



Emilio Mazza and Emanuele Ronchetti, eds. *New Essays on David Hume*

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Emilio Mazza and Emanuele Ronchetti, eds. *New Essays on David Hume*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007. Pp. 480. ISBN 9788846483362, Paperback, € 27.00.

New Essays on David Hume is an impressive collection of twenty-one essays by distinguished scholars covering an extensive range of topics concerning Hume's philosophy, politics, religion, and history presented in diverse methods and styles including dialogue, biography, intellectual history, historical-contextual interpretation and philosophically-oriented history of philosophy. The collection aims to be "a good reflection of the vividness and diversity" of contemporary scholarship and to "foster fresh and innovative Humean explorations" (13). In this manner, the volume is "closely connected to the activities and intentions" of a 1967 international special issue of the "Rivista di storia della filosofia" devoted entirely to Hume. The special issue of the "Revista," edited by one of Italy's "first and foremost" Hume scholars Mario Dal Pra, marked a "turning point" of Hume's career in Italy: a positive culmination of the "first season of Italian Humean studies" (7–9). Forty years later, the *New Essays* advances a new assessment of the current state of Hume scholarship. Both the "Revista" issue and the *New Essays* feature eminent international scholars. Both works highlight the importance of Hume's intellectual biography and his reception in different times and places with an emphasis on close textual analysis and attention paid to texts as well as subjects, "which if not quite neglected, were not traditionally regarded as mainstream" as well as the revisiting of traditional controversial topics (11).

The volume divides into four parts: (1) "of the understanding"; (2) "of morals and criticism"; (3) "of history, politics, and religion"; and (4) "Hume novelties." A brief overview of the essays in each part is provided before an evaluation of the volume as a whole. Part one consists of six essays. In the first essay, John P. Wright clarifies Norman Kemp Smith's groundbreaking naturalistic interpretation of Hume's philosophy presented in his 1905 paper, "The Naturalism of David Hume," and again in his 1941 book, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, while Marina Frasca-Spada, in the next essay, claims that Hume's treatment of simple perceptions is an interesting mess "caused by his typically unsystematic, but repeated and deep probing of new issues concerning human knowledge" (39). The third essay, by Catherine Kemp, explores what Hume means by "a contrariety of events and its role in experience" (56), and Peter Kail's chapter examines Hume's account of animal reasoning against the background of some remarks made in the later works of Leibniz. In essay five, Dale Jacquette concludes that "Hume has strong, defensible . . . reasons for rejecting the divisibility of Euclidean lines and line segments into infinitely many . . . points as logically consistent" (82), and finally, Emilio Mazza defends Hume's treatment

of skepticism as a “process” that captures “the ‘native bent’ of his genius, that is, his indulgence in ‘starting difficulties, and perplexing received opinions’” (103).

Six essays on morals and criticism make up the second part of the book. The first two essays deal with Francis Hutcheson’s influence on Hume. James Moore argues that the relation between Hutcheson and Hume’s moral philosophies can be better understood by supposing that Hutcheson saw himself as a Stoic “of some sort” while Hume was a skeptic of the Epicurean tradition (134). Alternatively, Luigi Turco examines evidence to show Hutcheson’s “special influence” over Hume and points out similarities between the moral doctrines of both authors (174). Charles Pigden challenges the traditional interpretation of Hume’s moral philosophy as emotivist and non-cognitivist in the next essay, while James Harris explores themes underlying the essays “The Epicurean,” “The Stoic,” “The Platonist” and “The Sceptic” to mark the transition between Hume’s moral and political philosophy. Hume’s experience with particular works of art is the subject of the next essay, by Roger Emerson. Emerson argues that Hume was “a man with limited aesthetic sensibilities and interests” and that his interest in art was mostly a tool to illustrate his philosophical theories (256–7). In the final essay of this part, Flavio Baroncelli presents a dialogue between Rawls and Hume about justice.

The third part of the book consists of six essays on historical, political, and religious matters. First, Annette Baier details Hume’s treatment of hypocrisy in the *History of England*. The next two essays explore the early American reception of Hume’s work. Mark G. Spencer looks specifically at Hume’s reception in Philadelphia, an American city at the center of the Enlightenment, while M. A. Stewart examines Hume’s connection to American deism by way of his implication in an American press debate (335). The intellectual friendship between Hume and Adam Smith is documented by Ian Simpson Ross, and then Emanuele Ronchetti shows how Hume’s *History of England* was taken over in different ways by Joseph de Maistre and Benjamin Constant. The final essay in this part, by Martin Bell, identifies two themes in “The Natural History of Religion”: the primary theme is that the science of human nature provides “a naturalistic explanatory genealogy of religion,” and the secondary theme is about “the relation between philosophy and popular religion and . . . the extent to which they can co-exist” (410).

Three articles of Humean novelties make up the fourth and final part of the book. The first essay previews the latest Clarendon two-volume critical edition of Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. Norton and Norton provide an overview of both volumes and excerpts from the editorial materials that make up the second volume (413–4). The final two articles are book reviews of edited collections that appeared in 2005. Peter Jones reviews *Impressions of Hume*, edited by Marina Frasca-Spada and Peter Kail, while Alix Cohen reviews Peter Jones’s collection, *The Reception of David Hume in Europe*.

The *New Essays* is, without a doubt, a valuable addition to Hume scholarship in at least three respects. First, the emphasis on the historical contextualization of the problems Hume addressed and the early reception of his thought does much to situate his place in intellectual history. Second, the collection succeeds in conveying an overall picture of Hume's thought while managing to pay considerable attention to detail both in historical context and textual analysis. Third, the volume draws much needed attention to some lesser-known parts of Hume's thought, such as philosophy of art, infinite divisibility, animal reasoning, and texts like the *History of England* and "The Natural History of Religion"; it also covers well a number of traditional topics such as skepticism, naturalism, and the influence of Hutcheson on Hume.

In fact, the collection is so admirably comprehensive there is not really any room for genuine grounds of complaint. Certainly some of the more popular and mainstream subject matters and texts are overlooked. Philosophical topics such as necessary connections, free will, personal identity, and miracles do not get much treatment; nor is there any sustained discussion of the posthumous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, a work widely regarded not only as one of Hume's greatest, but also as one of the most important in the philosophy of religion written in the English language. Inevitably, however, the focus on lesser-known parts of Hume's work enlivens more popular interests. For example, Kail's informative essay on the alignment of human and animal probable reasoning indirectly contributes to our understanding of necessary connections, free will, personal identity, and miracles, given the centrality of probable reasoning to these topics, and Bell's excellent piece on "The Natural History of Religion" can be brought to bear on one of the major themes in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* introduced in the first part, that is, the suitability of human reason to explore the complex subject matter of natural religion.

When it comes to the examination of the ways in which Hume's thought impacted the history of philosophy in terms of detecting his presence in present-day philosophical debates and comparing his ideas with important contemporary philosophers of our time, more could be done. Three articles stand out as exceptions in this regard. Pigden's important paper claims Hume as a moral realist in the modern sense and argues that Hume's "argument from motivation" has been misconstrued as an argument in favor of emotivism by present-day philosophers such as Michael Smith, in his 1994 book, *The Moral Problem* (199). A new perspective of Hume's influence on Rawls's theory of justice is given in Baroncelli's engaging dialogue, and the final piece in the volume, by Cohen, comments on Hume's appropriation by the logical positivists, beginning with the official statement made by the Vienna Circle in 1929 that Hume was "the positivist *par excellence*" (466). The collection would also benefit from the inclusion of essays addressing questions

about the tenability of Hume's philosophical doctrines, such as empiricism, causality, and psychology, given recent developments in the sciences, mathematics, mind, language, and logic. To be sure, the exploration of these areas and many others remain agenda items for future Hume scholarship, as indicated by the editors in the Foreword (12).

Finally, the special 1967 "Revista" issue included a guide to Hume literature from 1937 to 1966. To complete the present 2007 volume, a selective guide to the last forty years of Hume literature from 1967 to 2006 would be a welcome addition for scholars and students alike.

New Essays on David Hume is an absolutely essential collection for Hume specialists, or indeed anyone with any interest in the study of Hume's thought. All of the essays are stimulating and taken together, make up a remarkably wide-ranging volume both in subject matter and style, presented in accordance with the most recent scholarly standards for the interpretation of Hume. The *New Essays* will be an excellent source-book for both specialists and students because the varied approaches offered by the articles, written by leading commentators in the field, provide the reader with a clear picture of the state of contemporary scholarship as well as plenty of material to cultivate the advancement of studies on all aspects of Hume's life, works and significance.

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