



**Review of Alexander Broadie, *The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy: A New Perspective on the Enlightenment***

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ALEXANDER BROADIE. *The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy: A New Perspective on the Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990. 144 pages. ISBN 0 7486 6051 8; (cloth) and 0 7486 6029 1 (paper).

In this book's introductory chapter, the author states that his intention is to "establish philosophical links between the (Scottish) Pre-Reformation and the Enlightenment periods" and he claims that "I shall demonstrate that the country had acquired a rich philosophical tradition....Philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment did not philosophize in a vacuum...and it is past belief that in the absence of that tradition the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment could have been written."

However, more than two-thirds of the way through the text (on p. 92) we are informed that "there is no doubt that it is possible to trace a line of philosophical influence from Mair's circle to the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment. In this book I do not seek to do that: I shall however argue that there are important philosophical identities between doctrines of the earlier period and of the later. The...historical question...whether the identities are more than merely accidental...I shall leave...to others." At this point one recalls John Passmore's complaint in his review of another Scottish publication in the Spring 1992 *Bulletin of the Hume Society* that its blurb is so misleading as "to encourage legal action in any country which has truth in advertising laws."

But does Broadie succeed in establishing "important identities" between the Pre-Reformation and the Enlightenment thinkers? I fear not. His main point is that Reid's central thesis—that is, his rejection of the "theory of ideas" imputed by him to Locke and Hume—was strikingly anticipated by Mair's insistence that we know an external object "through the notion" of it in the mind, as opposed to first knowing the notion and then taking it to represent the object. Broadie takes this parallel to justify his writing of the "ghostly attendance" of Mair and company in Reid's thinking "reaching out over two and a half centuries."

Actually, however, what Broadie describes as the "characteristic doctrine" of Mair and his associates, as if it had originated with them, was in one way or another a commonplace in medieval philosophy, for there had long been widespread awareness that to take the mind's intelligible species or its concept of a thing to be the object of cognition rather than the thing in question

would be to place an insurmountable barrier between the mind and that which it seeks to know. Thus, Occam had come to maintain that concepts are simply acts of intellection as opposed to mental *ficta* apprehended in intellection because as the latter they would "impede" cognition of objects as third intervening things (see G. Leff, *William Of Ockham* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976], chapter 2) and Aquinas had insisted that the species is not *that* which is known but that *through which* the mind knows (*Summa Theologiae* Ia. 15.2). Compare also Maimonides' discussion in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Part I chapter 58. The few other "similarities" Broadie specifies are even more questionable, for example I think it is extremely misleading to claim that Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas is "almost the same" as the late-scholastic distinction between intuition and abstraction.

In general it must be said that this book's failure to live up to its promise is but an aspect of the more pervasive weakness that it never seems to decide what it wants to do. At the outset it seems bent on the formidable project of discussing specific philosophical issues virtually divorced from historical context as when Broadie argues that propositions such as a whole is greater than its parts possess "awesome...infinite power" because of their "causal efficacy" in compelling even the mind of God to submit to them. At other times, as in describing sixteenth century philosophy, historical detail is offered whilst philosophical argument is excluded.

The sections on Hume (who is introduced without any historical or biographical detail, unlike all other thinkers mentioned) present highly controversial interpretations without discussing alternatives. Thus we are repeatedly told that "for Hume the existential status of our world" is that of "an artifact produced and sustained by our imagination" and again that "an act of will is the kind of internal impression which can immediately cause an action, whereas a passion can cause an action mediately only, by causing an act of will which in turn causes an action of the kind which the passion would cause immediately if it could." Perhaps the unavoidability of such misleadingly one-sided statements could be pleaded in a text only 131 pages long, but then why, after all, could it not have been longer?

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