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JERRY A. FODOR. *Hume Variations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003. Pp. 176. ISBN 0-19-926405-8, cloth, £16.99/$22.00.

It is not uncommon for philosophers to seek the imprimatur of a great predecessor by attempting to show that the truths they proclaim have been perceived by the latter, even if only through a glass darkly. In this slim but rich volume, it is Jerry Fodor's turn to claim Hume as a philosophical ancestor, both for cognitive science, in general, and for the theory of the mind he has championed for some time, in particular. He writes: "Hume's *Treatise* is the foundational document of cognitive science: it made explicit, for the first time, the project of constructing an empirical psychology on the basis of a representational theory of the mind" (135).

Others have endorsed the first of these claims without thinking that doing so is equivalent to signing on to the second. Thus, the chief interest of the present work, at least for readers of Hume, lies in Fodor's argument for the thesis that in Hume's hands the theory of ideas becomes, in essential respects, an early version of the representative theory of the mind (RTM). This means that we should see Hume, somewhat surprisingly, as being on the right side on the central question that divides theorists of the mind in our day into (a few) "Cartesian naturalists" and (many) "Wittgensteinian pragmatists." That question (actually, two closely related ones) is, what is a concept and what is it to possess one? The Cartesian naturalist answer is that a concept is a mental object that represents the thing of which it is a concept, and possessing one is being able to think about the thing it represents. The pragmatist answer is that a concept is a "construction out of dispositions to classify things and draw inferences," and having one is to be able to sort and to infer in the appropriate ways.

For Fodor, the pragmatist has it wrong in at least two crucial ways. First, he is unable to give a coherent account of the causal role that a theory of the mind must ascribe to the concepts a thinker possesses. Second, he puts the cart before the horse: the epistemic abilities which he says constitute concept-possession presuppose what they are supposed to explain. Where does Hume come into this? According to Fodor, he "is entirely committed" to the Cartesian picture, as is RTM. Fodor has long urged that RTM is "the only game in town," if the game is developing "an empirically adequate theory of the mind." Here he sets out to show that "it is possible to regard [Hume's psychology] as an early attempt to construct a naturalistic theory of the mind within the assumptions of Cartesian Representationalism" (27). As Hume makes clear in the Introduction to the *Treatise*, developing a scientific account of the mind is his chief aim in that work. It is, then, just as well that he saw, with remarkable clarity, that only on the basis of the theory of ideas inherited from Descartes could he do so.

Complaints (by, for example, Stroud) that Hume was not enough of a pragmatist, besides being ironic, presuppose that pragmatism is right. Fodor finds a "remarkable and doomed consensus" to this effect in recent analytic philosophy, and much of *Hume Variations* is devoted to arguments against the pragmatist picture. Many of these will be familiar to habitual readers of Fodor; whether one finds them compelling or not, one has to admire their inventiveness, incisiveness and elegance. As always, Fodor is great fun to read. Students of Hume will be interested in the evidence he offers to make his enlisting Hume on the side of the angels plausible, and in what we can learn about Hume by reading him in this way, and what may be lost if we do so.

First, a brief (and partial) list of other things Hume got right, according to Fodor, and one of some of the things he got wrong. He was right to be a realist about mental processes and operations; to be a conceptual atomist (the alternative being "a ruinous holism"); about there being an experiential given, something pre-conceptual but contentful (that is, semantically evaluable) and thus able to warrant beliefs; about complex ideas being complex representations with simple ones as their constituents (something required for explaining the systematicity, producivity and compositionality of thought); and, in general, about the "architecture" of an adequate theory of the mind.

Unfortunately, he was wrong about some not unimportant things. First, he was wrong in adopting the empiricist epistemology he did and in letting that epistemology run interference on his psychology (indeed, even in thinking, as many do, that epistemology has anything much to do with psychology). He was, in particular, wrong in advancing the copy principle as both the only explanation of how ideas acquire their content and a condition of legitimacy for ideas. And he was wrong about the nature of mental processes and operations, in particular, about the roles of association and of the imagination.

Fodor describes his own project as "abstract[ing] from the aspects of Hume's theory of mind that are dictated primarily by his epistemology" (33). He thinks that the copy principle can be shown to be false by noticing that complex impressions and their corresponding complex ideas have different structural properties, from which it follows that not all the semantic properties of the latter are traceable to the former. So be it: if one's (otherwise adequate) theory requires the positing of innate ideas, one should not let an empiricist prejudice get in the way of doing so. As for Hume's appeals to the principles of association and to the workings of the imagination to explain the formation of complex concepts and the making of inferences, these come uncomfortably close to being of the *virtus dormitiva* sort.

These are radical claims, but Fodor has subtle and intriguing arguments to back them up. Here I can comment only on a few of these, and that too briefly. Fodor applauds Hume for holding that there is "something in perception that is both semantically and experientially given" and is "prior to conceptualizations

in the order of perceptual procession." That given is an impression, and Hume is also right, Fodor thinks, about its being iconic, that is, image-like. What he is wrong about is thinking that all conceptual content derives from such things. In Humean terms, he is wrong that ideas receive all their content from prior impressions. Concepts are not iconic but discursive: they have constituents and a unique decomposition into these, whereas images have only parts. Thus concepts have a kind of structure that impressions, even complex ones, lack, which means that they cannot inherit their structure from the latter. That, in turn, means that part of (what determines) their content is not traceable to impressions in the way the copy principle requires. "What Hume would like but can't have is the image theory of impressions *together with the copy theory of concept formation*. . . . As usual, it is Hume's empiricism . . . that gets him into trouble" (55).

All this depends on the identification of Humean ideas with Fodorean concepts. That identification is made explicit early in the book (28) and is used to license using the terms 'idea' and 'concept' interchangeably throughout. There are reasons to worry about Fodor's argument; here is just one. If complex ideas' having canonical decompositions means something like *the complex idea of gold is analyzable into the simple ideas of yellow, malleable, and so on*, why think that the complex impression of gold is not similarly analyzable into the simple impressions of yellow, malleable and so on? In fact Fodor concedes this (34) but seems to think that because impressions, being iconic, can be also divided into arbitrary parts each of which has content (in fact, the same content as the original impression), whereas ideas (that is, concepts) cannot, impressions and ideas have different kinds of structure. But note that the parts into which a complex impression can be arbitrarily divided are themselves *complex* impressions. That does not stop each one of them from having *simple* impressions as constituents just in the way that complex ideas have simple ideas as constituents.

What, though, of complex ideas without prior and corresponding complex impressions? An idea of a unicorn cannot be a copy of an impression of a unicorn! Here is where Hume has recourse to the principles of association he is so proud of and to the workings of the imagination. The trouble with the former, Fodor thinks, is that they can give us only a story (presumably causal) about transitions from one idea to another, they cannot explain the formation of complex ideas. "They cannot distinguish a mind that thinks that *P and Q* from (e.g.) a mind that thinks that *P* and is thereby caused to think that *Q*." (114) He also thinks that Hume was well aware of the problem and that "having understood that associationism gets the scope relations wrong . . . Hume promptly calls on the imagination" as a supplement to, or a replacement for, it (115). The trouble is that he does not tell us *how* the imagination does what he has it do, so, once again, we have only the appearance of explanation. What Hume should have done, instead, is to invoke memory traces on which computational processes can operate, so as to allow the

mind "access to a memory," that is, to information about the history of its experiences. Only in that way can we explain how it performs the inductions it does on the basis of that history. Constant conjunctions are not enough, in other words; only remembered constant conjunctions can do the job.

Two concerns here. First, Hume is criticized for not telling us enough about how the imagination does what it does. But how about: "Suppose that experiences leave traces in the memory; and suppose . . . that the mind has mechanisms for copying what's in its memory onto its 'working tape'" (131). What's sauce for the goose . . . ? Second, Hume does appeal crucially to memory in many of his explanations, most notably those of personal identity and of causality. His story has impressions not only of sense but also of memory, and these are not the same things as ideas. (When I remember yesterday's tooth-ache, I am not just having an idea of a tooth-ache.) These memory impressions carry the kind of diachronic relational information Fodor claims, correctly, impressions of sense do not. Perhaps Hume's story does in some way contain the functional analogue of memory traces? If so, perhaps he is not stuck "*in a specious present*" (129), after all.

More generally, is Hume so wrong in allowing his epistemological concerns affect his science of the mind? This is a big subject, not one to try to settle here. Perhaps he did start out with a naïve faith in the possibility of just doing naïve psychology, with the image of Newton's naïve physics before his mind as a model. But is it not a mark of his greatness that he saw that for that science to be as fundamental a one as he describes it in the introduction to the *Treatise*, it must be embedded in, nay, it must itself constitute, a satisfactory epistemology?

Fodor's grounds for attributing the positions he does to Hume, and the criticisms of the positions attributed, are not always convincing, at least to this reader. But his arguments and criticisms are always philosophically interesting and instructive. Even if we do not believe everything Fodor says about Hume, we can learn much both about the mind and about Hume from this lively and engaging work.

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