



**Rupert Read and Kenneth A. Richman, eds. *The New Hume Debate***

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RUPERT READ and KENNETH A. RICHMAN, eds. *The New Hume Debate*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Pp. viii + 210. ISBN 0415238846, cloth, £50.00.

The “New Hume” referred to in the title of this collection of essays is the Hume who is supposed to be a causal realist in Galen Strawson’s and John Wright’s senses of that term. There are, of course, other “New Humes.” (Kenneth Winkler was quick to point this out when he first used the term to refer to causal realist interpretations of Hume.) There is the “New Hume” who is not an inductive sceptic, the “New Hume” who is a moral realist, and the “New Hume” who is a causal realist of a very different kind, to name but a few. Perhaps the book should have been called *A New Hume Debate* to acknowledge the many interesting and new interpretations of Hume that have very little to do with Strawson’s and Wright’s forms of causal realism and may even be incompatible with them.

Although the title promises a debate, if a debate suggests arguments, objections, and rebuttals, this book does not quite deliver on its promise. There is such an exchange in four of the eleven essays in the book. (Strawson and Wright respond to Blackburn and Winkler, whose essays were previously published and already well known.) Richman acknowledges this in his introduction. He describes the contents of the book as “a back and forth exchange through the papers” just mentioned (11). He then describes the remaining papers in a way that sounds innocent and reasonable, but Richman fails to point out that all the remaining papers are critical of the “New Hume” and that neither Strawson nor Wright respond to these criticisms. We are left to speculate about the reason for this, and to wonder whether the “debate” is balanced and fair to all participants. At any rate, the lack of rebuttals should remind us that the debate remains open.

One way to assess a collection of this sort is to consider the selection of essays and authors. Galen Strawson and John Wright were obvious choices. Each has written a new essay for the book addressing previously published objections to their views. As noted above, neither addresses new criticisms and objections raised by the other authors. Janet Broughton would have been another obvious choice. Although Richman mentions her paper as making an important contribution to his “New Hume” debate, the collection contains nothing by Broughton. The editors decided to use Barry Stroud’s “‘Gilding or Staining’ the World . . .” as the sole example of an alternative interpretation of Hume’s view on causal connections. This choice was somewhat unfortunate. While “ ‘Gilding or Staining’ . . . ” is a well-known and

highly regarded essay, Stroud is not sympathetic to Hume's views. The collection could have included Annette Baier's "Real Humean Causes," which argues that there is much to be said for Humean causation. Baier also illustrates Blackburn's point that one can be a causal realist without being a causal Realist. Kenneth Winkler's "The New Hume" and Simon Blackburn's "Hume and Thick Connexions" were also obvious choices. Both Winkler and Blackburn have added new postscripts; Winkler's brings in additional textual evidence that challenges Wright's interpretation, while Blackburn's helpfully lays out contemporary varieties of realism and antirealism and explains their relevance to this "New Hume" debate.

The collection contains new essays by Edward Craig, Martin Bell, Daniel Flage, Anne Jaap Jacobson, and Rupert Read. In his criticism of Strawson, Bell carefully lays out the problem of reconciling inductive scepticism, and the connected claim that the evidence of sense and memory are our only reasons for empirical beliefs, with the kind of causal realism that Strawson attributes to Hume. The arguments are interesting but not conclusive, and one is left wondering how Strawson would respond. Bell's objection to Wright's causal realism is very powerful. Bell begins with the fact that "Hume argues that since causes and effects are distinct, the non-existence of the one object can never be contrary to the existence of the distinct object." Bell concludes that because there cannot be a conceptual connection between distinct objects, "there cannot be a conceptual connection of the kind Malebranche [and Wright] imagines using as a criterion for the discovery of true causes" (132). This point is worth developing. Conceptual connections exist only between things that are the same (for example, bachelors and unmarried men) or that overlap or are partly the same (for example, elephants and animals). Distinct objects cannot be conceptually connected because conceptual connection entails sameness or partial identity, while distinctness entails complete non-identity. Since nothing can be both partially identical and completely distinct, Malebranche's idea is incoherent. Bell further concludes that Malebranche "has no idea of what he means by 'perceiving a necessary connection'" (132). This conclusion is weaker than is warranted. If Bell is right, then these connections cannot be perceived for the same reason that rectangular circles cannot be perceived. Denying their existence is not dogmatism: it's logic.

Flage's essay examines the role that relative ideas play in Strawson's argument for causal realism. Flage uses Berkeley's critique of Locke's idea of substance to illuminate the difference between relative ideas that have content and relative ideas that have only the illusion of content. The basic idea, although Flage does not put it this way and may even object to this way of

putting it, is that one can form a real relative idea of an  $n$ -place relation if one can form an idea of  $n-1$  of the relata and an idea of the relation. Flage points out that Berkeley did not criticize Locke's relative idea of substance on the grounds that Locke had no idea of the unknown something in which known properties were supposed to inhere. That was perfectly all right, as long as Locke had an idea of the relation between the unknown thing and the known properties. Berkeley argued that the ordinary ideas of the relations of inhesion and support did not literally apply in the case of substance, and no others were forthcoming. Much of Flage's essay focuses on his view that relative ideas are definite descriptions, but not much turns on that. The point against Strawson is that being able to form a definite description like "the feature of the world in virtue of which the world is regular" or a singular term like "that on which the regular . . . succession of objects *totally depends*" (42) is no evidence that one has an idea with *any* kind of content, much less that the idea has a referent. If we have no idea of one of the relata, as Strawson says, and we have no applicable idea of the 2-place relations of being in virtue of, or totally depending on, then we don't have an idea with content of any kind. Compare the relative idea of the unknown (to me) father of Flage, which does have content and reference, with the putative relative idea of the unknown  $x$  that stands in the unknown 2-place relation to Flage which is merely a schema for an idea, with no possible referent. If Strawson's relative idea is that of a secret something with a secret connection to natural regularities, then it is merely a schema for an idea, with no possible referent.

Jacobson is the only woman included in this collection. The editors could have done better, and doing so would have enhanced the book's balance in more ways than one. Jacobson's use of the vocabulary of hermeneutics is somewhat distracting; her points could be made without it. The only interpretive principles she needs are that context can sometimes help us disambiguate ambiguous terms, and context can sometimes indicate whether a use of a term is referential. Jacobson argues that Hume discusses three distinct concepts of causal connections: the vulgar's, the philosopher's, and the cautious investigator's. The philosopher's concept of necessary connections has two elements: constant conjunction and a notion of "quasi-semantic relations," like Malebranche's conceptual connections, which tie the world together. Jacobson takes Strawson to be claiming that Hume sometimes used the term "necessary connection" to mean the philosopher's concept and that Hume was using it as a referring term. Jacobson argues that when we use context to disambiguate and to determine whether the term is being used to refer, none of the quotations that Strawson uses to back up his position do so. Thus, when Hume uses "necessary connection" to mean the philosopher's concept

he is not using it to refer, and she takes this to be a criticism of Strawson. However, Strawson never explicitly commits himself to the existence of “quasi-semantic” connections and would, I suspect, reject them, so it is not clear that Jacobson’s criticisms reach their intended target. They do apply to Wright, however.

This collection is heavily biased against the “New Humeans.” Despite this flaw of the collection as a whole, some of the essays advance the debate and are well worth reading.

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