



D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin, eds. *Religion and Hume's Legacy*

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D. Z. PHILLIPS AND TIMOTHY TESSIN, eds. *Religion and Hume's Legacy*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., and New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 1999. Pp. xx + 282. ISBN 0-333-74850-0 (Macmillan) and 0-312-22526-1 (St. Martin's), cloth, \$69.95.

Collections of essays and conference papers are always liable to two defects. One is that the essays are not all of the same quality. The other is that the collection is *ad hoc* with no structural unity or organized purpose. The present collection—arising from the 1997 Claremont conference on the philosophy of religion—almost unavoidably exemplifies the first defect. I myself would pick out the contributions of Simon Blackburn, D. Z. Phillips R. W. Beardsmore (alas there can be no more from him), Jane McIntyre, Antony Flew, and Peter Jones as the most interesting. Many of the others are well worth the attention of Hume scholars, but two or three are turgid, over-annotated examples of argument by authority of the sort “Wittgenstein tells us . . .” compounded with emotive appeals to what is alleged (not argued) to be Hume's insufferable moral narrowness. But as I say, the uneven quality of contributions is a standard hazard of conference collections. The second hazard—lack of structure—is much less in evidence. There is a real coherence of subject and purpose in the eighteen sections that make up this book, and an effort has been made to relate the articles to each other. An odd omission is, however, the absence of any standard system of reference to agreed editions of Hume's works. It happens, for example, that most contributors refer to the Selby-Bigge edition of the *Enquiries*, but this is an accident of common usage not a virtue of editorial policy. There is a general index.

The volume is divided into six parts: (I) Hume's Epistemological and Moral Critique (S. Blackburn, W. H. Brenner); (II) Hume's “True Religion” (M. J. Ferreira, V. A. Harvey, D. Z. Phillips); (III) Hume on Miracles (R. W. Beardsmore, S. T. Davis); (IV) Hume on Superstition (M. Bell, J. L. McIntyre); (V) Philosophy of Religion after Hume (A. Flew, N. Murphy, B. R. Tilghman); and (VI) Hume in Historical Context, which contains a single elegant and informative contribution by P. Jones. In each part except the last, the papers are followed by several pages of “Voices in Discussion” where the reader is offered some account of the ensuing conference discussion. The discussions are tidied up to avoid repetition (and, one presumes, sloppy syntax and conversational punctuation) by Phillips, who somewhat confusingly remarks in his introduction, “I have to emphasise that the reactions to what they [speakers in the discussion] had to say are mine,” thus leaving the reader to puzzle

rather uncomfortably about the invisible boundaries between editorial reactions and what was actually said.

Rather than attempt an inadequately brief discussion of all thirteen essays, let me make a general comment and then look at just two of the contributions in the light of it.

The general comment concerns the tendency of too many essayists on Hume to focus all their critical skills on one or two paragraphs or small sections of the original, and then follow out their idiosyncratic and ingenious interpretative agenda without reference to the wider picture of Hume's philosophy, or even to other texts in which the item under discussion appears. As a consequence, a key term may become distorted by excessive attention to one occurrence, qualifications lost, or a crucial distinction so muddled that it has to be reinvented in other words. The term "true religion"—so much used in part II of this collection—is a serious candidate for distortion and muddle. To understand Hume's use of the term one must refer not only to the *Dialogues* and *Natural History* (as almost everyone does) but also to the second *Enquiry*, the *History of England*, letters and biographical anecdotes (as few do). However in the present volume, I am most bothered by a certain tendency to overlay the invented term "natural belief" with words (and ideas) drawn from Hume's own terms "original instinct" and "primary impression of nature."

The invented term has a clear development through the writings of Kemp Smith, R. J. Butler, Gaskin, Penelhum, and others. It was devised in relation to the few crucial points in Hume's epistemology and general philosophy where he refuses to discard a universal and natural assumption even when skeptical philosophy shows that the assumption cannot be proved true: the refusal stemming from the necessity of the assumption in the sense that if we do not make it, neither human beings nor other conscious living things could function in the world. Examples of such "natural beliefs" are that the world has a continuous existence independent of our perception of it, that past regularities are a reliable guide to future ones, and that we ourselves have a continuous identity over time. But Hume's own term "original instinct" (variously, and in some contexts with different nuance, "immediate propensity" or "primary impression of nature") clearly has a different meaning. Examples of original instincts are hunger, thirst, self-preservation, attachment to offspring, and sexual attraction. They are physical features, which as a matter of contingent fact, almost all human beings and many animals have. They are almost universal because of our species, the type of creatures we are, not because they are philosophically vulnerable beliefs in the absence of which we could not function or make sense of the world.

Now Hume's commentators have argued whether or not the criteria for natural beliefs allow some sort of religious belief to be a natural belief. The predominant view (with various qualifications) is that religious belief does not satisfy the criteria of universality or, in the sense explained above, of necessity. This is important because if it did satisfy the criteria, this would mean that some sort of religious belief (perhaps no more than a vague belief that natural *order* needs an intelligence, a "god" as its source) would be part of the way we have to understand the world in order to function properly in it. In short there would be an advantageous epistemological consequence for religious belief. It has also been argued—less often, but more interestingly in the present volume—that religion may be an original instinct. That would mean that we are (mostly) so constructed that we need religious belief. But the need would be "psychological" and would not have the structural necessity for knowing anything which typifies the natural belief.

I now turn to two of the articles that employ these terms, first M. J. Ferreira's. On 49 she gives an accurate summary of the main accounts of natural belief preceded and immediately followed by a new terminology "paradigmatic instinctive beliefs." My first complaint is why proliferate such terminology when it appears, on Ferreira's own showing, that such beliefs are "unavoidably, irresistibly, universally" held, i.e., they are natural beliefs. In particular why go in for this wordy renaming by means of "instinctive" that invites confusion with Hume's differently intended "original instinct"? Secondly, Ferreira's argument focuses exclusively upon the *Natural History*. Fair enough if the subject under discussion is covered by Hume only in that work. But it is not. As was pointed out by Penelhum in 1983 in the article to which Ferreira makes inadequate reference on 49, Hume's statement that "the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author," is lip-service to an alleged fact: "That this is only lip-service we can see from what [Hume] says about the quality of this foundation when he examines it in the *Dialogues*." But in her argument Ferreira does not look at the *Dialogues* at all despite making this "lip-service" a keystone of her thesis. Another example of incipient terminological confusion is evident in V. A. Harvey's otherwise interesting article, "Philo's 'True Religion.'" He observes (75), "Philo's religious beliefs cannot be considered as falling into the same class as natural beliefs. The latter are universal while the former are not. The propensities that generate religious beliefs are secondary and not primary as natural propensities are." All three sentences in isolation are correct. What make me uncomfortable is the assumption that in saying something about natural beliefs one is saying something that can be transferred to natural propensities. We really do need

a *Hume Dictionary* of the sort so well done by Blackwell for Hobbes, Descartes, and others!

Despite my criticisms, this book as a whole is a valuable addition to Hume studies and a must for even the most parsimonious library or scholar concerned with Hume on religion.

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