
**Review of PAUL STANISTREET. *Hume's Scepticism and the Science of Human Nature.***
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PAUL STANISTREET. *Hume's Scepticism and the Science of Human Nature*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002. Pp. xi + 226. ISBN 0-7546-0484-5, cloth, $69.95.

Paul Stanistreet's *Hume's Scepticism and the Science of Human Nature* seeks to address its subject matter at a level somewhere between that of an introductory text and an original, scholarly contribution to Hume scholarship. Stanistreet states that the book is written "with the general reader or beginning student of Hume in mind" (ix). At the same time, he says

> I have not attempted to avoid or ignore the key issues at stake in modern scholarship. I engage critically with much that I think mistaken in contemporary thinking about Hume, offering, along the way, my own contributions to the debate. (ix)

These self-descriptions, as it turns out, are accurate. Stanistreet's book is clearly enough written for a good beginning student to follow along and it does outline and make a case for a broadly sensible reading of Hume's thought—for the most part, as it appears in Book 1 of the *Treatise*. It is, in a number of respects, a well-executed work. I have three general misgivings about this book. First, the pace of the book is slower than it ideally should be given its intentions and its intended audience. A number of Stanistreet's discussions could and, I think, should have been streamlined and more clearly focused. Too often his discussions proceed slowly, bogging down in repetitiveness and, on many occasions, providing more in the way of tangential material than context requires. Second, while the views Stanistreet contends for are, by and large, sensible ones that are well supported, they do not collectively constitute an overall view of Hume that is, in any important way, new. This is not, given the book's admittedly modest intentions, as serious a matter. Finally, I find it disappointing that nowhere in the book does Stanistreet directly discuss Hume's concept of a *skeptical solution*. Given the subjects he takes up and the audience he seeks to reach, a discussion of this very basic and centrally relevant subject would appear to be a requirement. It is puzzling and disappointing that there is none.

Stanistreet's main contentions have to do with Hume's sceptical arguments in Book 1 of the *Treatise*. Throughout the book he combats both the notion that Hume is essentially a skeptical philosopher and, I think more

important, the contention that his skeptical arguments undermine his positive philosophical program. There is nothing new in this, and Stanistreet is straightforward in admitting it and assigning to his work a modest, though certainly not unimportant task:

> A growing number of specialists now see Hume not as an unmitigatedly destructive sceptic, but as a constructive thinker, with a positive philosophical agenda, which deserves critical attention. Yet most of the literature which has contributed, and which continues to contribute, to this dramatic reversal in Hume's philosophical fortunes remains unknown or, at best, obscure, to all but a small circle of scholars. No book I am aware of has adequately surveyed these developments for the general reader. . . . It is hoped that this work will go some way towards bridging this gap. (x)

Stanistreet's Hume is no skeptic eager to show that classical empiricist assumptions undermine themselves, but rather, the founder of a science of human nature that is inspired by Newton's methods. What then of Hume's sceptical arguments? Stanistreet explains his plan to deal with them:

> The difficulty of reconciling Hume's endorsement of sceptical arguments with his positive Newtonian project of founding a science of human nature is the central interpretive puzzle of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. . . . In my view, Hume's scepticism is to be seen not as an unmitigatedly destructive force, but as an important part of the preparatory investigation upon which Hume intends to found what he calls "a compleat system of the sciences" (T.xvi). . . . Hume's adaptation of this extreme form of scepticism is part of a complicated, systematic dialectic, which, he brings to a head in the closing sections of Book I with his remarkable account of the development of true philosophical consciousness. (4)

The plan of Stanistreet's book is straightforward and sensible. The Introduction and the first three of its six chapters—"Science and the Study of Human Nature," "Ideas and Association," and "Causality, Reason and Causal Inference"—seek to explain, both in overview and in important detail, Hume's positive program in Book 1 of the *Treatise*. The concluding three chapters—"Hume and the New Hume," "Hume's Scepticism Regarding the Senses," and "Hume's True Philosophy and Reid's Common Sense"—and a final section called "Conclusion" try to show the way toward a reading of Hume in which

his sceptical arguments illuminate, rather than undermine, his attempt to found a science of human nature.

Overall, Stanistreet makes a very strong case for the conclusion that Hume's skeptical conclusions are not his *ultimate* conclusions. He is sensitive to Hume's attempts to show the proper place of these skeptical thoughts within the context of his overall philosophical plan. He is alert to Hume's indications of what their role might be and strives earnestly to clarify it. Stanistreet attempts to read Hume's scepticism regarding the senses in a manner that coheres with his overall interpretation of Hume and, in this, he is, I think, largely successful. He endeavors to place that component of Hume's discussion of causality that has historically given rise to discussions of what has come to be known as the problem of induction into its proper context. He argues persuasively that Hume's discussion is neither essentially skeptical nor does it seek to undermine causal reasoning. In all this, I think, Stanistreet shows patience and an appropriate measure of sympathy for Hume's efforts. Stanistreet's sympathy is sufficiently robust that he pretty clearly admires and is disposed to defend the views he ultimately attributes to Hume. At times, he seems too uncritical. In some, I think, he does not take seriously enough the view, espoused by many commentators, that Hume's attempt to achieve a balance between his overall philosophical program and his sceptical thoughts ends in contradiction.

I want to focus on some of the important discussions in this book. In chapter 1 there is a lengthy discussion of Hume's various claims that, in his philosophy of human nature, he seeks to find the *hidden* or *secret* principles of the human mind. Hume sometimes uses the word "cause" in such contexts, and that use is, of course, problematic. Hume's well-known analysis of causality in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* would appear to preclude the possibility of finding causes that are, by their nature, hidden. How can Hume, the great empiricist, hope to discover the *secret causes* governing the human mind if they are of such a nature so as to be hidden and, so, not experienced? The problem here is real, worth noting and exploring. In the end, the resolution Stanistreet suggests—one that attributes a form of analogical reasoning to Hume—while not conclusive, is clever, plausible and defensible. His defense of it, however, and the discussion that precedes it is, I think, overlong. Stanistreet spends more time than is necessary explicating the problem in a number of ramified forms and discussing proposed solutions that are plainly nonstarters. The problem is immediately apparent, upon his first explanation of it and, as such, much of this material is superfluous. His discussion of the problem deals, in part, with Newton's writings on the nature of hypotheses and Hume's comments upon those. These writings certainly are relevant

to the question at hand, but Stanistreet, I think, places more weight upon them than they ought to bear, given the very different contexts in which they appear. Stanistreet defends his own view well enough using more clearly relevant passages from Hume. The overall result is that what could have been a clear, well-paced, discussion of an important problem, bogs down in repetitiousness and in details of borderline relevance before reaching its commendable and noteworthy conclusion.

Stanistreet attempts, in chapter 3, to clarify those passages in Hume's discussions of causality that have led so many others to puzzle over "the problem of induction." This discussion, while less clear and less compelling, makes important points and good distinctions. The problem of interpretation is clear enough. Hume is intent, in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, to establish that there is no convincing rationalist style demonstration that supports the conclusions of causal "reasoning." Hume thinks that such a demonstration would require an unobtainable demonstration of the uniformity of nature. Yet, in many other contexts, he strongly advocates the use of causal reasoning, taking pains to detail principles regarding its proper use. Stanistreet places more emphasis on the latter than the former. He claims boldly that Hume was not particularly interested in what has come to be known as the "problem of induction," and that he saw no need to solve it in order to justify the use of causal reasoning. Stanistreet takes into account, but does not accept, Stroud's reading of Hume's view of causal reasoning as non-deductivist. His rough characterization of Stroud's strategy seems correct:

> Stroud argues that Hume need not have in mind an exclusively deductive model of inference. Hume exploits another aspect of the "traditional conception of reason" which allows him to form a truly sceptical conclusion without making the unwarranted assumption that all reasons must be "deductively sufficient." (92)

Stanistreet's rejection of this view neglects Barry Stroud's overarching analysis of Hume's conception of a skeptical solution. Stanistreet's failure to discuss this important Humean notion, here and elsewhere, detracts from the completeness of his interpretive project. The rest of Stanistreet's discussion of causal reasoning proceeds on the assumption that an analysis of Locke's distinction between demonstration and probability will shed light on Hume's position on causal reasoning. He examines Locke's position toward that end. I do not find this procedure or Stanistreet's defense of it compelling. Hume was much clearer on the subject of causality (and many related subjects) than Locke precisely because the questions he poses and the distinctions he makes

are more penetrating. A subsequent discussion of Hume's account of the idea of necessary connection in chapter 4 is, I think, so sympathetic to Hume and to the insights he offers along the way that it fails to appreciate fully the difficulties of Hume's final positive account.

In a similar vein, Stanistreet is, I think, unsuccessful, in those parts of the book's final chapter in which he discusses Hume's arguments for skepticism with regard to reason. Here, I think, he is much too sympathetic to Hume's intentions, relies too heavily on Hume's own words in trying to explicate them, and ignores entirely the flaws in Hume's argument for skepticism with regard to reason. More important, I do not believe that he sufficiently confronts the possibility that the conclusions of that argument, if correct, really would undermine all Hume has done. Here, at least, Hume really does appear to have "proved" too much. I see no way of avoiding this conditional: if none of the dictates of reason can be relied upon, then neither can any purported "skeptical solution" to that problem. Stanistreet earnestly attempts to explicate a Humean solution to this problem, but, in the end, I do not see that the proposed solution works.

I do not want to end this review of a book that deserves a measure of praise with a series of negative comments. As such, I will conclude by recommending Stanistreet's discussions of Hume's skepticism with regard to the senses and his discussions comparing the views of Reid and Hume. Here, Stanistreet comes closest to applying his overall view successfully to specific subjects and supporting his case clearly with relevant details. The account of Reid is helpful and lucid. Finally, I would be remiss were I not to commend Stanistreet's brief biographical sketch of Hume. It is excellent, presenting a well-written, vivid, sympathetic, and even moving portrait of the philosopher and the man.

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