



James Baillie. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Morality*

Michael Brady

Hume Studies Volume XXVII, Number 2 (November, 2001) 342-344.

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JAMES BAILLIE. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Morality*. Routledge: London, 2000. Pp. 226. ISBN 0-415-180484, cloth, \$60. ISBN 0-415-18049-X, paper, \$14.95.

Hume on Morality will appeal, I assume, to two types of readers: (i) those who are interested primarily in *Hume*, and seek to broaden their understanding of his philosophy by discovering what he has to say about morality; and (ii) those who are interested primarily in *morality*, and wish to deepen their knowledge of this by finding out what Hume thought about the subject. I doubt that either type will find James Baillie's book entirely satisfactory, in spite of its undoubted merits; in what follows I'll attempt to ground such doubts, giving an indication of the content of Baillie's text as I progress.

At the beginning of chapter 2, after an introduction including a brief historical background, a basic outline of Hume's methods and aims, and a short account of Hutcheson's moral sense theory, Baillie writes that "Hume is an extremely systematic philosopher, such that no part of his philosophy can be understood apart from the whole. It follows that this book does not only concern 'Hume on morality.' It is about Hume's philosophy, but with an emphasis on his moral theory" (19). Chapters 2, 3, and 4 then serve to present and interpret Hume's views from the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry* on ideas and impressions, causation, physical and mental substance, direct and indirect passions, personal identity, freedom, motivation, reason and the will.

Baillie's treatment of these issues is impressively clear, and his take on Hume is both sympathetic and rigorous, indicating common misconceptions of Hume whilst pointing out where the views need qualification. In all this he serves the introductory reader well. My first worry is, however, that a hundred or more pages seems too long to wait before encountering, in any detail, Hume's thoughts on *moral* matters. Now this would be of concern even if it were made patently clear throughout the first four chapters how these topics bear on Hume's moral philosophy; as it turns out, the wait seems much longer, given that the relevance of these issues to Hume's moral views is seldom made clear at all. Introductory readers, whether familiar or unfamiliar with Hume's thoughts on mental substance *et al.*, are too often left to wonder what exactly these subjects have to do with *morality*.

To illustrate, Baillie spends pages 24–31 discussing Hume's views on causation, and pages 73–85 discussing causation in light of Hume's ideas on freedom and religion; but the relation of causation to morality is mentioned only in passing on 83, where we're told that for Hume, "causal necessity, correctly

understood, is a prerequisite for moral accountability." And *that's it* as far as causation and moral philosophy goes. Those interested in Hume's views on morality might very well wonder whether this is sufficient payoff for the detailed discussion of other themes. More generally, they might wonder whether three chapters out of seven marks sufficient emphasis on Hume's moral theory.

Turning, now, to these three chapters, "Against Moral Rationalism," "The Virtues," and "The Moral Stance." Here Baillie discusses, again with admirable clarity, Hume's moral philosophy as elaborated in the *Treatise*, second *Enquiry*, and the essay "Of the Standard of Taste," covering topics such as moral rationalism, the gap between "is" and "ought," moral sentiments, justice, sympathy, and the standards of taste and morals; and once more those approaching Hume's texts for the first time will find Baillie's text a valuable aid. One of his major concerns here is, moreover, to argue that Hume is much less skeptical than traditionally interpreted, and in fact regarded himself as putting morality on a solid foundation; and he does a fine job in supporting this line by carefully distinguishing Hume's position from varieties of subjectivism and expressivism. Equally impressive are the detailed accounts of Hume's attacks on egoism, and of his treatment of the nature and origin of justice.

Fine though these discussions are, my second worry is that these chapters will strike those approaching the text from the standpoint of contemporary moral philosophy as too heavily exegetical, such that the reader interested primarily in modern moral theory might fail to appreciate fully Hume's significance. This is especially apparent in Baillie's chapter "Against Moral Rationalism." There, after brief introductory remarks, Baillie spends fifteen pages presenting Hume's criticisms of Samuel Clarke and William Wollaston, and the following fourteen pages looking at Hume's criticisms of rationalism in general. But as far as I can tell, contemporary moral rationalists would themselves be pretty hostile to Clarke and Wollaston, and it's far from clear that they need be committed to tenets then discussed as characteristic of rationalism in general. (Must rationalists hold that moral facts are "objectively 'out there' in the sense of being independent of all possible human perceptual capacities," as Baillie suggests [135]? It's not obvious to me that this is the defining feature of rationalism.) Moreover, material that does appeal to contemporary rationalists, such as possible analogies between moral properties and color properties, merits barely two pages in Baillie's discussion. The point isn't, of course, that Hume's views on rationalism lack significance to modern moral philosophy; it is, rather, that Baillie's chapter fails to show why contemporary moral rationalists should be bothered by what Hume says.

This is unfortunate, given that later sections of the text feature precisely the kind of discussion relating Hume to contemporary views that would have

been welcome throughout. For instance, in the final chapter Baillie presents Hume's views as having considerable affinities to the kind of Ideal Observer theories currently much in vogue; and his final section on the standard of morals includes an argument that Hume's views provide a better account of the cause and resolution of moral disagreements than both rationalism and naive subjectivism. (I'm not, in the end, entirely convinced by this argument: Baillie thinks that Hume can explain moral disagreement in terms of agents falling short of being ideal observers, which might be in tension with the view that coming to adopt the "moral stance," and thus coming to make genuine moral judgements, "involves a complex interaction of empathic, imaginative and rational skills, each of which could fail to operate satisfactorily" [213]. But doesn't this suggest that a good deal of idealization is a prerequisite for making genuinely moral judgements, thus narrowing the scope for genuinely moral disagreement?)

Despite its obvious virtues, readers might therefore find *Hume on Morality* a slightly frustrating read. Those seeking to understand what Hume says about morality will welcome the fine expository work in the last three chapters of Baillie's book, but wish that there were rather more of it. Those approaching this text with a view to seeing how Hume fits into contemporary moral thinking will, conversely, wish there were less.

MICHAEL BRADY

Department of Philosophy

University of Stirling

Stirling FK9 4LA, United Kingdom

e-mail: m.s.brady@stir.ac.uk