



**Review of K. R. Merrill and R. W. Shahan, eds., *David Hume, Many Sided Genius***

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K. R. Merrill and R. W. Shahan (eds.): David Hume, Many-sided Genius, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1976. 192 pages. Hardback \$9.95; paperback \$3.95.

This is a collection of nine independent essays which are calculated to remind us, as the editors remark, of the "depth and range of Hume's intellectual gifts".

The volume opens with a characteristically astute addition to Terence Penelhum's growing quiver of publications on the self, Hume and personal immortality. In the present piece Penelhum argues (p.10) that Hume's dominant use of the term "self" is one in which "the self is the mind rather than the whole person". His conclusion is that such an account - although unsatisfactory - is free from outright self-contradictions.

The second essay, "Hume on the Standard of Morals" by R. F. Atkinson, is concerned with those passages in which Hume seems to make good and evil relative to pains and pleasures. Atkinson's thesis, which is supported by detailed textual argument, is that although Hume did not intend to be and was not a subjectivist, he nevertheless gives a seriously deficient account of the standard of morals.

In "Hume's Catalog of Virtue and Vice" William Davie focuses upon the list of "estimable or blameable qualities of men" which can, according to Hume, readily be constructed from "the very nature of language" (second Enquiry, sect. I. I am entirely baffled by Davie's page references). Davie points out that the enterprise is not as straightforward as Hume implies and that the name of any given quality, e.g. "tough", could occur in the estimable or the blameable column depending upon the culture or character of the person drawing up the list. Moreover this is not a merely technical objection to Hume, but one which shows up the intricate variety of moral life and language which "thwarts any philosophical efforts to sum it up". The points are important and warrant further discussion. I can

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only remark that Hume may be able to admit variations in the cataloguing of a given quality if he can show that the variations are brought about by different estimates of the utility resulting from possessing the quality.

James Noxon's wide-ranging article "Hume's Concern With Religion" starts by asking what motivated that concern. Noxon's answer is that interest in establishing the limits of the understanding was the motivational force. He then considers Capaldi's and Penelhum's accounts of the final estimate which Hume put upon the design argument. He concludes with some new observations on the chapter "Of Miracles".

The essay of Richard Popkin, "Hume: Philosophical Versus Prophetic Historian", is of the stimulating and vigorous character which one has come to expect of him. Apart from slightly cliquish opening references to "some of us", Popkin's argued thesis is that Hume in the History, and elsewhere, rejects the "providential and prophetic history" which had long been the norm of Christian historians. Instead he wrote secular history, in which there is no beginning, no Divine Drama, and no apotheosis. "Hume's history starts nowhere and goes nowhere. The sort of world we live in has sequences, events, developments, dramas, but all on a human level" (p.92). The thesis is challenging and important and one hopes to hear more of it. My only irritation is Popkin's perpetuation of an old malpractice in referring to the "Essay of Miracles" (p.89), and my only hesitation is whether Hume makes prophecy a sub-class of miracles for the reasons Popkin suggests (p.87f) or because their appeal to the rational apologist had already been eroded by earlier controversy.

Ralph Cohen's "The Rationale of Hume's Literary Inquiries" is concerned with Hume's writings on literature, aesthetics, criticism and taste. These are to be found, for the most part, in his essays, but also include "The Dissertation of the Passions" - surely the most thin and vapid thing Hume ever published. I remain unconvinced

that Hume had significant things to say on aesthetics. This is not due to any deficiency in Cohen's article but to my own persuasion that few if any philosophers have things of value to say in this area.

As one who had previously skimmed over or ignored Hume's writings on economics I found Eugene Rotwein's essay "David Hume, Philosopher-Economist" a real eye-opener. It is mostly (but not exclusively) concerned with the Political Discourses of 1752. Hume's economics are discussed under three heads: economic psychology (motivation); specific market problems and normative economic philosophy. As so often, one can scarcely fail to be impressed with Hume's refusal to indulge in the simplistic single-factor explanations of human activity with which economics, not to say morality and politics, abounds. Rotwein's estimation of the essay "Of Refinement in the Arts" is worth quoting for those who doubt Hume's significance as an economist: "It warrants recognition as one of the most comprehensive statements of the case for a wealth-oriented, liberal social order to be found in the literature of economics" (p.133).

"Hume, Whitehead, and Philosophic Method" by K. R. Merrill deals with a nest of epistemological issues: the impression/idea dichotomy, the relation of ideas/matter of fact divide and the character of experience. Hume's theses and Whitehead's objections are nicely supplemented with Merrill's comments but the matters discussed are too intricate to be followed here.

The final essay, Adolf Reinach's "Kant's Interpretation of Hume's Problem" dates from 1908 but it wears its age well. This is its first appearance in an English translation (by J. N. Mohanty). It is meaty stuff. There are in-depth discussions of whether Hume questions the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements in the special case of causation, and whether "analytic" for Kant and "relation of ideas" for Hume mean the same. Reinach's conclusion is that they don't (p.177). This article

deserves attention. It is a good thing which has been too long obscured.

As a whole this is a stimulating collection of essays and it admirably fulfils its editors' intention to display the many facets of Hume's genius. But the editors ought to have imposed uniformity of reference upon their contributors. Each essayist announces separately (and differently) the editions of Hume's works he will use and the manner of abbreviating their titles. Indeed I would go further. There are some very common and, for all ordinary purposes, entirely satisfactory editions of Hume's works available. Couldn't we all agree to use them? For examples: the Treatise in the Selby-Bigge edition; the Enquiries in either the Hendel or Selby-Bigge editions; the History in the 1778 edition and the Essays in the 1777 edition; the Dialogues in the Kemp Smith edition (until this last is displaced by a better, which, arguably, it has not yet been: see the review article in Philosophical Books, May 1977).

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