



**Review of D. F. Norton, N. Capaldi and W. L. Robison
eds., *McGill Hume Studies***

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McGill Hume Studies. Edited by D. F. Norton, N. Capaldi

and W. L. Robison. (San Diego: Austin Hill Press. Pp. 358. 1979.)

This is a selection of nineteen papers on Hume from among those presented at a conference held at McGill University in 1976 to commemorate the bicentenary of Hume's death. Most of them are concerned with Book I of the Treatise and the Enquiry concerning Human Understanding. Three are largely concerned with the Dialogues and have been, in general, superseded by the publication of Gaskin's Hume's Philosophy of Religion in 1978. There are no papers focused on Hume's moral philosophy.

Surveying the volume as a whole, three general comments are in order. First, it is a valuable contribution to Humean scholarship. Most of these short essays are very competent and will be of use to students in the future. Secondly, one is forced to recognize what a towering figure Kemp Smith is in the entire history of Hume studies. More authors mention him than do not, whether the references are to his article "The Naturalism of Hume" (1905), his edition of the Dialogues (1935), or his The Philosophy of David Hume (1941). Thirdly, the book is admirably produced. The typography is excellent, the margins are wide and the paper and binding are better than one usually encounters nowadays. This reader noticed only one mis-print (p.45, line 1), apart from an error in the general index.

Rather than offer cursory summaries on each paper, it seems appropriate to select the more outstanding contributions which invite discussion. This criterion excludes Gaskin's "Hume, Atheism, and the 'Interested Obligation' of Morality". He discusses Hume's reply to the contention that there can be no inclination to good moral behaviour save from religious belief in a post mortem system of rewards and punishments. One could, perhaps, cavil with the flac

assertion that Hume held we 'directly feel' the misery or joy of others, for some of his remarks on this point are ambiguous; and also with the use of an inaccurate version of the "Early Memoranda"¹ when the originals are available in Edinburgh. But, written as it is with habitual elegance and lucidity, wit and learning, one can only commend. Norton's thesis in "Hume and His Scottish Critics" is also unlikely to be disputed in the future.

Jane McIntyre's "Is Hume's Self Consistent?" is exceptional in clarity and incisiveness. After a concise account of the self in Book I of the Treatise, she takes up the puzzling passage in the Appendix in which Hume claims inconsistency for two propositions, when, in fact, as Kemp Smith pointed out, the first implies the second². She accepts Kemp Smith's explanation and goes on to show why, for Hume, self-identity presents a more difficult and fundamental problem than the notion of persisting external objects, for unless the first is solved, all beliefs are inexplicable. While one is uneasy about exegeses which say that, in effect, Hume could have resolved his problem if only he had been more intelligent, the version offered here is interesting. The paper would have been even better if it had been less concise.

Beck's paper, "A Prussian Hume and A Scottish Kant", will probably be ranked as the most original and important in this collection. Quoting Walsh's remark that Humean imagination is "simply the Kantian understanding in disguise"³, he suggests that there is not an abyss separating naturalism and transcendentalism in epistemology. In his own words, "The problem of causation has traditionally been seen as the bone of contention between Hume and Kant. I shall argue that, on the contrary, it is precisely here that a surprising degree of accommodation between them is possible. To this end, I shall first recount Kant's stand on the conception of causality both before and after Hume awoke him from his dogmatic slumber. I shall then show

that Kant misunderstood Hume's views in the Treatise but that this misunderstanding was a fruitful one. Finally, I shall try to show that something in fact needed by Hume but not supplied in the Treatise is given by Kant in his attempt to refute the point he erroneously believed to have been argued for by Hume" (p.64). This program is admirably carried out by someone probably uniquely qualified to do so, even if there is a taint of prejudice in the remark that Kant's a priori principles have the "nobler ancestry" (p.75). But the philosophical world being what it is, it is improbable that Beck's arguments will be contested. Three points at least will probably be raised. Beck complains that Hume arbitrarily shifts back and forth between talking about objects and events and talking about impressions when he is only entitled to rigorously phenomenalist language. He then argues that Hume must justify the concept of objective event before he can establish the principle 'same-cause-same-effect', and that he has no right to use such a concept. And is it Humean to claim unqualifiedly that we "know" 'same-cause-same-effect' (p.78)? Further, is Kant, in raising the question of how we distinguish a sequence of impressions of an enduring object from a sequence of impressions indicating that an objective change is occurring, presenting a genuine problem?

Davie's "Berkeley, Hume, and the Central Problem of Scottish Philosophy" is recondite and composed with broad strokes of the brush. As he sees it, the "conflict of principle between these two philosophers [Berkeley and Hutcheson] stimulates a series of major systems in which the problem of the relation of ethics to economics is approached through the fundamentally epistemological issue of the relation between vulgar common sense and philosophical reason" (pp.44-45). He adds yet another to the already comically long list of different explanations, advanced with varying degrees of dogmatism and hesitance, of what constituted the 'new scene of thought' in the famous 'Letter to a Physician'.

In his words, it "arose from his sudden glimpse of the possibility that Mandeville's modern world of individualism, far from being incompatible with Hutcheson's social-minded doctrine, could not fulfill itself in the process of economic growth unless the individuals in question, in addition to their involvement with one another in the process of specialized production for exchange and profit, were also united with one another in a web of mutual sympathy or communication" (p.52). This presentation in general terms is of a Hume concerned with the broadest social and economic features of society in the present and the future.

One thesis in "The Naturalism of Hume Revisited" by Cannon is criticism of 'unhistorical approaches' to Hume. Some writers certainly have taken remarks by Hume out of their context, whether deliberately or not as the case may have been, and used them as pegs for non-Humean philosophizing. Cannon picks out G. E. Moore, A. J. Ayer and Jonathan Bennett and to these one might add the recent book Hume's Moral Epistemology by Jonathan Harrison.⁴ He also evidently finds it trying to be told what Hume should have said to get things right, quoting H. H. Price, and Jane McIntyre provides another example in this volume. But such writings can obviously be valuable if it is made clear that they are not exegetical of Hume's philosophy, though this is not always done.

It is inevitable that a philosopher who was both as broad in his interests and as exploratory as Hume will be seen in different lights. One finds not only a plethora of explanations of the 'new scene of thought', but of Hume's aim in writing the Treatise: Cannon sees him as primarily a psychological theorist explaining probable reasoning. And then a Hume, who seems not to have been philoprogenitive by nature, is viewed as an intellectual progenitor of remarkable fertility - positivism, utilitarianism, emotional relativism in ethics, the philosophy of religion, behavioural psychology (the list is much more extensive than this) -

and Connon's view of him is as an ancestor of phenomenology (p.145).

Only one paper, "Hume and the American Revolution: The Dying Thoughts of a North Briton" by Pocock, is biographical - and I think it is substantially wrong. Hume was the first distinguished man in Britain to advocate independence for the American colonies.⁵ I hope it is fair to Pocock to say that he attributes Hume's advocacy primarily to Anglophobia (p.328). The case for his dislike of the English has been exaggerated.⁶ It rests largely upon his later letters to Scottish friends in which, admittedly, it is not always easy to distinguish persiflage from rancour. But can one possibly take seriously, as Pocock appears to do (p.340), Hume's hopes to see London reduced in population to ...*less than a half, and the Restoration of the King, Nobility, and Gentry of this Realm [Scotland]?*⁷ To which he added, making it doubly clear that he was joking: *To adorn the Scene, I hope also that some hundreds of [English] patriots will make their exit at Tyburn, and improve English Eloquence by their dying Speeches.* Neither Hume's numerous and close friendships with Englishmen, nor his admiration for the British constitution nor his lifelong passion for moderation and impartiality in judgement are compatible with Anglophobia. For the source of his opinion on the American colonies it is more helpful to look at his account of moral judgements in the Treatise and his knowledge of the facts: as he put it when Under-Secretary of State, ...*Messengers... bring me all the Secrets of...America.*⁸

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1. Journal of the History of Ideas, 1948.
2. The Philosophy of David Hume, p.558.
3. "Hume's Concept of Truth", in Reason and Reality (Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures 1970-71), pp.99-116, at end.

4. This I have reviewed elsewhere: Philosophy, October, 1977.
5. As early as 1768. Letters, II, p.184.
6. He is also seen as hating the English in Mossner's Life (p.405) and by Jessop in Hume and the Enlightenment, ed. Todd, p.2.
7. Letters, II, p.210.
8. Letters, II, p.133.