *Dialogues*. By stating the problem of inference, he objects to an inference of God in a world full of evil; not that there is a God but that the way to reach God, through such a world, is logically wrong and does not lead us to the goal. *So the subject matter, then, is the method, not the purpose.* Another reason that makes evil a problem is disregard for the limits of reason, and that is what evoked evil. (1) There is a God, (2) there is evil, how are these two possible together?! Hume's answer is again the common sense of all human beings; that is, just as the experience of ordinary people puts the two together, philosophers who have accepted (1) should not, by arguing too much, want to adapt (2) with (1), or rationally justify (1) and (2). But after accepting (1), they must also believe in (1) along with (2) (F) (Hume, 2007c, p. 79).

### **Against systematic theology**

According to Hume's skepticism, organized religion is a set of coherent and fixed principles and beliefs, in which it is not possible to modify these beliefs and subjectivize the object of faith, and everyone should have the same belief about religious objects. For example, everyone performs the Lord's Supper or prays in the same way. In this case, first of all, the subjectivity of faith disappears and secondly, due to the dogma of formal religious beliefs and practices, the possibility of the subject's progress and transcendence is lost. Probably Hume's most important fear of official religion is the horrible memory created by the thousand years of the Middle Ages that motivated him to destroy any reconstruction of such an authoritarian system. This extreme opposition to official religion and medieval Christianity has made popular the view that Hume was an atheist.

In this regard, at the beginning of *Fragment on Evil*, Hume says the purpose of this article is not to reject reason and consciousness for God, but to reject his moral attributes; which is necessary for a theological system (Hume, 2007d, pp. 109-110); a theological system draws a mechanism for its believers, citing every property of God. For example, *Ein Sof* (Hebrew: אין סוף) means infinite in the *Torah* (*Exo* 14: 21-19), which creates a special thought and action for its believers. The *New Testament* also says "if anyone

slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (*Matthew* 5: 39 & *Luke* 6: 29); this statement, by the grace of God, encourages the believer to sacrifice. Also, *Qurans* says God is "The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful, and Master of the Day of Judgment; Guide us to the straight path ..., of those you have blessed, not those You are displeased with, or those who are astray" and these have corresponding actions and paths [*Quran: The Opening* (in Arabic: *Al-Fatihah*) (1)].

Points inferred from these statements:

1. Hume accepts a kind of intellect for God; this is based on his texts.
2. Hume accepts the existence of God; because logically, the existence of God takes precedence over the acceptance of consciousness for him (NA+GE).
3. Hume says that God's moral properties cannot be deduced from God's consciousness (RR).
4. Hume rejects theological systems in which the properties of God are inferred from his consciousness (TS).

Thus, just as Hume rejects natural theology for the reduction of religious propositions into rational propositions, he denies systematic religion or theological systems that seek to extract all aspects of life from religious propositions (Hume, 2011, pp. 54, 61; Hume, 2007e, pp. 426-427; Hume, 2007c, 74, 87). According to him, religion is an individual belief and what is important is its inner and faith aspect, and not its rational-institutional aspect (F).

## Discussion and Conclusion

What guided this research is the possibility of reading Hume as a fideist (**RQ**). The claim needed to be substantiated by two propositions; first, Hume does not deny the existence of God (GE+NA), And second, in his view, reason has no way of proving the existence of God (RR). Rather, its existence must be accepted without the aid of philosophical and objective arguments, and by accepting the subjective mystery and secrecy contained in it. To substantiate our claim with a text-based approach, evidence for these claims was presented in Hume's work, which showed that *the goal of his philosophy of religion is to problematize the possibility of rationally proving the existence of God, not denying the existence of God.*

*The argument for Hume's fideism is:*

- (I) An explicit acknowledgment of a cause for order in the world in the text of his works (end of both *Natural History* and *Dialogues*) (GE),
- (II) Hume's acceptance of God's properties (GE),

- (III) His acceptance of the order as evidence for the existence of causes for the world (GE),
- (IV) Solutions that Hume made for the problem of evil.

*Hume, therefore, accepts the existence of a cause that must have certain attributes (GE) but believes that human reason has no way of examining them (RR).*

Let's take a moment to think about Hume and put the following statements together:

- Introduction I: *God exists (GE).*
- Introduction II: *The existence of God cannot be proved by rational arguments; such as the argument from design, the cosmological argument, the miracle argument, etc. (RR=F)*
- Conclusion: *The way to accept the existence of God is not rational, but antirational-irrational (F&M).*

If these propositions are true about *person A*, we have no way to call person A a fideist and a mystic (because of the sum of introductions I and II). Hume said the same thing that this person A said but for him, because of the assumptions we have, it is difficult to accept being a mystic-fideist. If we replace Hume with person A, the result will be fideism and mysticism for both because the supposed person A (read Hume) has accepted the existence of God, but does not consider it rationally provable. This means that person A (read Hume) is at least more fideist than Wittgenstein because Wittgenstein did not express the acceptance of the existence of God anywhere but he has expressions for the absence of faith in himself (Drury, 1984, p. 79), and person A (read Hume) has statements about his faith in God that make him surpass Wittgenstein in fideism (**RQ**).

Examining the text of Hume's work, we realized that he was at war with theological systems, not with religion as a whole, and what is said about his opinion about religion should be replaced with theological systems. Hume showed that the reasoning based on the arguments for the existence of God could not help to prove the existence of a kind of divine agent, as taught by various religions (RR). But in the end, he concludes his critiques by accepting that although the argument from design is rationally incapable, it is somewhat convincing. The order in nature, although not a conclusive reason for the existence of the author, is evidence of the fact that the cause or causes of the order are probably similar to the human intellect (GE+NA). As Philo puts it in the last part of *Dialogues*: "The divine being, as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance (IE+RR+RM) and artifice of nature" (GE) (Hume, 2007c, p. 89).

According to Popkin's evidence of skepticism in Hume's age, skepticism is commonplace in his time (eighteenth century) and not a factor in rejecting religion; it is even a basis for beginning faith, and an attempt to demonstrate the immunity of faith from rational demands and arguments (Konyndyk, 1987, p. 207; Hume, 2007c, p. 102) which is called skeptical fideism by Penelhum. This makes our reading of him quite different; that is, if he criticizes the arguments of theology, miracles, and the immortality of the soul, and brings up the problem of evil, they should all be considered for the suspension of religious dogmas and the beginning of the project of fideism.

Overcoming skepticism and addressing the essence of the Christian faith seems to be what he carefully seeks in the *Dialogues*. Because while Philo, at the end of the book, considers skepticism a prerequisite for the Christian faith, it seems that to reach such a belief, one must first read *Dialogues* in the presence of Philo and the second time without his presence. The first time, with a skeptical view, he showed the shortcomings of reason and rational arguments for reaching certainty and religious truths (RR), and the second time, he overcame that skepticism and arrived at a view similar to Demea who refuses empirical arguments for the existence of God (RR). Such a view does not defend natural theology (TS) and speaks much less of the other two; which is a requirement of a view that holds the subject of faith as a mystery; *talk less and flood more* (RM+F+M); what Kierkegaard later called *the leap of faith*.

Thus, Hume, as has been said, did not intend to attack religion, and perhaps, as Wittgenstein believed in various language games, he also saw religion and reason as two separate and even contradictory realms which must not enter within each other's boundaries. As the second-century Christian theologian, *Saint Athenagoras of Athens* (133-190 AD) said, "Know God with God" (Gilson, 1969), a faithful life is different from logical life and should not be confused; rather, to understand the faithful life, one must have a faithful life. Hume, therefore, considers the existence of God to be epistemologically outside the realm of human logical knowledge, not to regard it as non-existent ontologically (RR+NA).

Such a view is closer to the concept of fideism than atheism because in atheism both the epistemological and the ontological realms are denied, but in fideism, only the epistemological realm is denied. On the other hand, he is not an agnostic because in this case, the existence of God should not be accepted even in a minimal way (NA). Thus, Hume, by denying the epistemological realm (UC+RR+IV), and affirming and emphasizing the ontological realm (GE+NA), inevitably enters the valley of fideism (F). Hume's skepticism rejects any systematic theology and official interpretation of Christianity and he crosses skepticism and arrives at fideism by acknowledging the existence of God.

Hume concludes explicitly at the end of *Of Miracles* that Christianity began with miracles and mysteries and has codified a faith that reason has never been able to figure out (Hume, 2007a: 95). The incarnate God as the earliest and most important event in Christianity has a miraculous and mysterious nature (RM):

1. The most important event in Christianity is the incarnation of Christ (G.I.);
2. G.I. is the most important principle in determining whether or not to believe in Christ;
3. G.I. has a mysterious nature;
4. The Christian faith has had a mysterious nature from the beginning;
5. Christianity has been a mysterious religion from the beginning and in its essence;
6. The essence of orthodox Christianity is mysticism (M).

So Hume, as a philosopher can not accept G.I.; because philosophy does not have the right way. But as a fideist, he accepts the secrecy of G.I. Accordingly, *Philo and Demas simultaneously are Hume*; the former shows his philosophy and the latter shows his mystic-fideistic view; as it is necessary to distinguish reason, philosophy, and *Athen* from faith, religion, and *Jerusalem*.

Also in the tenth and twelfth chapters of the *Dialogues*, with emphasis on this mystery, while accepting a cause for the world (GE+NA) and rejecting any theorizing (RR), he arrives at a kind of mysticism regarding the existence of God (M+F) and refers early Christianity to what it was from the beginning and restores its mysterious status to it; that is why we introduce him as an orthodox or essentialist Christian. His essentialism is also because if the core of Christian theology is Original Sin, the Incarnation of God, the Trinity, and other mysterious stories that absorbed the believers in early Christianity, without rational and philosophical explanations, Hume also emphasizes the same kind of mystical nature by rejecting the rational aspect of Christian theology. Of course, as we said before, what we have in common with mysticism is this secrecy and more about the origin of existence, concerning the above-mentioned mysterious propositions. Otherwise, if the essence of mystical thoughts is a kind of unity of existence (Sufi metaphysics), we have not recognized such a thing in Hume.

Based on the piece of evidence presented, Hume's fideism is a big black swan in commentators' and philosophers' thoughts. *Nassim Taleb* (1960-now) in his *Black Swan* (2007), shows us that our information about a matter leads us to conceptualize, generalize, and finally summarize and simplify that matter, and after that, we do not want to see the opposite (Taleb, 2007). Just as until the discovery of Australia and the appearance of a black swan, humans

thought that all swans are white, accordingly, Hume's fideism is a black swan that many people do not want to see. Hume suffered something he hated; that is, the generalization of the past to the future; since he has so far been called an atheist (or agnostic), then he must be so, and the opposite is not acceptable.

In our opinion, despite many interpretations of Hume, ultimately, the best conclusion is his own; where, in the last paragraph of *Natural History*, he plays his main role. By showing the totality of existence and religion as a mystery and acknowledging doubt, uncertainty, and the suspension of judgment, and the serious emphasis on the weakness of human reason, and the Wittgensteinian distinction between reason and faith, finally with something like Kierkegaard's leap of faith, Hume gets the job done:

The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery (RM+IE+RR+UC). Doubt, uncertainty, and the suspense of judgment appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny, concerning this subject (UC). But such is the frailty of human reason, and such the irresistible contagion of opinion, that even this deliberate doubt could scarcely be upheld (RR); did we not enlarge our view, and oppose one species of superstition to another, (TS) set them quarreling; while we, during their fury and contention, happily make our escape, into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy (F) (Hume, 2011, p. 54).

### **Ethics declarations**

### **Conflict of interests**

The authors have no competing interests.

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