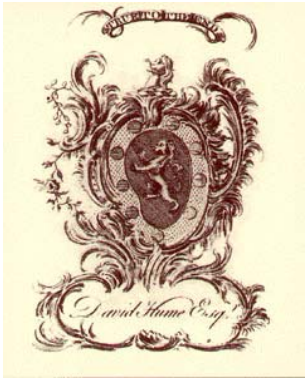

David Hume. ***Essais moraux, politiques et littkraires, PremiPre partie.*** **Translated by Michel Malherbe**
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DAVID HUME. *Essais moraux, politiques et littéraires, Première partie (Essais et Traitès sur plusiers Sujets,* vol. 1). Translated by Michel Malherbe. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1999. Pp. 320. ISBN 2-7116-1349-6, paper, 160 FF.

Michel Malherbe's translation is the first volume of a complete editorial project which intends to present and translate into French the whole 1777 edition of Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*. Such a project does not only fulfill the need of a unified French translation of the last collection of Hume's philosophical works. If the implications of Malherbe's editorial intention go far beyond the French scholars' expectations, it is because it matches Hume's own editorial intention. Everybody knows that from 1753 on, Hume considered that his whole work should only include the following: *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* (two parts), *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, A Dissertation on the Passions, An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, The Natural History of Religion*. Neither the *Treatise*, which Hume formally rejected, nor the *Dialogues*, which were published two years after Hume's death, belong to that collection. Malherbe does not claim faithfulness to the author's intention for its own sake. He simply insists—and successfully proves in his foreword—that Hume's editorial intention corresponds to a philosophical intention deserving a proper philosophical response. The original significance of the works that follow the *Treatise* is not in their contents, but in the new philosophical manner the author adopted to deal with his perpetual object: the elaboration of a science of human nature. Hume's mature works are more positive without being dogmatic, and display a new "art of composition, adjustment and distinction" (8). They constantly aspire to reach perfection in their writing, where argumentative precision is achieved through simplicity and refinement. Malherbe calls this new manner an argumentative art of association. Freer than any systematical approach, it also demands a more active reading.

This art is fully displayed in the first part of the *Essays*. Their editorial history, which Malherbe precisely relates, extensively shows the new concerns of the philosopher-writer. In the introduction which precedes his translation Malherbe shows how Hume has attempted to combine in his *Essays* the stylistic demands of abstract philosophy, and the merits of a potentially convincing public writing. Constantly correcting his *Essays*, gradually elaborating a language meant to instruct and please at once, Hume never chose between "the easy and obvious philosophy" and "the accurate and abstract" one. He always tried to overcome their tension.

Hume's *Essays* obviously belong to a literary genre of which Hume proves to be a master. The manner of the *Essays* is free, so is the relation between the writer and his reader. Every object can be discussed by the writer, provided he remains impartial. As for the reader, he is invited to use his judgment and

come to an agreement in justness and truth. While the *Treatise* resorted to the "art of doctrines," the *Essays* belong to the "art of conversation." Through this social "art of judgment," also an exercise of refined taste, Hume invented a new type of rationality—the practice of "nicety" and "ingenuity" (these terms appear in "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences"). Through the union of taste and reason, the *Essays* establish a science which does not inquire into the secret and unknown causes operating on a few persons only, but neither does it neglect historical or local peculiarities.

Indeed, Hume's *Essays* precisely correspond to a philosophical intention: a "science intention," as the French commentator calls it. Malherbe's main point is to defend the following thesis: despite the formal independence of each essay, despite the various types of discourse they use, and despite Hume's declaration in the preface to the first edition of the *Essays* that "the reader must not look for any Connexion among [them]," *the* Essays *are not miscellaneous writings*. Green and Grose, E. C. Mossner, and M. A. Box all agree that after the first two editions of the *Essays* (1741–42) Hume progressively "purified" the miscellaneous *Essays* to give them a greater philosophical value before finally deciding to incorporate them in his *Essays and Treatises* (first edition, 1753). In contrast, Malherbe asserts that Hume's philosophical intention was already present in 1741, never to change. Malherbe offers two main arguments to support his thesis. First, a precise assessment of Hume's corrections proves that the *Essays* did not suffer any disruption during their successive editions. The modifications are slight, except for the essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm"; but here Hume uses mainly a "cut and paste" device. The cancellations only affect (a) the mannerisms of the art of conversation (e.g. phrases or essays too openly devoted to the feminine readers, artificial allegories or parables); (b) anecdotal or out-of-date reflections on political issues. The additions are insignificant. Thus Hume's modifications reveal a simpler relationship to his reader, as well as an expurgatory work which never impairs the explanations. Thus, while trifling essays or too frivolous remarks are abandoned, the theoretical intention of each essay, and of the whole collection, is preserved. "Hume does not rewrite, he simply curtails" is Malherbe's conclusion (27).

Secondly, Malherbe proves that the essay's form perfectly fits philosophical discursiveness. The *order* of the collection remained constant from 1741 to 1777: "The Origin of Government" was the only essay to be added to the list. Moreover, obvious links and echoes unite the essays. The *causal method* is constantly displayed. Here, a particular fact is accounted for by a general principle, there, a general maxim is empirically checked, elsewhere, the causal genesis of a political reality (such as civil obedience) is shown. Sometimes, a kind of natural history is inquired into, e.g., the history of the relationships between authority and liberty, or the history of the rise and progress of arts and sciences. At other times, a general analytical grid is presented ("Of Parties

in General") and then applied ("Of the Parties of Great Britain"). Taking one essay after the other, Malherbe enhances the coherence of their contents and precisely studies the "art of association" which binds them. In particular, he shows that in the first ten essays, Hume attempts to construct a political science, without neglecting the practical and speculative analysis of a precise national situation. The nature of governments appears to be the "formal cause" of political life (essay 3), whereas opinion is its "real cause" (essay 4), and the relations between authority and liberty make this system more complex (essay 5). In England, liberty has increased so much since the Great Revolution that, formally, the balance of power is favorable to the *Commons* (essay 6). But while the opinion of the right of the Crown has declined, the sense of the general advantage reaped from the mixed government has remained unchanged (essay 7). Furthermore, a constitutional balance is found in the great revenue of the Crown: it enables the Crown to make the members of the *Commons* more dependent (essay 6). If these factors are properly considered, it may be concluded that there is a weaker probability that the British government inclines to a republic rather than to an absolute government (essay 7). But, as Malherbe points out, political science is a practical science as well as a causal one. Thus, as the study of political and religious factions reveals a structural bipolarity of opinion, the moderate philosopher can determine the acceptable divergence between factions, by weighing their respective effects on public life (essays 9 and 10). We have just very roughly summed up one of the Humean philosophical processes of causal composition, which Malherbe identifies and brilliantly highlights through the whole sequence of the first part of the *Essays*.

As was pointed out, Malherbe's latest publication is not only a translation, it also contains a strong philosophical thesis which should prompt us in reading Hume always to consider the final arrangement of his works. Should we choose to go on reading the *Treatise* (and I certainly will), Hume's philosophical (and not only editorial) intention when deciding to gather his works in a definite collection is to be taken into account. Finally, the merits of Malherbe's translation are to be insisted upon: he has managed to achieve in French the terminological precision, the common eighteenth-century elegance, and the fluid art of association which he admires so much.

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