



**Review of Donald W. Livingston and James T. King, eds.,
*Hume: A Re-evaluation***

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R E V I E W

HUME: A Re-evaluation, edited by Donald W. Livingston and James T. King.
 Fordham University Press, New York. Pp.421. \$25.00 cloth,
 \$8.50 paper.

This volume contains, besides a useful introduction by Livingston and a name index, nineteen papers by eighteen authors, arranged into six sections. The description "a re-evaluation" rouses hopes that are satisfied in various ways. There are contributions covering the whole range of Hume's writings - epistemology, aesthetics, morals, politics and history - so that the volume provides a perspective broader than most studies by a single author. Some papers discuss neglected topics, and many oppose the common view of Hume as a precursor of twentieth-century phenomenism and positivism.

The two contributions on Hume's moral philosophy, James King's "The Place of the Language of Morals in Hume's Second Enquiry" and Ronald Glossop's "Hume, Stevenson, and Hare on Moral Language", illustrate this last theme. King stresses the differences between the Treatise, which, by its emphasis on the psychology of the passions, lends itself to phenomenalist interpretation, and the Enquiry which, King argues, presents morality as an historical institution revealed in the workings of moral language. Glossop's paper then takes up this theme, and contrasts Hume's account of this language with two contemporary views. He suggests that Hume understands the moral point of view to be objective and "disinterested", and explains this in the Enquiry by appealing to the public nature of language. He contrasts this favourably with Stevenson's account whereby moral terms express essentially individual perspectives. Glossop favours the opinion that Hume did not propose what Hare calls "Hume's Law" about the derivation of "ought" from "is", and then draws ammunition from his interpretation of

Hume to attack Hare's requirement that naturalist definitions of virtue contain no terms having, even covertly, "evaluative meaning". This same section also contains a fine paper by Peter Jones on Hume's aesthetics, in which, like King and Glossop, the stress is on the objective nature of aesthetic judgments explained by reference to the language game of aesthetic appraisal and its historically fashioned form of life.

Throughout the volume, Hume the historian is to the fore. Sheldon Wolin's "Hume and Conservatism" and Constant Noble Stockton's "Economics and the Mechanism of Historical Progress in Hume's History" discuss his place in the history of political and historical thought, while articles by Craig Walton and Douglass Adair relate him to political thought in America before and after independence. More generally, the editors use the idea of time, and especially the past, as a link between three other papers, Donald Livingston's "Hume's Historical Theory of Meaning", Antony Flew's "Infinite Divisibility in Hume's Treatise" and James Noxon's "Remembering and Imagining the Past".

Part II of Treatise Book I is rarely discussed in detail; but it cannot be said that Flew finds any reason especially to revise the usual judgment of Hume here. (See, for example, J. R. Lucas, A Treatise on Time and Space, pp.26-30). The merit of his paper lies in the clarity of his account, and in his tracing the origin of Hume's problems. Neither can it be said that Noxon finds new merits in Hume's attempts to distinguish memory and imagination. Noxon gives a cautious endorsement to Hume's causal theory of remembering, but questions the application of the same model to the acquisition of historical beliefs. He remarks on Hume's apparently inconsistent use of "impressions" and "ideas" in the passage (T108) where he speaks of the reader receiving impressions from the conversation and books of travellers and historians, and, referring to the claim that *without the authority either of the memory or*

senses our whole reasoning wou'd be chimerical and without foundation (T83), says that "Hume's statements give no unequivocal answer to our question of whose impressions are being talked about" ... "the historian's or the eyewitnesses's?" (p.279). In fact, Hume is here talking about the impressions of neither, but about our own impressions on reading or hearing historical narratives. As a result, Noxon does not properly grasp what Hume's theory here was.

Livingston's essay on Hume's theory of meaning argues that it differs from subsequent empiricist theories which are aimed at the language of science in that "Hume's paradigm for understanding the language of common life is not theoretical inquiry but historical inquiry" (p.221), "Hume's theory has narrative form" (p.228). Unfortunately, Livingston does not explain the differences and relations between his categories of "the language of common life", "philosophical language", "theoretical language" and "sensory language". Whatever exactly the language of common life may be, Livingston says that Hume's theory is about the workings of this language, for which the doctrine of the derivation of ideas from impressions as a criterion of meaning is a contingently true but nomic proposition, and that it is a theory which involves essentially reference to the past. This relates to the fact that Hume, in searching for meanings, looks to prior impressions - what Livingston calls the "past tense structure of the theory" (p.221).

In his second section Livingston considers the familiar objection that Hume's criterion of meaningfulness cannot be employed, for we cannot compare past and present perceptions. He says that commentators who urge this objection, such as Russell and Passmore, do so because they are themselves in the grip of phenomenalist or pragmatist theories which attempt to reduce past tense utterances to present and future tense utterances. They suffer from what Livingston calls "historical nihilism". Hume himself says

that it is *impossible to recal the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas* (T85), and if, as Livingston insists, this is no problem for him, then I would say that it must be that such comparisons are not in fact required by his theory. Strangely, however, Livingston thinks that they are, but that the question how this is possible is "inappropriate": "The question, however, is inappropriate insofar as it rests on the assumption that the past is a strange or dubious sort of reality requiring special explanation. Hume takes past existence and knowledge of it as primitive to the language of common life..." (p.224).

In his third section Livingston discusses what he claims is "an objection which, in effect, grants that comparisons between past and present existences are possible but holds that reference to the past is not part of the meanings of terms" (p.224). This refers to Bennett's objections to Hume (Locke, Berkeley, Hume, pp.229-230) that "...if it really does matter now whether a given expression makes sense, then its making sense or not ought to show now..." and that "what someone understands now is not logically tied to what he underwent earlier: the account of 'newly born' adults in Shaw's Back to Methuselah is a perfectly consistent fantasy." Livingston counters that a human being might be a 'newly born' adult male, but could not be a 'newly born' father, priest, senator, police officer or lover, for these are past-entailing concepts (i.e. apply now in virtue of events before now), and he thinks that Hume's theory gives a better account of such terms than do rivals, which apparently work only for what he calls "atemporal terms" such as "adult male". He tells us that "we have only two sets of terms with which to describe the world: atemporal terms and past-entailing terms" (p.226), and that "the language of common life, then, is constituted by past-entailing concepts" (p.227).

There are a number of misunderstandings and con-

fusions here. First, it is quite clear that nothing Bennett says commits him to the view "that reference to the past is not part of the meanings of terms". To use Livingston's language, what Bennett is denying, contra Hume as he understands him, is that the predicate "understands the meaning of expression E" is itself past-entailing; he is far from denying that there are past-entailing terms. What Livingston needs here is an argument to show that if "E" is itself past-entailing then "understands E" is also past-entailing. Second, the claim that "we have only two sets of terms with which to describe the world: atemporal terms and past-entailing terms" suggests quite wrongly that all expressions which are not past-entailing are related to time in the same way. As it stands, all Livingston says here is that we have "only" past-entailing terms and the rest. Third, it is misleading to use the expression "atemporal" to describe all expressions which are not past-entailing, since that expression already has a use in which it is false that, for example, "adult male" is atemporal. In fact, "atemporal" is normally used to describe the language of mathematics and Quinean canonical languages of science, and this explains I think why Livingston is misled into claiming that "the language of common life, then, is constituted by past-entailing concepts".

The attack, by no means begun in this volume, upon the interpretation of Hume as a precursor of positivism and phenomenism is extended in the three chapters of section III, by Anderson, Capaldi and Jones. Of these, Robert Anderson's "The Location, Extension, Shape and Size of Hume's Perceptions" is the most limited in scope. He argues that Hume's philosophy of mind is far more physicalist than is commonly supposed, and adduces evidence that Hume considered that at least some perceptions are located in the brain, and that the mechanisms of association may indeed be physiological. Nicholas Capaldi, too, in "Hume's Theory of the Passions", thinks that commentators have taken

the theory of mental activity in too phenomenalist a way. He says that Hume's references to introspective "experiments" do not show that he was trying to reconstruct reality from the data of consciousness, but are intended as empirical evidence for the existence of universal principles of mental functioning, which he regarded as physiological. With reference especially to the passions, Capaldi defends Hume against Gardiner's criticism that he thought passions can be identified by acts of direct introspection by claiming that he regarded such feelings as "only the conscious tip of a more basic physiological process" (p.178).

Both Anderson and Capaldi agree that Hume begins from the position of common sense, that his world is a world of physical objects and other people. They differ, however, in their view of the relation between the Treatise and the Enquiries. Anderson argues that "there appears to remain no reason...not to take seriously Hume's disowning of the Treatise. Hence, if we are to respect his wishes, we should take the Enquiry over the Treatise in case of any apparent difference between them" (p.162). Capaldi's essay, however, is a careful, although overcompressed, case for regarding the whole Treatise as a structure unified by Hume's theory of the passions, which links together his analysis of belief and discussion of scepticism in Book I with his account of sympathy, the conception of the self and his moral theory. All these elements get some, often rather hurried, treatment in this chapter, in an attempt to show how Hume uses the idea of the communication of vivacity between impressions and ideas throughout the Treatise as his leading idea. For Capaldi, the discussions of both belief and the self in Book I are negative, Hume's positive account coming only with the development of his doctrine about impressions of reflection in the second Book.

He thus argues that Hume's treatment of the self is consistent between the three Books. In his opinion, Hume's thought in the Enquiries lost this unity and coherence:

"when he surrendered the sympathy mechanism, Hume also surrendered the communication of vivacity as the connecting link of the three books of the Treatise" (p.189). It seems, then, that while Anderson is prepared to regard the Enquiries as maturer works purged of youthful errors, as Hume recommends, Capaldi sees Hume's thought as there radically changed.

For both Capaldi and Peter Jones in "Strains in Hume and Wittgenstein", a key quotation is "...philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected." Like Capaldi, Jones emphasises Hume's naturalism, his acceptance of common sense, and his view of man as a social animal. Jones's brilliant and stimulating essay draws out many parallels between Hume's conception of the nature and function of philosophy, especially in regard to scepticism, and Wittgenstein's, especially in regard to solipsism and idealism. He shows how Hume, like Wittgenstein, takes doubt as possible only against a social background of shared beliefs, and that the foundations of belief come first in action rather than thought. He shows, too, how both philosophers share a distaste for philosophical systems, and a conception of philosophy as a therapy for illusions. (But here I think he underplays Hume's rationalism). Both philosophers emphasise the role of education and training in the acquisition of concepts and beliefs. "Nature is always too strong for principle" is, Jones says, a Wittgensteinian as much as Humean thought.

In the first two sections of his paper, Jones is content to make his points by expositions of Hume and Wittgenstein which stay close to the texts, and he lets the quotations speak for themselves. In the third section the other possible meaning of his title comes forward. Both Hume and Wittgenstein "face the problem of explaining the possibility of revision, extension, and overthrow of our position. Their fundamental views are essentially con-

servative, grounded in the past and in the preservation of its traditions" (p.205). Jones then comments, all too briefly, on what he calls the "rhetoric of presentation" of these authors, comparing this to "prophetic writings" - which he takes to be marked by a concern to describe rather than explain the basic truths and values of a tradition, often by the device of reminding the audience of what they can be taken already to know. His thought here chimes in with Árdal's (see below), saying of Hume and Wittgenstein: "For both, the terms "reasonable" and "rational" have a social dimension, and thereby an ethical dimension" (p.206). To my mind, Jones's paper is among the most interesting in this book, and one is pleased to see that he promises more on this theme elsewhere.

Four papers centred on Hume's conception of reason and scepticism make up the first section of this volume. Jones suggests, in the paper just considered, that Hume like Wittgenstein had a therapeutic conception of philosophy. But what did he diagnose as ailments? Aprioricism in epistemology and ethics, certainly, and superstition in religion. But beliefs in the external world, and causal beliefs, while not rationally justified are not illnesses, for such beliefs are not only unavoidable, but necessary for living. Wade L. Robison, in "David Hume: Naturalist and Meta-sceptic" argues, however, that in the case of causal beliefs Hume held that there is a feature of our thought which is neither necessary for life, nor rationally justifiable, nor avoidable: the belief that there is a necessary connection in nature between causes and effects. He claims that Hume thought that even after we have recognized that the idea of necessary connection derives from an internal impression of reflection, nevertheless we must still ascribe necessity to causal connections in the objective world. As Robison agrees, however, the textual support for this is scanty (basically T222-223), and if this really was Hume's view, it is surprising that he makes so

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little of it. I am inclined to think that the passages Robison cites do not unequivocally bear his interpretation. Further, there could be no difference in behaviour - and how beliefs show up in action is crucial for Hume - between one who does and one who does not believe in necessary connections in nature. Hume does, of course, remark that *the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects* and that this *biass of the mind will prevail with the generality of readers* (T167); but this does not, I think, suggest that Hume thought the bias beyond correction.

D. C. Stove's "Why Should Probability Be the Guide of Life?" begins with the question,

Q1: Why should one believe a proposition H which is certain in relation to one's total evidence E?

and the answer,

A1: Because, necessarily, if one's total evidence E is true, then every proposition H which is certain in relation to E is true.

He then considers the analogous question,

Q2: Why should one believe a proposition H which is probable but not certain in relation to one's total evidence E (since any such H may be false)?

Three answers are considered:

A2: Because, necessarily, if one's total evidence E is true, then every proposition H which in relation to E has probability = x/y (where $x/y > 0 < 1$, but may be close to 1) has probability = x/y in relation to E.

A2': Because, necessarily, if one's total evidence E is true, then every proposition H which in relation to E has probability = x/y (x/y as before) has (simple) probability = x/y .

A2'': Because, necessarily, if one's total evidence E is true, then a proportion = x/y of the propositions H which each have a probability = x/y in relation to E are true.

Stove rejects A2 as a repudiation of the question, A2' as wrongly linking simple with relational probability, and as inviting an analogous question about believing (simply) probable propositions, and A2" as false. He goes on to suggest that if we require that an adequate answer to Q2 should be a necessary truth linking probability to truth, and should begin with the supposition that E is true, then these three answers look to have exhausted the field. The argument is so far, Stove tells us, a version of one given by W. C. Salmon, who apparently regards the difficulty of answering Q2 as being Hume's problem of induction, and as especially a difficulty for "logical-probability" theorists like Carnap. In the second section of the paper, Stove argues, I think rightly, that neither of these opinions of Salmon's is correct.

In the third section, Stove shows that these two requirements for an answer to Q2 cannot be both satisfied together: (i) that an answer states a necessary connection between probability in relation to evidence and truth, (ii) that an answer be such that, when added to E, it raises the probability of H to certainty. He then says that Q2 should be rejected, giving for this two reasons. First, he says that even if one could provide an answer analogous to A1, that began "because, necessarily, if E is true...", the result would be at most half an answer to Q2. For the obligation to believe what is probable in relation to one's total evidence E is not confined to cases in which E is true. It subsists also and equally where E is false. A second arm of an answer is required, therefore, one which begins "...and if E is false..." But now, I think it will be agreed, no one has any idea at all how to complete the part of an answer to Q2 which begins in that way" (p.60) Second, he says that Q2 wrongly suggests that if one believes what is probable in relation to one's total evidence, then all is well. This is not so, says Stove, for one must have the right degree of belief. If Q2 is reformulated to make this

explicit, as,

Q2': Why should one have, in a proposition H which has probability = x/y in relation to one's total evidence E, a degree of belief which is a fraction = x/y of one's degree of belief in E?

then, he says, it is obvious that the question is self-answering:

The very thing which assessments of probability do, and which no other propositions do, is to characterise certain degrees of belief as rational and others as not, as distinct from characterising just some beliefs as rational, or not (p.61).

Stove's first reason for rejecting Q2 here is a muddle.

Someone who accepts A1 as an answer to Q1, to take the analogy, is saying that one has an obligation to believe because a certain conditional proposition is necessarily true; but he is not saying that the obligation is conditional upon the truth of the antecedent of that conditional, as Stove thinks he is. His second reason presupposes what Stove does not give, an account of what it is to have a certain degree of belief in a proposition. How does having a certain degree of belief differ from believing that a proposition has a certain relative probability? If these do not differ, then Stove's version of irrationality consists in having false beliefs about probabilities. Why is that being irrational rather than just making a mistake?

Farhang Zabeeh, in "Hume's Problem of Induction: An Appraisal", applies the familiar defence against scepticism - that the sceptic cannot state his case without presupposing the falsity of his conclusion - to Hume's inductive scepticism. He argues as follows. Hume demands a justification for inductive inferences, and usually takes these to be inferences from the data of senses and memory to what goes beyond these sources. He regarded the premisses of such inferences as "basic propositions" which are known intuitively and are indubitable, so that, for

Hume, inductive inference comes in only after the premisses are established. Zabeeh thinks that this is unjustifiable phenomenalism, and contends that all knowledge, since it involves the use of concepts, "necessitates the existence of a language, and there cannot be any language without rules, and the use of rules requires, among other things, inductive inference" (pp.78-79).

Here one feels the lack of any clear discussion of what inductive inference is. Stove, for example, in his contribution, says:

An inductive argument, according to the main stream of philosophical usage, is simply an argument from observed to unobserved instances of some empirical predicates (p.54).

Now Zabeeh says,

...the premisses of an inductive argument are exactly in the same position as the supposed unwarranted conclusion...the sceptical doubt about induction could not arise unless we grant these inductively laden premisses (p.80).

But, clearly, if inductive arguments are, as Stove says, from observed to unobserved instances of predicates, then the premisses cannot be in exactly the same position as the conclusion. It is possible, therefore, that Zabeeh intends to maintain that there simply are no arguments which satisfy Stove's definition of induction; that is, that no predicates can be correctly applied on the basis of observation alone. This is suggested by a passage on p.78 where Zabeeh, referring to Hume's question 'why from this experience we form any conclusion beyond those past instances, of which we have had experience', says that "instance" means "instance of some predicate", but perhaps Zabeeh is saying that all empirical predicates imply, in some way, a causal law or regularity. This is supported by his approving quotation from Russell: "most object words are condensed induction". If this is correct, then Zabeeh must provide some account of induction alternative to Stove's.

Another possibility is that Zabeeh would accept Stove's definition, but argue that the mastering of empirical predicates involves induction. This is what is suggested by such remarks as, "Learning language requires the use of words, and that requires making cognitive inference from certain semantic and syntactic regularities" (p.79). This appears to be the argument that no one can even make an observational statement to provide a premiss for an inductive inference unless he has mastered a language, and since mastering a language involves induction, one cannot state the premisses of an inductive inference without having already made use of induction. But this does not show that Hume's scepticism cannot be stated; it shows only that if both Hume and Zabeeh are correct, language learning is not a rational activity.

Finally in this section, Páll S. Árdal's "Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume's Treatise" is scholarly, enlightening, and has the added merit of raising a number of interesting questions in addition to those discussed at length. Árdal begins with the famous quotation that reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and couples this with Hume's view that reason is inert. He points out that Hume does not deny that reason influences conduct, giving examples, and then concentrates on the concept of reason as inert. Here he argues that Hume equates reason with truth, or the discovery of truth, and that he does so as a consequence of his rejection of mental faculties, which come under the same ban as occult qualities and so on. The claim that "'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" becomes no scandal when "reason" is interpreted this way, for if "contrary to reason" means self-contradictory or false (said of propositions) then this famous saying only illustrates Hume's view that, as Árdal says, "passions and actions have no representative characteristic and consequently cannot

conform , or fail to conform, to reality" (p.94). At the same time, Ardal points out how idiosyncratic this use of "reasonable" and "unreasonable" is.

Árdal then turns to the main concern of his paper, the concept he finds in Hume of reasonableness as a virtue. He gives an account of how and why Hume distinguishes those special feelings of approval and disapproval which give rise to judgments of virtue and vice from passions such as love and hatred. Hume says that these are apt to be confused, *...those sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another...*, but a man of temper and judgment can keep them apart.

(T472) This separation of moral judgment from passion is, Hume thinks, what people have usually had in mind when they say that one ought to live by reason not passion. Hume agrees, but argues, Árdal says, that in this sense "reason" is not inert, and is not truth or its discovery, but rather itself a calm passion: *...that reason, which is able to oppose our passion; and which we have found to be nothing but a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflexion* (T583).

Reasonableness, as a virtue, is approved for its utility. But, Árdal says, Hume does not then adopt a subjectivist concept of truth, for he continues to distinguish reason as truth from reasonableness as a virtue. Árdal thinks that this is why Hume praises both the vulgar and the true philosophers in their theories of the external world, and why in Book I he rejects the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, while in Book III describes it as a great discovery. Árdal's paper is persuasive and stimulating, and seems to me to outline a promising approach to understanding Hume's complicated thought on the relations between belief, reason and scepticism.

The two papers that remain to be considered comprise the second section of this book, on Hume's philosophy of religion. Keith Yandell, in "Hume on Religious Belief"

rejects what he says are two common assumptions: that Hume's positive conclusions are contained primarily in the Dialogues, and that to understand that work one must decide who speaks for Hume. He argues convincingly that no one participant is Hume's mouthpiece, but that he expresses himself through the work taken as a whole.

Taking the Dialogues as a whole has often seemed a problem, since Dialogue 12 appears inconsistent with the rest. Not so, says Yandell; Hume distinguishes the question of religion's "foundation in reason" from the question of its "origin in human nature". The Dialogues is concerned mainly with the first topic, and the Natural History with the second; but Dialogue 12 is also about the second, and is consistent with the Natural History. Further, it is not inconsistent with the rest of the Dialogues, since it is not concerned with the same question.

Yandell then suggests that, taking Hume's general philosophical position into account, it is reasonable to think that his positive views are contained not in the Dialogues but in the Natural History, precisely because this work considers religion in relation to human nature. What is that relation? Yandell says that Hume believes that human nature has a propensity, on surveying the order of nature, to belief in an intelligent, invisible author of that order, and that this is a propensity of reason. Being so, it is not so universal, nor so inevitable, as the propensities of the imagination to belief in causes and effects and the external world. Yandell supports this textually, but in so short a paper he cannot tell us how he understands the reason/imagination issue in Hume. Yet this, it seems to me, is crucial. Nevertheless, Yandell has made a good initial case for his interpretation.

In contrast to Yandell, George J. Nathan argues, in "The Existence and Nature of God in Hume's Theism", that Hume did accept a version of the design argument (or, better, cosmological argument). The basis of his case is

an account of Hume's theory of causation and causal explanation. He says that this is by no means exhausted by the "traditional" constant conjunctions plus customary transition theory summed up in the two definitions of "cause". He claims that Hume also recognized "general causes", sometimes called "powers" or "principles", and that he regarded reference to these as essential in causal explanation. Hume had in mind here such principles as gravity, theoretical explanatory mechanisms not known by the senses or causal reasoning, but by *reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation* (EHU 30).

Nathan then argues that the Dialogues rejects any argument in which the regress of causes is a regress of particular objects, related by constant conjunction, but that Hume accepted a version which regards God as the first cause in the sense of ultimate principle or general cause of the order of nature. But, so regarded, we cannot know anything of God's nature, and in particular cannot ascribe any moral qualities to him. Indeed, according to Nathan, Hume's accepted argument leads away from the concept of God as a personal being. The strength of this interpretation depends to an extent upon how Hume's talk of powers and principles is to be understood. Here I think Nathan is less clear than he needs to be. Here are some of the things he says about general causes:

These are not particular objects but rather powers which such objects possess to produce certain effects in certain circumstances in virtue of their essential natures (p.127);

Hume...intends a distinction to be drawn between powers and causes, i.e., between powers and the objects which are the bearers of powers (p.131);

...generative mechanisms are what form the powers of natures of objects (p.133);

General causes are the natures of various objects whereby they enter into regular

relations with one another. They are structural features of objects. (p.140);

and he tells us that Hume counted as general causes: elasticity, gravity, cohesion of parts, communication of motion by impulse, reason, instinct, generation and vegetation.

There is some unclarity here. We are told that general causes are not objects, but are structural features of objects; that they are powers that objects possess in virtue of their natures, and that they are natures. But in general it seems that on Nathan's account of Hume's ontology here, general causes do not subsist in their own right. If so, and if Hume's God is the ultimate such general cause, of what object is he a structural feature or a nature? If he is a power, of what is he a power? On his own interpretation of Hume, such questions must arise for Nathan; but he does not consider them. Instead, his version of Hume seems to envisage a different ontological status for ultimate principles on the one hand, and derivative principles on the other. To my mind, all this is very unHumean.

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