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A Textual Study
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Book Reviews

Robert J. Fogelin. *Hume's Skeptical Crisis: A Textual Study*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 192 pages. ISBN 978-0-19-538739-1, Cloth, $45.00.

Not since A. J. Ayer's *Hume: A Short Introduction*, in 1980, has a little book about Hume packed so much punch. Fogelin's handsome book is more restricted in its topic than Ayer's, which covered all of Hume's thought, and along the way made some very pertinent remarks about personal identity, a topic which Fogelin too addresses, although it was not part of the crisis that is his main concern. The only other short book which is at all comparable is David Pears's 1990 *Hume's System*. We must be grateful to Oxford University Press for a series of little gems on Hume.

This book is a more restricted in topic than Fogelin's 1985 version of Hume's thought, in *Hume's Skepticism in the* Treatise of Human Nature, since it does not discuss Parts 1 and 2 of Book 1, and barely alludes to Books 2 and 3. The account of induction is still seen as skeptical (18), but is mentioned only in passing. As its subtitle tells us, this book is a fairly close textual study, giving us analytical summaries of all of parts 3 and 4 of Book 1, and some parts of the Appendix. Fogelin grants, to those who have stressed Hume's naturalism, that much of Book 1, such as the final sections of Part 3, support such a reading, or would, "unless, that is, we turn pages and enter into the skeptical realm of Part 4" (28). And even then, as he points out, Hume ends its first section claiming that his own theory of belief is verified by the ineffectiveness of the skeptical argument. "Hume exhibits no jitters

as a result of his skepticism with regard to reason" (51). The jitters come a section later, and recur in Section 4, and in the "Conclusion."

In his preface Fogelin mentions me, as well as Thomas Brown, J. A. Passmore, Barry Stroud and Don Garrett, as having influenced his present interpretation. His account of the skeptical moves in part 4 has changed mainly in its details. While in his earlier book, skepticism was a recurrent mood, running through the whole *Treatise*, now it is seen to peak in a crisis in part 4 of Book 1. Fogelin sees Hume's stance, thereafter, as the outcome of two vectors, unanswered skepticism about our powers of thought, and the persistence of common belief. This leads to a modest ambition to proceed with the science of human nature, despite the gloomy skeptical conclusions. "Viewed this way, his mitigated skepticism is an explicable event in the natural history of philosophy" (158).

Fogelin begins with part 3, leaving aside the question of whether Hume had a right to his empiricist thesis that all ideas derive their elements from impressions, and to other theses asserted before part 3 of Book 1, and also leaves aside the question of how Hume could proceed from the Conclusion of Book 1 on into Books 2 and 3. Just as the naturalist ending of part 3 is followed by the skepticism of part 4, it is granted (137) that part 4 is followed by a resumption of the task of describing our minds. Part 4, before its final paragraphs, is a skeptical interlude in a long careful look at how we think and feel, and how our experience, including our experience of thinking, affects that.

The book aims to show how the skepticism grows up alongside, and even within, the science of man. This it does, in the main, superbly. It is a narrative, not an argument with other interpreters, none of whom are mentioned, after the Preface. This gives the book its uncluttered charm. The brisk run through part 3 with which the book begins is fine, except for two matters. Section 9 is said to claim that all the principles of association transfer belief, while all that Hume claims about two of them, resemblance and contiguity, is that they transfer some vivacity, but not enough to tip the scales from lack of belief to belief. The most that they can do is fortify an already held belief. This inaccuracy about association affects, I think, the later diagnoses of Hume's eventual despair. On Fogelin's version of it, Hume realizes that not only the Lockean philosophers, but would-be "true philosophers" like himself, fall into confusion and contradiction, since the principles of the mind are in tension with one another. These principles are mainly those of association, so it is important to get them right. The second questionable claim is that Hume's two definitions of cause, in section 14, leave out any necessity (25). Hume's saying that neither of them make a cause always necessary is taken to say that causes do not necessitate. As Hume says in T 2.3.2.4 (SBN 409), he has two definitions of necessity conformable to the two of cause, since necessity is an "essential part" of *cause*. Both these matters, necessary connection and

association, are part of the Appendix worries, so any errors of interpretation here are likely to reverberate.

Fogelin's accounts of the first four sections of part 4 are miracles of clarity, and illuminate some of Hume's obscurer moves. They succeed so well that it comes as a disappointment that the same help is not given with sections 5 and 6. A crucial move Hume makes in section 5, of treating single perceptions not just as separable in thought, but as able to exist separately, as long as such separation makes sense for their objects, is not discussed. Hume calls it a principle, and repeats it in the Appendix, so it should not be overlooked. Hume called few things principles: most of those attributed to him by commentators, such as the "copy principle" and Don Garrett's "title principle" are not so termed by Hume. What Fogelin gets from "Of the immateriality of the soul" is mainly the rejection of the concept of a soul-substance, one version of which Hume had looked at in "Of the antient philosophy," and also the distinction between perceptions of what is nowhere, or in no definite place (like smells, sounds, and tastes), and those (of sight and touch), which are of extended things with a definite location in space. The spatial objects make trouble for immaterialists, as the unlocated objects make trouble for materialists. Since Hume had rejected the concept of substance back in part 1, it is unlikely that this rejection is the main point of this later section. The mixture of located and unlocated existences, within our perceptions and their objects, is important for the next section, where we come out neither material nor quite immaterial.

Fogelin sees "Of personal identity" as "a replay of arguments" (109) given in the previous section against any notion of a soul-substance. But of course Hume is also concerned to explain why we take ourselves to persist through time, so it is the relations we find within our personal sequences of perceptions which provide his main topic. His "most proper comparison" of the person to a republic, where causal relations link the successive members, is found "bad" (116), since it seems to use verbs like "produce" in an un-Humean way. Fogelin does not like any of Hume's metaphors for personal identity. He disarmingly says (112) it took readers for Oxford to alert him to the fact that Hume's gloss on his theatre analogy was not to the lack of audience, but the lack of any place where the perceptions do their intricate dance. Bundles of perceptions are among that majority of existences which "are nowhere." But later Fogelin reverts to the "no audience" view (121), saying that where Berkeley had perceivers as well perceptions, Hume has only the latter. Berkeley had "*percipi*," or things whose essence was to be perceived by minds, as well as perceiving minds, while Hume has only "perceptions." But Hume's "perceptions," as I understand them, straddle Berkeley's two sorts of things, since they are acts or occasions of perceiving, and all have "objects," which can be either mental or physical things, without or with a place in space. Fogelin takes Hume to be following the "way of ideas," but unless his "perceptions" were not

quite what any previous philosopher had spoken of, he would not have needed to coin new terminology. On Fogelin's reading, Hume does really merit the charge of having maintained there could be perceptions without any perceiver. Hume certainly said there could be a one-perception perceiver, but that one perception is a perceiving, and there is an object of that perceiving. I found Fogelin's treatment of these two sections, and of the Appendix worries, which really amount to a second skeptical crisis, the weakest part of his book. He has throughout taken Hume to be following the "way of ideas," but just what he took that to mean only becomes clear at this late stage. Berkeley needed a new term, "notion," for a mind's self-knowledge, and one can indeed see the Appendix as Hume's realization that minds cannot be taken to know themselves in the way he had taken them to know, or believe in, bodies.

On the Appendix worries, Fogelin writes that Hume finds nothing in the causal relations within his mind except his reflective self's own association of an earlier with a later perception. This may indeed be how Hume sees things then. But earlier he had found that detected natural relations *caused* mental associations, so there always is more behind an association, including a causal one, than just the mind's associating move. In the case of discerned causes, there should be experienced constant conjunction, leading to a customary inference, and that sort of association is the most robust and established working of the mind which Hume endorses. Why then hesitate, when the causes and effects are one's own perceptions? Fogelin says that, on Hume's view, no perception could apprehend another perception (121), but why he says this is unclear. Hume certainly allowed that there were secondary ideas, thoughts about thoughts (T 1.1.1.11; SBN 6–7). The costs of not beginning at the beginning of Book 1 become clear when confusions about what perceptions are, and what association is, affect what is said about later theses. As Hume himself said, of his "system," not merely do the parts agree, but there is a "necessity of one to explain another" (T 1.3.13.20; SBN 154).

In his seventh chapter, on the Conclusion of Book 1, Fogelin stresses that Hume finds even the established workings of our imaginations to be in conflict with each other, and that it takes a "seemingly trivial property of the fancy," the weak hold that elaborate reasonings have on our minds, to save us from losing faith in ourselves. Fogelin ends his book by contrasting the aims of EHU, to methodize and correct common life, with the grand aims, of "a compleat system of the sciences," with which the *Treatise* had begun. This contrast between Hume's two books, which represents a slight change of mind on Fogelin's part, is done a little too briefly, but does establish his main thesis, that, after the crisis at the end of Book 1 of the *Treatise*, a mitigated skepticism persists, along with a chastened ambition.

This book gives a very convincing account of the bases of Hume's first skeptical crisis, and of how his positive aims were affected by that. The style is brisk

and energetic, the conciseness admirable. Some matters remain un-clarified, but much is made clear, and done so with grace and address. Every Hume scholar will want to read this book, and students will be helped by its smoothing out of some of Hume's rougher passages. I think Hume, whose calm gaze looks out from the book's striking cover, would have liked this book.

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