

Natural Religion

1 Proofs of God's existence: miracles

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." (John 3:1-2)

2 Proofs of God's existence: design

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:" (Romans 1:18-20)

"They [religious philosophers] paint, in the most magnificent colours, the order, beauty, and wise arrangement of the universe; and then ask, if such a glorious display of intelligence could proceed from the fortuitous concourse of atoms, or if chance could produce what the greatest genius can never sufficiently admire.

You then, who are my accusers, have acknowledged, that the chief or sole argument for a divine existence (which I have never questioned) is derived from the order of nature; where there appear such marks of intelligence and design, that you think it extravagant to assign for its cause, either chance, or the blind and unguided force of matter."¹

¹ David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. § XI (Hackett, 1993), p. 93.

3 Why so cautious? Thomas Aikenhead. Compare p. 91, 1st ¶

On January 8, 1697, at some time between two and four in the afternoon, an eighteen-year-old student named Thomas Aikenhead was hanged in Edinburgh. Aikenhead had been found guilty of a serious charge: the previous year he had several times told other young men that the doctrines of Christian theology were “a rapsodie of fained and ill-invented nonsense.” Aikenhead’s friends, testifying against him, told the court that he had spoken of “the Imposter Christ” and had rejected the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption. Aikenhead recanted all these sentiments—he said he had fallen under the spell of atheistical tracts—but no one defended him, and the jury voted for death. On the scaffold, Aikenhead declared that he had come to doubt the objectivity of good and evil, and that he believed moral laws to be the work of governments or men. ... James Buchan ... maintains that Aikenhead’s execution “haunted” the century that followed. Just six decades after the student’s rant to his friends, an Edinburgh ecclesiastical assembly attempted to excommunicate the freethinking Scottish philosopher David Hume.²

4 Religion and public order. Compare p. 92, 1st ¶

Hugo Grotius. *The Rights of War and Peace* [1625] (London, 1738), p. 445.

4. It is my Judgment therefore, that those who first attempt to destroy these Notions, ought, on the Account of human Society in general, which they thus, without any just Grounds, injure, to be restrained, as in all well-governed Communities has been usual: It is what we read was practised towards ¹¹ *Diogenes of Melos*, and towards the ¹² *Epicureans*, who were expelled and banished all Cities that had any Regularity and good Manners amongst them. *Himerius*, an antient Rhetorician, in his Pleadings against *Epicurus*, ¹³ *Do you punish me then for my Opinion? No; but for your Impiety: You may propose your Sentiments, but you must not be impious.*

² David Denby, “Northern Lights: How modern life emerged from eighteenth-century Edinburgh,” *The New Yorker*, October 11, 2004.