American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS)

Friday's Religion: Its Nature and Importance in Robinson Crusoe
Author(s): Timothy C. Blackburn
Source: Eighteenth-Century Studies, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring, 1985), pp. 360-382
Published by: Johns Hopkins University Press. Sponsor: American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS).
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2738711
Accessed: 28-02-2016 08:03 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp
JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
Friday’s Religion: Its Nature and Importance in Robinson Crusoe

TIMOTHY C. BLACKBURN

While it is easy to see the importance of Friday’s conversion in Robinson Crusoe (1719) for Crusoe’s religious development, it has not, apparently, been so easy to see the importance of the religion Friday accepts. It has not been easy, in fact, to see the character Friday—or rather, it has been all too easy, what with “man Friday,” “gal Friday,” and now, in the want ads, “person Friday,” to see some mythic version of this character. To “unsee” this mythic Friday, it is helpful to consider the problem voiced by Eliza Farrar in her rather perverse adaptation of Defoe’s novel, The Children’s Robinson Crusoe (1830). What kind of Christian should she make Friday? Recognizing, however ingenuously, the significance of this question, she settled for inoffensiveness: “Nothing has been admitted which is not common to all Christians.”¹ Is this Defoe’s solution? J. Paul Hunter, who has written convincingly on Friday’s conversion, argues that the preface to Defoe’s The Family Instructor (1715) fits Robinson Crusoe: “... care is taken to avoid Distinctions of opinion, as to Church of England or Dissenter, and no offense can be taken here on the one side or the other.”² True as this is, it does

¹Eliza Ware (Rotch) Farrar, The Children’s Robinson Crusoe; or the Remarkable Adventures of an Englishman, Who Lived Five Years on an Unknown and Uninhabited Island of the Pacific Ocean (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little and Wilkins, 1830), p. vii.
²The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe’s Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 176 n. See also
not explain what Defoe tries to accomplish with Friday; for unlike Farrar’s Crusoe, Defoe’s Crusoe does not find it “painful” to observe or “useless” to describe Friday’s notions of religion. And when Friday exchanges these notions for Christianity, Defoe has Crusoe boldly assert that Friday became “a good Christian, a much better than I,” in fact, “such a Christian, as I have known few equal to him in my Life.”

Such a pronouncement fairly cries out for an examination of Friday’s Christianity. Religious controversy in the early eighteenth century, while tepid compared to the struggles of the previous century, was ubiquitous: on the eve of Robinson Crusoe’s appearance, “John Toland’s Nazarenus, with its suggestion that Christianity was merely a Jewish sect and Christ a mere mortal, was bringing cries of indignation from Defoe in his Tory journals,” and a dispute over the Trinity led to the dismissal of Martin Tompkins, a dissenting minister in Defoe’s own Stoke Newington. This is the context in which to ask: What kind of Christian does Defoe make Friday, and why is he such a good Christian? In answering these questions, this paper will first carefully identify Friday and his role, for Friday must certainly be one of the least understood or even investigated famous characters in English literature. It is not, for instance, an idle question to ask why he is called “Friday.” The second part of this paper will demonstrate how Defoe uses Friday’s pagan religion as a critique of the deists or “naturalists.” Finally, this paper will show how Defoe makes Friday’s Christianity a model of the essence of reformed Christianity and its necessary civil theology.

Friday is, of course, an Indian, not a black, though confusion about this arises because Friday calls Crusoe “Master” and because of the common view that Crusoe treats Friday “in the manner of a

---


3Farrar, p. 371.

4Daniel Defoe, The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York Mariner, ed. J. Donald Crowley (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 220, 221. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and will be indicated in parentheses in the text.

benevolent slave owner”—a view leading to serious misunderstandings of Defoe’s purposes. Extreme as it seems, for instance, that Friday must give up his language and learn Crusoe’s, it is not simply a case of Crusoe “stripping” Friday of his identity. In terms of natural law, the island is Crusoe’s; it is appropriate for Friday to learn the language of that country, however unusual that country is for having but one inhabitant. Defoe carefully reinforces this by noting that the Spaniard whom Crusoe and Friday rescue, who has lived among Friday’s people, has learned the Indian language (p. 242); Friday and his father know no Spanish. The religious dimension of this is that the Catholic Spaniards, even with their knowledge of Friday’s language, have not attempted to teach him Christianity. Defoe’s narrative, in other words, presents carefully fitted details about Friday upon which depends any full understanding of Friday.

For most readers, however, Friday’s cheerful obsequiousness makes him seem, in the words of James Sutherland, “essentially a more versatile, articulate, and amusing dog.” There is something to this. When rescued, Friday comes up to Crusoe on all fours (p. 203); immediately afterward, Friday volunteers to bury the two dead savages, “and in an instant he had scrap’d a Hole in the Sand, with

---

6 Ian Watt, “Defoe as Novelist,” The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), IV, 209. A recent movie, Man Friday, makes Friday a black (played by Richard Roundtree). Michel Tournier’s Friday, or the Other Island (1967), trans. Norman Denny (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 167, has Crusoe call Friday a “Negro.” See also Abby Arthur Johnson, “Old Bones Uncovered: A Reconsideration of Robinson Crusoe,” CLA Journal 17 (1973), 271–78, which talks about “the meeting of one white and one black man,” and Patricia Meyer Spacks, “The Soul’s Imaginations: Daniel Defoe, William Cowper,” PMLA 91 (1976), 423, which asserts that Crusoe, in spite of his “assumptions that the white man has somehow created new emotional possibilities for the black (the reverse seems more clearly to be the case),” is forced to admit Friday’s emotional importance to him. Spacks says, for instance, that Friday’s reaction to rescuing his father shows Crusoe how to be more emotional (though he never does become more emotional). And it should be pointed out that in The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Shakespeare Head edition of Defoe’s Writings, Vol. 8 & 9 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1927–28), 8, pp. 128–29, Crusoe notes that the starving French he rescues went into far greater ecstasies than Friday did when he found his father.

7 For a variant of this point of view, see “Robinson Crusoe and the Cannibals,” MOSAIC 10 (1976), 43, in which E. Pearlman says “Friday is dealt with not as a child, but as an infant. Crusoe strips him of all personality.”


his Hands, big enough to bury the first in” (p. 205); he again shows his subjection to Crusoe by going down on all fours (p. 206); he makes signs to Crusoe that they should dig up the men he buried and eat them (p. 206); he twice goes to “fetch” game Crusoe has shot (pp. 211–12); he is said, by Crusoe, to follow “close at my Heels” (p. 223); and Friday at one point calls himself an “Ugly Dog” (p. 239). What I think Defoe intends by this is not some racist depiction of the savage as a brute, but rather, in the dense Scriptural allusiveness of this work, a reference to Matthew 15:22–28. In that passage, Christ repeatedly rebuffs the requests of a Canaanite woman, saying, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and later, “. . . it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.” The woman agrees, but adds, “. . . yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table,” whereupon Christ praises her faith and cures her daughter. This passage clearly shows that Christ was not sent only for the Jews; to Defoe, alarmed by the vast numbers of pagans in the world,10 it speaks to Christians about the challenge of converting these “dogs.”

Dog or not, Friday is a savage, and is thus resolved into, as Defoe puts it, “the lowest degeneracy of human nature, I mean, the savage life.”11 In the roughly Hobbesian view Defoe takes, a savage is someone living in the state of nature, a ruthless and dangerous condition offering none of the protections that make the basis for civilization. Savages are locked in a continual struggle for survival involving eating, drinking, and fighting. So, of course, are all humans; as the aged Crusoe says in his Serious Reflections, “Truly, the main business that mankind seems to be doing is to eat and drink; that’s their enjoyment, and to get food to eat is their employment, including a little their eating and devouring one another.”12 The trouble with savages is that they eat humans more than “a little.” Friday further demonstrates his natural degeneracy by his casualness toward his cannibalism, whereas Crusoe is dismayed by it—and fas-

11Serious Reflections, p. 113.
12Serious Reflections, p. 112.
When Crusoe and Friday view the leftovers from a cannibal feast, Crusoe says, "... my very Blood ran chill in my Veins, and my Heart sunk within me, at the Horror of the Spectacle... though *Friday* made nothing of it" (p. 207). Worse, Crusoe realizes Friday has "a hankering Stomach after some of the Flesh" and is "still a Cannibal in his Nature" (p. 208).

Of course, before he rescued him, Crusoe knew Friday was a cannibal. He has a prophetic dream that so parallels Friday’s actual arrival a year and a half later that he notes the small differences during his narration of the rescue. While this may seem to be rather clumsy foreshadowing, it is Crusoe himself who points out and thereby stresses the exceptional coincidence. The dream demonstrates Crusoe’s increasing knowledge of human nature as inherently degenerate and thus inherently fearful. His dream matches the reality a year and a half later because he perfectly understands the situation—it would *have* to happen that way. He knows that a prisoner about to be executed would feel a tremendous, primal fear. So, when Friday sees a chance to escape, Crusoe says, "*Nature* inspir’d him with Hopes of Life" (p. 201, my emphasis). Friday runs. Realizing how obligated such a savage would be to his rescuer, Crusoe decides, after his dream, not only to "get a Savage into my Possession," but "if possible, it should be one of their Prisoners, who they had condemn’d to be eaten, and should bring thither to kill" (p. 199). If, as J. Paul Hunter maintains, this dream is one of many supernatural "hints" Crusoe receives, it shows God teaching Cru-

---

13 Defoe too had a long history of fascination with what Curt Hartog, "Authority and Autonomy in *Robinson Crusoe*," *Enlightenment Essays* 5, no. ii (1974), 41, calls the "ultimate threat of oral incorporation." In his 1706 poem *Jure Divino,* Defoe said, "Mankind delights his Neighbours to devour,/And is not fit to be supply’d with Power"; at least a dozen times in that poem he uses the "devour"/ "power" rhyme. In his *Review,* Vol. VIII, no. 75, Saturday, September 15, 1711, he speculated that necessity would not only drive someone to steal but to "EAT your Neighbour, ay, and say Grace to your Meat too." In *The Farther Adventures* 9, 67, he provides an example of that kind of necessity. A French servant, near starvation, tells how she could easily have eaten her mistress (who was nearly dead), and how in fact "once or twice I was going to bite my own Arm: At last, I saw the Bason in which was the Blood I had bled at my Nose the Day before; I ran to it, and swallow’d with such Haste, and such a greedy Appetite, as if I had wonder’d no Body had taken it before, and afraid it should be taken from me now."

14 *The Reluctant Pilgrim,* p. 183. Natural law philosophers like Grotius, Hobbes, and Locke said natural law was knowable through reason and thus did not depend on theology. Though Crusoe’s knowledge may have come from God (as reason itself did), he is obviously not dependent in any way on theology for this knowledge.
soe that the fear of violent death is central to human nature. Through the extreme similarity of this dream and Friday's rescue Defoe emphasizes a Hobbesian view of degenerate human nature in direct contrast to the views of "naturalists" like Harrington or Toland and the increasingly prevalent views of Shaftesbury. Crusoe doesn't have to know Friday to know that Friday, a human in the state of nature, must be an eater of human flesh.

The inspiration for Crusoe's rescue of Friday comes, I argue, from Montaigne's "Of the Caniballes." Montaigne's idealized, imaginary cannibals face being eaten by other cannibals with heroic indifference, cheerful expressions, and even taunting songs: "... this flesh, and these veins, are your owne; fond men as you are, know you not that the substance of your forefathers limbes is yet tied unto ours?" The scene of Friday's escape, expressly emphasized by Crusoe's nearly identical dream, is the exact opposite of the situation in Montaigne. To Defoe, the picture of prisoners approaching, without any fear, the horrible death of being cooked and eaten is impossible and crucially misleading about nature. The key to Defoe's portrait of Friday is that Friday, like the savage in the dream, runs.

Yet Friday is not at all cowardly. He is, in fact, brave, "handsome," "perfectly well made," "well shap'd," "very manly," "with a great Vivacity and sparkling Sharpness in his eyes" (p. 205), "faithful, loving, sincere" (p. 209), smart—"the aptest Schollar that ever was," "merry," a fast runner, "diligent" (p. 210), and, above all, grateful, even to being, as Maximillian E. Novak puts it, a "model of grat-

---

15For some of Defoe's thoughts about this, see Novak, Defoe and the Nature of Man, especially pp. 10–11.
16Montaigne's practice of satirizing Europeans through the depiction of idealized savages was common in Defoe's time. In a letter purporting to be a translation of a French letter from Carolina, the deist John Toland wrote of the Indians as an example of "Man in a state of pure nature," and offered this observation about Christianity: "We know our Saviour's precepts without observing them, and they observe them without knowing him: were they to have all the Gospel word by word by heart, they could not practice it with more exactness and strictness then they do it already." John Toland, Letter "To Mr. ***," A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Toland, 2 vols. (1726; rpt. in facsimile, New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), II, 424, 425. The undated letters in this collection are interspersed among the dated ones, which are in chronological order; if the undated ones are also in chronological order, this letter was probably written about 1710–14.
itude.” Friday’s gratitude demonstrates the perfect foundation for a contract between a citizen and the state; it is also the opposite of ingratitude, which Defoe held to be the national sin of England. Friday is just about a perfect human—except that he runs when threatened and eats people.

Friday’s running and Friday’s cannibalism take away from his being a perfect human in the sense of a human who is perfect, but they make him a perfect human in the sense of being a perfect example of actual human nature as Defoe, modifying Hobbes and Calvinist theology, saw it: many good qualities, but dominated by fear and aggression. Man Friday fears being eaten and in turn, for power, eats his enemies. When Crusoe gives him the odd name Friday, he says, “. . . and first, I made him know his Name should be Friday, which was the Day I sav’d his Life; I call’d him so for the Memory of the Time” (p. 206). While at other points in the narrative Crusoe says he lost track of the days of the week, he appears to have no trouble here. I think this is because, quite simply, he (or rather Defoe) chose the name Friday to point to how exactly representative of human nature Friday was to be: Man was created on the sixth day, that is, a Friday.

Although readers appear to have missed the significance of the name Friday, they have not missed the seeming impertinence of Crusoe telling Friday his name (rather than asking what it is). What gives Crusoe the right? Manuel Schonhorn has called it “obvious” that Defoe has, through Friday, “managed to provide Crusoe with the blessings of parenthood without repeating the slavery of Adam to Eve, the burden of copulation, and midnight changes.” Crusoe himself says Friday’s “very Affections were ty’d to me, like those of a Child to a Father” (p. 209). Yet, as a kind of counterpoint, Defoe later introduces Friday’s biological father, and calls attention

18 Defoe and the Nature of Man, p. 115.
20 Paul K. Alkon, in Defoe and Fictional Time (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1979), p. 159, has an interesting discussion of the implications of Friday’s being named after a point of time in a novel where dated items have real prominence.
to the strength of Friday’s affections for him. To what extent then can Crusoe be seen as Friday’s father, with the right of naming him?

The answer reveals a great deal about the religious ideas and artistry of *Robinson Crusoe*. While describing Friday’s looks, Crusoe mentions that Friday was “tall and well shap’d, and as I reckon, about twenty six Years of Age” (p. 205). Twenty-six happens to be Crusoe’s age when he landed on the island. Moreover, Crusoe at this point has been on the island for twenty-six years, or, as he says one page before mentioning Friday’s age, Friday’s words “were pleasant to hear, for they were the first sound of a Man’s Voice, that I had heard, *my own excepted*, for above Twenty Five Years” (p. 204). Thus, Defoe has Friday being born just at the arrival of Crusoe on the island; in the providential world represented in the book, this can mean Friday is born because of Crusoe, at the point when God has first punished Crusoe, in order to be the later, final test of Crusoe’s repentance and faith. In this sense, Crusoe is Friday’s real father; the introduction of Friday’s biological father, like Crusoe’s prophetic dream of rescuing a savage, is not a clumsy, incredible coincidence but a method of emphasis.

Defoe uses other, similar methods in *Robinson Crusoe*. Douglas Brooks has noted, for instance, that Defoe places Crusoe’s spiritual rebirth nine months after his arrival—“a symbolic gestation period.” In light of this method, the simultaneous occurrence of Friday’s birth and Crusoe’s arrival on the island appears as obviously intentional. Defoe’s intention is to stress the role of providence, because, as Hunter has argued, he wanted to assert God’s constant role in human life, an assertion necessary because of the increasing

---

22Actually, he turned 27 on the day he landed on the island, September 30, 1659. But he says in the text he was “miraculously saved 26 Year after” his birth (p. 133).

23It could perhaps be argued that this is merely “contamination”—that, in other words, Defoe picked twenty-six because he had just used that number—but the two quite different wordings (“twenty-six Years of Age” and “for above Twenty Five Years”) appear to me to work against such an interpretation.

24*Number and Pattern in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 25–6. J. Paul Hunter (*The Reluctant Pilgrim*, p. 149) also hinted at this in 1966: “Nine months pass before a violent physical distress finally humbles Crusoe into acceptance of the new birth which he had resisted for so long.” Pat Rogers adds, “... it would be more of an implausible coincidence if Defoe had *not* meant this to be significant than if he had” (*Robinson Crusoe*, Unwin Critical Library [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979], p. 112).
challenge, particularly from deists, to the notion of "a God who maintained an active interest in his individual creatures and who oversaw their daily activities," for "if God failed to exercise provident dominion in a world where good and evil still battled, he was far less significant than even the deists said: he was really no God at all."\(^{25}\) Crusoe's actually and providentially causing Friday's birth is a spectacular assertion of what Defoe called "the government of Providence."\(^{26}\) Crusoe names Friday because he, through God's punishment of his rebellion, has caused Friday's birth.

Crusoe does not immediately recognize the work Providence has put in front of him. He plans to rescue a savage for a "Servant" and a "Pilot" (p. 199), not a potential convert to Christianity. And while the first meal he offers Friday—"I gave him Bread, and a Bunch of Raisins to eat"—is quasi-sacramental and "presages his subsequent spiritual aid,"\(^{27}\) he is no more concerned about being the agent of Friday's conversion than he was about being the agent of Xury's conversion early in the book. He does cause the conversion of Xury, who clearly "foreshadows Friday,"\(^{28}\) but the depth of his involvement can be measured by his subsequent regret over the transaction. Using highly effective irony, Defoe has Crusoe question God's point in hiding the "saving Knowledge" of His word "from so many Millions of Souls, who if I might judge by this poor Savage, would make a much better use of it than we did" (p. 210).\(^{29}\) He realizes the danger of such questioning but does not see any role for himself as a bringer of "saving Knowledge." He does, however, off-handily mention a serious temptation. Friday is awed by the power of Crusoe's gun, so much so that Crusoe says, "I believe, if I would have let him, he would have worshipp'd me and my Gun" (p. 212). Perhaps it is in dealing with this pleasing yet frightening problem that Crusoe realizes he should convert Friday. Because of

\(^{25}\)The Reluctant Pilgrim, pp. 51–2.
\(^{26}\)Serious Reflections, p. 62. The aged Crusoe says that among Christians "... it should seem to be so universally supposed that every appointment is subject and submits to the government of Providence."
\(^{27}\)Hunter, The Reluctant Pilgrim, p. 190.
\(^{28}\)David Blewett, Defoe's Art of Fiction: Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack, and Roxana (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 32.
\(^{29}\)When Crusoe judges "by this poor Savage" with so many positive qualities, he is following the direction of Grotius, who said, "... what is natural we must judge by those in whom nature is least corrupt, and not by the depraved." Of the Law of Warre and Peace, English trans. (London, 1655), First Part, section v.
Friday’s role as a perfect representative of human nature, the process of his conversion demands special attention.

When Crusoe does begin to discuss Friday’s conversion—after more thoughts about Friday helping him escape, and after saying “This was the pleasantest Year of all the Life I led in this Place” (p. 213)—he does so abruptly, as though he should have discussed it sooner: “During the long Time that Friday has now been with me, and that he began to speak to me, and understand me, I was not wanting to lay a Foundation of religious Knowledge in his Mind” (p. 216). Though in The Farther Adventures Crusoe calls making converts “the most essential Part of a Christian,” and though Crusoe surely knew the command of the risen Christ—“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19)—Defoe has Crusoe delay Friday’s conversion in order to keep the portrayal realistic, in order to get Friday properly prepared in terms of language and civilization, and in order for Crusoe and, perhaps, the reader, to realize his faith has not been tested until he has converted someone.

Crusoe begins with a catechism-like question, asking Friday who made him. In a perfect example of Defoe’s realism—a seemingly accidental detail with thematic overtones—Friday misunderstands him, thinking Crusoe wants to know who his father is. Crusoe changes his question to make his point about a creator clearer, and Friday replies that old Benamuckee made “the sea, the Ground we walk’d on, and the Hills, and Woods” (p. 216). Crusoe is not surprised that Friday has a God, nor does he have much trouble getting Friday to switch from old Benamuckee to the “Being of a God” (p. 217); he merely convinces Friday that the Christian God is greater—more powerful—than old Benamuckee. As Crusoe paraphrases, “if our God could hear us up beyond the Sun, he must needs be a greater God than their Benamuckee, who liv’d but a little way off, and yet could not hear, till they went up to the great Mountains where he dwelt, to speak to him” (p. 217).

Crusoe gives the credit for this part of Friday’s conversion to “Nature,” which “assisted all my Arguments to Evidence to him,

30Farther Adventures, 9, 23.
even the Necessity of a great first Cause and over-ruling governing Power; a secret directing Providence, and of the Equity, and Justice, of paying Homage to him that made us, and the like” (pp. 217–18). For a quarter-century before the publication of Robinson Crusoe, since, that is, the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1694, the religious controversies in England were intensified by deists—men like Charles Blount, John Toland, Matthew Tindal, Anthony Collins, Thomas Woolston—who challenged the ceremonies and mysteries of Christianity, and who stood by reason; reason, they said, shows us how to find, through nature, the goodly but distant Deity. Friday’s “natural” religion is Defoe’s answer to deists. For instance, the name Benamuckee clearly means “much good,” and represents the good-natured, beneficent god of the deists and, through the influence of Shaftesbury, Defoe’s era. Defoe is saying, in other words, that up to a point the deists’ position seems to make sense; Friday’s religion is pretty much what a deist might have expected, with a crucial exception.

The so-called seventeenth-century “father of deism,” Lord Herbert of Cherbury, had determined the five “common notions” making up true religions, which deists often cited and which Nathan Bailey’s Dictionarium Britannicum (1730 ed.) lists as the defining beliefs of a “deist”: the existence of a God; the worship of this Deity; the religious practice of virtue; a natural revulsion toward wickedness; an afterlife involving reward or punishment. About this last notion Herbert adds, “... there is no nation, however barbarous, which has not and will not recognize the existence of punishments and rewards.”31 The natural religion of Friday distinctly violates this notion. Says Crusoe, “I ask’d him if the People who die in his Country went away any where; he said, yes, they all went to Ben-

31“Common Notions Concerning Religion,” De Veritate, in Deism: An Anthology, ed. Peter Gay (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1968), p. 39. Robert E. Sullivan’s helpful John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 219–32, discusses the early deists’ responses to Herbert’s notions. Bailey’s definition of “deist” reads: “... a sect among the christians of most or all denominations, who believe there is one God, a providence, the immortality of the soul, virtue and vice, rewards and punishments; but reject revelation, and believe no more than what natural light discovers to them, and believe no other article of the christian religion or any other.” The Scott-Bailey A New Universal Etymological English Dictionary (1755) omits the references to Christianity and adds, “Certain deists, as they seem to have been, laughed at the prophecy of the day of judgment.”
amuckee; then I ask'd him whether these they eat up went thither too, he said yes" (p. 216). Friday's telling answer demonstrates the Lockean notion of the state of nature's equality.

The state of nature, Defoe is saying, provides no model for an afterlife with rewards and punishments; nature offers only war and a constant struggle to avoid violent death. In nature all individuals are equal in their solitariness and equal in their ability to kill or be killed. The afterlife of Friday's natural religion expresses that radical equality, whereas an afterlife with rewards and punishments expresses either ideas from civilization or ideas from a false view of nature as a place where virtue is possible and humans are not depraved. Defoe thus uses Friday's natural religion to criticize deistic assumptions about nature and humans—and also about God. Old Benamuckee has divine attributes, but he is merely a shadow of the true God; clearly, natural religions can err, and God may not be a common or innate notion. Limited by their fearful existence in nature, Friday's people create a God who recognizes no virtue and is worshipped equally by all things out of fear.

This is similar to Friday's near-worship of Crusoe and his gun, and in accord with Defoe's view, in The History of the Devil, that the Indians worship the devil so he will not hurt them. Defoe does not view this as base or ignoble; Friday is quite reverent and respectful to Benamuckee. Thus when Crusoe says, "... if this old Person had made all Things, why did not all Things worship him," Friday "look'd very grave, and with a perfect Look of Innocence, said, All things do say O to him" (p. 216). It does not take much to turn Friday's religion to the language of Hobbes in Leviathan, a crucial influence on Defoe's thought: "The Right of Nature, whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his Lawes, is to be derived, not from his Creating them, as if he required obedience, as of Gratitude for his benefits; but from his irresistible

33The History of the Devil, 4th ed. (Dublin, 1745), pp. 20, 42.
34In the Serious Reflections, p. 115, a woman asks the aged Crusoe if the meaning of saying "O" to Benamuckee was "O do not hurt us; for thou art omnipotent, and canst kill us; O heal our distempers; for thou art infinite, and canst do all things: O give us what we want, for thou art bountiful: O spare us, for thou art merciful," to which Crusoe replies, "I grant all this."
Power.” God’s power gives him “the Right of afflicting men at his pleasure.” Thus, “the End of Worship amongst men, is Power.”

An abuse of this power is described when Crusoe asks Friday if he had ever gone to the “great Mountains” where old Benamuckee dwelt “to speak to him.” Friday says no; only old men called “Oowocakee” go to the mountain, hear Benamuckee, and interpret for the people. Crusoe’s response has the anti-clerical fervor of a John Toland, but again shows the flaws of natural religion: “By this I observ’d, That there is Priestcraft, even amongst the most blinded ignorant Pagans in the World; and the Policy of making a secret religion, in order to preserve the Veneration of the People to the Clergy, is not only to be found in the Roman, but perhaps amongst all Religions in the World, even among the most brutish and barbarous Savages” (p. 217). Defoe’s choice of a mountain for these secret meetings makes sense for many reasons—in “Of the Cuniqballes” special priests live in the mountains and occasionally come down to the people—and Crusoe’s response matches the spirit of Locke’s comments on John 4:21-3 in The Reasonableness of Christianity (1695). Locke takes Christ’s words to a woman of Samaria, whose ancestors “worshipped in this mountain,”—“The hour cometh, when ye shall neither to this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father”—as a challenge to Judaism and unreformed Christianity: “The outward forms of worshipping the Deity wanted a reformation. Magnificent temples, and confinement to certain places, were now no longer necessary to his worship, which by a pure heart might be performed anywhere.”

But before Crusoe can show Friday the worship of a pure heart, he has to answer some difficult questions Friday asks. Crusoe, like Hobbes, stresses God’s “irresistible power”; he knows this is a good way to convince Friday and to ensure his worship. As he says, “I had been talking a great deal to him of the Power of God, his Omnipotence, his dreadful Nature to Sin, his being a consuming Fire to the Workers of Iniquity; how, as he had made us all, he

36 Montaigne, p. 222.
could destroy us and all the World in a Moment; and he listen'd with great Seriousness to me all the while" (p. 218). Friday understands only too well. When Crusoe tries to explain the devil, Friday asks, "... why God no kill the Devil, so make him no more do wicked?" (p. 218). Crusoe's answer leads Friday to the conclusion that the devil will repent and be pardoned—at which point the frustrated Crusoe sends Friday on a long errand, while he ponders the ability of the "meer Notions of Nature" to bring, through reason, a knowledge of God and even "Worship or Homage" of that all-powerful being, "yet nothing but divine Revelation can form the Knowledge of Jesus Christ, and a Redemption purchas'd for us" (p. 219). As Paul says in Romans 10:14, "... how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" Clearly, Defoe intends this dialogue as an attack on the deists' criticisms of revelation and also as proof of the need for evangelism of a fairly sophisticated kind. Hunter has demonstrated that Friday's questions are precisely the kinds of questions missionaries to the Indians were being asked. The realism of Friday's questions matches the seriousness of Crusoe's concern about revelation.

Deists sought to bring the test of reason to revelation. While not deistic, Locke's important and controversial The Reasonableness of Christianity (1695) helped show the way; Locke had earlier argued that "Reason is natural revelation," and "revelation is natural reason" enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of." John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious (1696) said revelation must have "Divine Wisdome" and "Sound Reason" to be valid; the test of "Sound Reason" meant that "all Matters reveal'd by God or Man, must be

---

38Defoe obviously thought this a good question, for he uses a version of it in The History of the Devil (p. 26): "I say, how it consists with that entire Victory, to let him loose again, and give him Liberty, like a Thief that has broken Prison, to range about God's Creation, and there to continue his rebellion, commit new Ravages, and Acts of Hostility against God, make new Efforts at dethroning the Almighty Creator, and in particular to fall upon the weakest of his Creatures, MAN?" Like Crusoe, Defoe cannot give an immediate answer: "These Objections I shall give as good an Answer to as the case will admit in this Course, but must adjourn them for the present."


40An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, II, 289 (Bk. IV, ch. xix, par. 4).
equally intelligible and possible.” Most radically, Charles Blount reasoned that “no Rule of Revealed Religion was, or ever could be made known to all men,” so therefore “no Revealed Religion is necessary to future Happiness.” In an age when claims were being made by devout Christians like Samuel Clarke and Archibishop Tillotson that man’s “natural light” was sufficient for discerning all except a few basics of Christianity, Defoe presents Crusoe’s struggle with the “natural” insight of Friday to show how far from the essence of Christianity natural reason can get and to show how difficult—how unreasonable—the essentials of Christianity are. Crusoe cannot get through to Friday until he carefully goes through the whole of biblical revelation. Defoe thus carefully makes a strong case for the necessity of revelation; his care can be seen in the realism of Friday’s questions and the quality of Friday’s reasoning.

So with, as he says, “More Sincerity than Knowledge” (p. 220), Crusoe instructs Friday, and thereby himself, in the essentials of Christianity. The appropriate Scriptural subtext for his success is 1 Corinthians 12:3—“no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” When Crusoe thinks of his success in this venture, he gets as outrageous as Robinson Crusoe can: “... when I reflected upon all these Things, a secret Joy run through every Part of my Soul, and I frequently rejoyc’d that ever I was brought to this Place, which I had so often thought the most dreadful of all Afflictions that could possibly have befallen me” (p. 220).

What kind of Christian is Friday (besides a good one)? As Sutherland has noted, Crusoe sticks to the recommendation of Locke in The Reasonableness of Christianity and teaches only, in Crusoe’s words, “the Doctrine of Salvation by Christ Jesus,” which is so “plainly” (even, he might have said, “reasonably”) “laid down in

41Christianity Not Mysterious: or, a Treatise Shewing, That There is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, nor Above it; And That No Christian Doctrine Can Be Properly Call’d a Mystery (London, 1696), Sec. II, ch. 2, par. 15, p. 41, and Sec. II, ch. 2, par. 16, p. 42.
42The Oracles of Reason (1693), in Religious Thought in the Eighteenth Century, Illustrated from Writers of the Period, John Martin Creed and John Sandwith Boys Smith, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1934), p. 23.
the Word of God” (p. 221). Defoe believed the “Protestant Principle,” as he called it in a journal at the time of Robinson Crusoe’s publication, to be “that the Bible is the only and the perfect Rule of Faith,” a position more reformed and thus, to Defoe, more Protestant—more truly Christian—than the sixth of the thirty nine articles of the Church of England: “Holy Scripture conteyneth all things necessarie to salvation.” In fact, Defoe’s dissenting, reforming views were so strong that he saw the proliferation of sects in England as a sign of its being “the most religious nation in the world.” The religion of Crusoe and Friday, however, has no such need of continual reformation and purification: “As to all the Disputes, Wranglings, Strife and Contention, which has happen’d in the World about Religion, whether Niceties in Doctrines, or Schemes of Church Government, they were all perfectly useless to us; as for ought I can yet see, they have been to all the rest of the World: We had the sure Guide to Heaven, viz. The Word of God” (p. 221). This is a bold claim: a perfect (needing no reformation) Protestant (relying wholly on revelation) Christianity.

In The Farther Adventures, the conversions of Will Atkins and his wife Mary parallel the conversions of Crusoe and Friday in many ways (Atkins, for instance, has trouble explaining revelation to an intelligent savage). Crusoe even judges Mary’s faith—after four days—in terms he used for Friday’s faith: “... yet the new baptiz’ed Savage Woman was made such a Christian, as I have seldom heard of any like her in all my Observation, or Conversation, in the World.” Clearly, the quality of one’s Christian faith can be easily perceived. Yet Friday’s life with Crusoe changes little, except that he reads the Scriptures with Crusoe, offering “serious Enquiries, and Questionings” (p. 221). While significant, this change is stated rather than described. The one test of Friday’s faith—whether he understands that “most essential part of a Christian,” evangelism—occurs

43Sutherland, p. 142.
44Mercurius Politicus, April 1719, p. 246. A pamphlet published that same year by Samuel Savage, “The Sufficiency and Perfection of the Holy Scriptures, as a Rule of Faith and Manners,” (London, 1719), p. 3, has a similar view: “There is nothing more readily and more universally allowed by Protestants, than that The Holy Scriptures are a perfect Rule of Faith and Manners.”
46Farther Adventures, 9, pp. 47, 54–5, 61.
when Crusoe asks him how he would act if he were back in his native country: "... would you turn Wild again, eat Mens Flesh again, and be a Savage as you were before?" Friday's response is illuminating: "He lookef full of Concern, and shaking his Head said, No, no, Friday tell them to live Good, tell them to pray God, tell them to eat Cornbread, Cattle-flesh, Milk, no eat Man again" (pp. 224–25). Friday passes the test; he wants to convert the savages. But the religion he wants to bring them is more a religion about domestication and civilization than a religion about zeal for Christ—in seventeenth-century terms, "discipline" rather than "doctrine." Perhaps Friday's Christianity is so simple it only amounts to this—a little domestication—but perhaps Friday understands very fully that one must break from the state of nature before one can be a Christian at all.

Charles Gildon, a contemporary of Defoe, criticized the two parts of Robinson Crusoe on several grounds, one being that readers do not hear of "Friday's being christen'd himself, during his twelve Years Service with that zealous Teacher of the Christian Religion Robinson Crusoe."47 In a work in which he has the rescued Spaniard "swear upon the Holy Sacraments" (p. 245), Defoe perhaps omits any reference to Friday's baptism because he, like so many Dissenters, rejected the practice of lay-baptism and the increasingly popular private baptisms: baptism, Dissenters thought, was a sacrament to be performed by an ordained minister in a church.48 Perhaps, though, Defoe skips the baptism of Friday, or any discussion of it or the need for it, because he thinks, like Hobbes, that "this Article believeed, Jesus is the Christ, is sufficient to Baptism, that is to say, to our Reception in the Kingdome of God."49 Hobbes, of course, means this in a way more destructive of religion than Defoe means.

it, yet the religion Crusoe gives Friday is radical in what it takes from Christianity.

Crusoe does, however, keep the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper (as Dissenters called it), at least “within the limits of his condition.” Each year on the anniversary of his coming to the island Crusoe spends the day as a “Solemn Fast,” praying and confessing his sins, ending with an evening meal of “a Bisket Cake, and a Bunch of Grapes” (p. 103). After Friday has been converted, Crusoe says, “I kept the Anniversary of my Landing here with the same Thankfulness to God for his Mercies, as at first” (p. 229). Though the first food he offered to Friday, “Bread, and a Bunch of Raisins” (p. 205), was quasi-sacramental, Crusoe omits reference to the sacramental ending of the Anniversary solemnities shared with Friday, and in fact says nothing at all to Friday about Communion. Perhaps Crusoe is in sympathy with the deist Toland’s objections: “All the Rites of the Supper, too tedious to particularize, were introduc’d by degrees after the same manner. So by indeavouring to make the plainest things in the World appear mysterious, their very Nature and use were absolutely perverted and destroyed, and are not yet fully restor’d by the purest Reformation in Christendom.” Dissenters, Toland is saying, still share the hocus-pocus of Catholicism (in the seventeenth century, the committee that wrote the Parliamentary Directory for worship spent 18 of its 75 meetings dealing with the order of the Communion rite). Crusoe’s simple service, and Friday’s unknowing participation, seem to offer Toland’s standard of the “purest Reformation in Christendom.”

Throughout the eighteenth century the frequency of Communion in both the Church of England and the Dissenting churches was, in general, low, even though the central altar of the Anglican churches and the center table in the Dissenter’s meeting houses point to the sacrament’s liturgical importance. Still, virtually all English Protestants received Communion more often than Crusoe’s once a year—at least quarterly in the Church of England and, usually,

---


51 *Christianity Not Mysterious*, Sec. III, ch. 5, par. 91, p. 170.

monthly for Dissenters.\textsuperscript{53} Crusoe also varies from the practice of Dissenters by omitting commentary on the meaning of the sacrament—\textsuperscript{54}he apparently says nothing at all about it. Of course, as with baptism, Crusoe could point to his not being a minister; even the most iconoclastic sects ruled that an ordained minister was necessary for the administration of the Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{55} More tellingly, Defoe is using Friday’s history as a cannibal to make a point about the nature of the Eucharist—it is not Christ’s body and blood. How could he explain such cannibalism to Friday?

As his witless story in the \textit{Serious Reflections} about a stolen host thrown into a privy (which becomes a shrine)\textsuperscript{56} shows, Defoe, like most English Protestants, did not like transubstantiation: books like Samuel Johnson’s \textit{The Absolute Impossibility of Transsubstantiation Demonstrated} (London, 1688) were common, and the Act of Toleration (1689) offered religious liberty to those making (among other things) a declaration against transubstantiation. The typical Dissenting view, however, was not simple memorialism; the Presbyterian Matthew Henry wrote in 1704 that the Lord’s Supper is a “commemorating, communicating, and covenanting ordinance” through which God “conveys” to his people “the good Things promis’d.”\textsuperscript{57} Deists would have called such language the gibberish of the divinity schools. Their approach would be to take Crusoe’s simplification a step further and do away entirely with such savagery.

Locke, on the other hand, was too concerned with being an orthodox Christian to do away with a sacrament. His discussion of John 6:22–69, in which Christ says, “. . . whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life” (6:54), is instructive. Locke quotes approvingly the disciples who say, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (6:60). Surely Crusoe and Defoe felt so too, Crusoe

\textsuperscript{53}In London in the earlier eighteenth century, only eleven churches offered weekly Communion, though monthly Communion was fairly common and quarterly standard. Perhaps the lowest ebb for Communion participation was on Easter day, 1800, when there were only six communicants at St. Paul’s Cathedral. Norman Sykes, \textit{Church and State in England in the XVIIIth Century} (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1934), pp. 250–53; Davies, \textit{Worship and Theology}, pp. 63, 58.

\textsuperscript{54}Davies, \textit{Worship of the English Puritans}, p. 247.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., pp. 206, 222–23. The Baptists ruled on this in 1693 and 1702. Davies recalls another example: “It may also be remembered that William Brewster asked John Robinson’s permission to administer the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper aboard the \textit{Mayflower}, but he was informed that it was inexpedient.”

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Serious Reflections}, pp. 138–39.

\textsuperscript{57}\textit{The Communicant’s Companion} (London, 1704), p. 30.
FRIDAY’S RELIGION

especially, given Friday’s recent past. Locke does not quote Christ’s taunting “Doth this offend you?” (6:61) directed to the disciples who “went back, and walked no more with him” (6:66). Rather, he says Christ was using a “mixture of allegorical terms,” and that all Christ meant was believing that He is the son of God—“This was the eating his flesh and drinking his blood, whereby those who did so had eternal life.”\(^58\) Locke finds it that simple and reasonable; he does not inquire why Christ might have chosen such graphic “allegorical terms.” With just as little tolerance for any concept of a “real presence,” Defoe does not dodge the paradoxes of Christianity. Crusoe’s yearly Eucharistic feast, shared with a cannibal converted to the worship of a God who said, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (John 6:53), shows Defoe’s rich appreciation of Christianity’s hard sayings.

This yearly Eucharistic feast constitutes the whole of Crusoe’s and Friday’s liturgy—their other religious exercises consist entirely of bible reading. Furthermore, this liturgy is not only infrequent but sparse and simple: “I kept this Day as a Solemn Fast, setting it apart to Religious Exercise, prostrating my self on the Ground with the most serious Humiliation, confessing my Sins to God, acknowledging his Righteous Judgments upon me, and praying to him to have Mercy on me, through Jesus Christ” (p. 103); he ends the day with his sacramental bread and grapes. Dewey Ganzel finds fault with Crusoe saying, after Friday’s conversion, that he described England to Friday, including “how we worshipp’d God” (p. 224): “To explain ‘how we worshipped God’ after such a lengthy Christian indoctrination is not redundant but contradictory.”\(^59\) This, I think, misses Defoe’s point: Crusoe and Friday do not worship God the way the people in England do. For Defoe, the liturgical revolution of the Reformation was incomplete; he laments in the \textit{Serious Reflections} that God’s directions for worship “should be capable of being understood any more than one way.”\(^60\) Calvin’s criticisms of ceremony became, in Defoe’s time, the criticisms of deists, who saw it as a weapon of priestcraft, Toland declaring that “there is nothing so naturally opposite as Ceremony and Christianity.”\(^61\)

\(^{58}\)\textit{The Reasonableness of Christianity}, pp. 64–5.


\(^{60}\)\textit{Serious Reflections}, p. 154.

\(^{61}\)\textit{Christianity Not Mysterious}, Sec. III, ch. 5, par. 94, p. 172.
Christianity, with its reliance on revelation, is not deistic, but it is so bereft of ceremony it has no music at all, and in an age when the architecture of a church told its theology, it has no church building. When Friday and Crusoe lie down during their day of solemn fasting, they lie on the ground.

While Dissenters emphasized the importance of Sundays, they had provisions for solemn fasts, as described in the Parliamentary Directory (in use from 1643–60): “When some great and notable judgments are either inflicted upon a people, or apparently imminent, or by some extraordinary provocations notorious deserved; as also, when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained, public solemn fasting (which is to continue the whole day) is a duty that God expecteth from that nation or people.” It is interesting that Crusoe picks the anniversary of his landing on the island—God’s “notable judgment”—rather than the anniversary of his conversion for his yearly solemn fast. It is also interesting that Friday’s religion has for its solemn fast day the anniversary of Crusoe’s landing on the island, rather than that of his own landing on the island or his conversion. But the 30th of September is not without significance for Friday. Since Crusoe landed on this day it can be seen as Friday’s birthday (and, in fact, it is also Crusoe’s birthday). Their religion is extremely personal.

It is also, in important ways, a civil religion, using civil theology. By this I do not mean that Crusoe creates a state church on the island—he says he offers his subjects “Liberty of Conscience” (p. 241)—but that the process toward religion, especially with Friday, follows the process indicated by Hobbes at the end of the “Of Common-Wealth” section of Leviathan: “There wants onely, for the entire knowledge of civil duty, to know what are those Lawes of God.” In other words civil duty, without which man is thrust back into the anarchy and killing of the state of nature, is knowable and obtainable without any knowledge of God’s commands. The state involves contracts among men; God comes later, and God’s laws are not the model for the state. That this is the basis of modern government does not take away the bold effect of Hobbes’s statement: religion no longer guides our civil lives; political obedience no longer

62Quoted in Davies, Worship of the English Puritans, p. 140.
63Hobbes, p. 274 (part 2, ch. 31).
FRIDAY'S RELIGION

has religious justification. In Robinson Crusoe Defoe shows Crusoe mastering nature before being converted and Friday learning to be civilized before being converted. Religion is incorporated into politics; God works through the political authority (Crusoe in this case), not through the natural good instincts of humans stressed by deists.

Defoe thought that Christianity was particularly good at blending with and perfecting civilization. What distinguishes it from other religions, he says, is that wherever it has been “planted or professed nationally in the world . . . it has yet had a civilizing influence.” (He adds that “those who are reformed, and farther and farther Christianized,” are even more civilized). 64 This is not the urbane reflection of Addison, who, like a weekend tourist to the country, says, “I am always very well pleased with a country Sunday and think if keeping the seventh day holy were only a human institution, it would be the best method that could have been thought of for the polishing and civilizing of mankind.” 65 Defoe is not interested in “polishing”; the civil theology he has in mind is like that in the description of baptism in The Reasonableness of Christianity. Baptism for the Jews, Locke says, was “an initiating ceremony” involving a “submission” to Mosaic law and entrance into “the commonwealth of Israel.” So Christ made baptism the “solem visible act” whereby believers in his divinity “were admitted as subjects into his kingdom.” 66 People join Christ’s commonwealth to gain what they lost through Adam—eternal life. Thus, Christianity has a civil theology and a keenly civilizing effect because it is based on the same thing as natural law’s foundation of civilization: people entering a covenant through fear of death. Defoe offers this civil theology as a contrast to any other theology—whether from naturalists, or deists, or members of the Church of England—that does not recognize the natural depravity of humans and the horrors of the state of nature. Christianity, as modelled in Robinson Crusoe, is made for man Friday the cannibal.

During his rescue of the Spaniard from the mouths of cannibals, the wild-looking Crusoe asks him, “What was he?” The Spaniard’s response perfectly demonstrates the world of Robinson Crusoe; instead of giving his nationality, he gives a better and more complex

64Serious Reflections, pp. 119, 121.
65The Spectator, August 9, 1712.
66The Reasonableness of Christianity, pp. 126–27.
answer—"Christianus" (p. 235). He, like Friday, becomes a perfect citizen because he owes his life to the governor of the state. The religious dimension of this is that Crusoe tolerates the Spaniard’s Catholicism because his citizenship is properly founded. Not even Locke, the great defender of toleration, argued for toleration of Catholics. Crusoe offers it—and toleration of a pagan (Friday’s biological father) besides—because his state is perfect. As Defoe said in a poem written long before Robinson Crusoe: “No Nonconforming Sects disturb his Reign,/ For of his Yoak there’s very few complain.”67 A state founded on the perfect basis will allow opportunity for perfect religion, which turns out to be a Christianity of a radically simple kind, based on fear of death, steeped in bible-reading, with a spare, infrequent, natural liturgy, evangelism, and a wary, personal sense of God’s immanence and providence—and a wary sense of fellow, hungry men.

Augsburg College
Minneapolis

67“The True-Born Englishman,” p. 56.