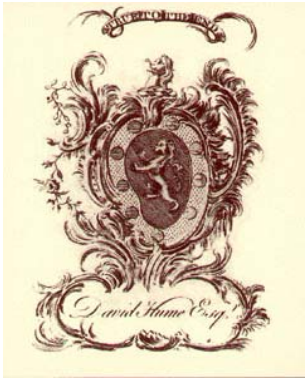

Review of Barry Stroud, *Hume*
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HUME. by BARRY STROUD. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London,1977
Pp. xii + 250. £7.50

In this, the fifth volume in the series The Arguments of the Philosophers edited by Ted Honderich, Professor Stroud is impressively successful in working out a unified and consistent interpretation of Hume's philosophical writings. To begin with I thought him less successful in the more difficult task of communicating with beginners and Hume scholars alike. But I was gradually convinced that, although beginners have to work hard, the more determined of them are well catered for by the clear, careful exposition of central matters, and that the more expert will be interested to find this sometimes familiar material used in support of the thesis that Hume is to be understood as the scientific student of human nature he claimed to be - not fundamentally a sceptic, nor an advocate of the theory of ideas (which he simply took for granted), and emphatically not an analytical empiricist before his time.

Many will agree that interpretations and criticisms of Hume often go astray by considering parts of his work in isolation from one another. In opposition to this, Stroud tries to be comprehensive; although, as he acknowledges in his Preface, he does not manage to take into account absolutely everything. It is, perhaps, most to be regretted that no space was found for a consideration of Hume's treatment of religion, since it might well have afforded clues to his strategic aims in philosophy. The neglect of the historical writings is probably less serious, though it would be interesting to read a detailed defence of Stroud's claim that his interpretation makes Hume's history more of a piece with the rest of his work than is generally supposed.

After the introductory chapter and a chapter giving

an admirable account of the theory of ideas, the following main topics are dealt with: causality and necessary connection (III and IV); the continued and distinct existence of bodies (V); personal identity (VI); practical reason and morality (VII - IX). Conclusions are summarised in chapter X.

The introduction emphasises that Hume is putting forward 'a new theory or vision' of human nature, in which association has the role taken by gravitation in Newtonian physics. Hume takes for granted a rather simplistic version of the theory of ideas, his problem being to determine what has to be added in order to construct a satisfactory account of human nature. He is attempting to extend Hutcheson's treatment of aesthetics and morality to all divisions of human nature. Acknowledgement is here made to Kemp Smith; corroboration of the latter's conjecture that Hume's ethics pre-dated his epistemology is found in the fact that in Treatise Bk.II reasoning (including causal reasoning) is opposed to passion, whereas in Bk.I causal thinking is credited to imagination (passion) rather than to reason (p.162 note). Stroud later (p.186) sees in Kemp Smith's conjecture an explanation of the 'crudity' of Hume's account of moral judgments compared with his treatment of causal statements. This, as Stroud recognises, leaves unanswered the question why the relevant passages of the second Enquiry were not revised in the light of Treatise Bk. I; but Stroud can be forgiven for not going deeply into the relationship between the Treatise and the Enquiries in the present well-packed book.

Another point of emphasis in chapter I is that Hume's attempt to discredit traditional rationalism in its own terms is subordinate to his project of developing a radically naturalistic account of human nature. The aim is not fundamentally sceptical (though it seems to me hard to deny that Hume is at times carried away); it is rather to prepare the way for his own views. There are,

in fact, generally two phases to Hume's procedure: first an exposure of the inadequacy of rationalism, next his own positive account. Accordingly Stroud tries to comment separately on the negative and positive phases of Hume's treatment of causality, dividing it between chapters III and IV, and to an extent tries to maintain the same division in his discussion of the other topics.

In chapter III Stroud argues that Hume's interest is in the empirical question how we make the causal inferences we do, rather than in the analysis of our idea of causation. He points out the defects of such analyses as Hume offers or assumes and the frequent circularity of his arguments as presented, but maintains that these defects neither seriously obstruct Hume's carrying out of his own programme nor much reduce the interest of what he has to say for us - whose interests presumably are mainly analytical. Stroud disputes the common contention that Hume makes essential use of the rationalist principle that arguments have to be either deductive or defective. I remain of the opinion that this contention is not groundless but all the same I thought by the end of the chapter that my understanding of what Hume might have supposed he was doing was much improved.

Chapter IV presents Hume's positive account of how imagination (certain natural, primitive dispositions of the mind) does what reason cannot, in conducting us from the observed to the unobserved. Hume aims to explain why, given A, B not merely comes to mind, but is actually <u>believed</u> to be going to occur. He himself was aware that great difficulties stood in his way; Stroud effectively, though not unsympathetically, shows that they cannot be overcome in Humean terms. Hume's problems, like those of others since, derive in Stroud's opinion from a failure to relate belief to the passions and the will. Hume's theory of the mind is too narrow to cope with the intentional character of belief.

Doubt is also cast on the coherence of the Humean contention that the impression corresponding to the idea of necessary connection belongs to reflection and arises in the mind from repeated observation of constant conjunctions. Hume wants to maintain that the idea of necessary connection, though it has a subjective source, is somehow projected onto external reality. What he fails to explain is how the idea comes to present itself to us as being of an external reality. The trouble derives from his tending to collapse the question of what the idea of necessary connection is into the question of how we come by it, which makes him think that, since the idea results from the operations of our mind, it must be of them. Chapter V concludes by defending Hume from the charge that circularity must be involved in giving a causal theory of causation, but by objecting that his theory is compatible with our founding any expectations whatever on our past experience.

Quite apart from its merits as an interpretation of Hume, Stroud's discussion of causation has considerable philosophical interest in its own right. The same is true in only slightly lesser degree of his discussion of the existence of bodies and personal identity in chapters V and VI. The former properly emphasises that Hume's question is entirely what causes us to believe in the continued and distinct existence of bodies - Hume neither questioning nor having any interest in trying to justify the belief. Since the belief does not come from sense or reason, it has to be the result of imagination working upon the consistency and coherence of our observations. There is, however, the difficulty that Hume's explanation of how we get the idea of the identity of objects through time presupposes that we already have the idea.

In chapter VI Stroud considers Hume's discussion of personal identity to be on similar lines to that of body, though more perfunctory, and with less effort expended on the clearing up of obscurities. Attention is focussed on

what might be thought specially problematic about personal identity, and on explaining the origin of the despair confessed to by Hume in the appendix. Hume's concentration on second rather than first person attributions of identity is held to conceal the difficulty that we need the notion of a single mind even to set up the problem of identity. In spite of this, however, it is held to be possible to defend Hume against the charge of vicious circularity - a person does not need to have an idea of the mind in order to receive the data which lead him to the idea of himself as such a mind. This defence, however, as Hume perhaps saw in the appendix, leaves unanswered the most important question about the self - the question how to explain why the data, on which the theory of identity relies, present themselves in the way they do. How could we know that we are acquainted, not with all perceptions, but only with those constituting a particular bundle? No corresponding difficulty attends the Humean account of the continued and distinct existence of bodies.

Next come chapters VII and VIII on action, reason, passion and morality. The first criticises compatibilist views of freedom and necessity, arguing (p.151) that Hume does not really show that spontaneity is compatible with causality. Nor does he explain why, if theological determinism ought to lead theists to hold God responsible for the evil men do, a secularised doctrine should not lead atheists to hold no one responsible. The incompleteness of Hume's treatment is held to reflect the fact that his main concern is simply with developing the doctrine of necessity. The reconciliatory aim is not specific to him, but is to be found, for instance, in Hobbes.

There are, as is generally the case, negative and positive phases to Hume's development of a causal account of human nature. Negatively he has to dispose of the traditional conception of practical reason, which he considers quite as erroneous as the Cartesian account of how

we come to believe things - hence the attempt to show that reason cannot be a motive nor oppose passion in the direction of the will. Stroud persuasively contends that Hume's argument concerning passions and actions would, if carried through, show that beliefs themselves can be neither reasonable nor unreasonable, even though his aim is to contrast reason (including beliefs) with passion.

Chapter VIII discusses the contention that judgments of vice and virtue reflect neither relations of ideas nor matters of fact. Stroud notes how Hume's unjustified assumption that propensities and aversions are feelings determines his conclusion that morality is based on feeling or sentiment. He considers different interpretations of what Hume may have meant by this, disliking the more psychologistic or subjectivist, and maintaining (correctly, I believe) that Hume never contemplated an expressivist view. Hume's aims would have been better satisfied by a moral theory on the same lines as his theory of necessity, i.e. by regarding moral; like causal, judgments as projections. Stroud admits that this is to go beyond anything that is explicit in Hume. A unified and coherent ethical theory is no doubt possible on Humean lines, but was scarcely achieved by Hume.

The over-discussed 'is/ought' passage is moderately and plausibly interpreted as emphasising the impotence of reason and the potency of passion. Stroud sees that it is a problem for Hume to explain what is distinctively moral about the moral sentiments; and he emphasises Hume's non-recognition of the tendency of his invocation of unfelt sentiments, which would be felt by one adopting a steady and general point of view, to take him outside the simplicities of his official moral theory.

The third of the moral chapters (IX) treats Hume's attempt to explain why we approve of the things we do, in particular why we approve of justice, which on occasion brings about neither private nor public benefit. Stroud

rightly draws attention to the narrowness of a conception of justice which fails to allow for anyone's being unjustly placed in his station in life, and concludes that Hume does not explain what recommends justice to us in cases where we know it to be in our interest to act unjustly. Stroud does not forget Hume's recognition at the end of the second Enquiry that he has problems to face, but very reasonably concludes that Hume needs a richer and more complex conception of our natural condition if he is to give the rationale of justice.

I have tried in this review to convey some impression of the richness of content of Stroud's book, I hope without obscuring the structure of the argument, or the way in which the copious detail is subordinated to advancing it. The work's great strength lies in the fact that its interpretation is carefully documented and thoroughly argued. It is a major contribution to the understanding of Hume.

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