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Christopher J. Berry. *David Hume*. New York: Continuum, 2009. Pp. xiv + 176. ISBN 978-0-826-42980-7, Cloth, $130.00

In this book Professor Berry concisely and convincingly demonstrates two points: the various reasons "why Hume's thought has indeed been frequently read as a contributor to or progenitor of conservatism" (154), and why the author nonetheless disagrees with this assessment. According to Berry, to identify some—or in fact many—elements or strains of conservative thoughts in Hume's writings is one thing and to classify him as a conservative thinker another. Berry picks up four major themes of analysis: Hume's theories of causation and of justice, his economic thought, and his remarks on superstition. Rather than constituting distinct elements of the philosopher's thought, these strands are seen as closely intertwined. As for the first two, Berry argues that Hume's theories of causation and justice are solidly founded upon his emphasis on custom and habit, and he perceives here "the clear connection between Hume's epistemology and his political and moral philosophy" (43). Despite accepting this, Berry claims that overall Hume is not a conservative philosopher. The focal point of Berry's argument is Hume's criticism of superstition: he contends that Hume's term 'superstition' has a wider sense, indicating bad customs. This means that, despite his emphasis on custom and habit in epistemology and politics, Hume neither accepts nor justifies every historically well established custom. For example, he criticizes many mercantilist laws (such as usury and sumptuary laws), which according to Berry's reading, can be regarded as based on a kind of economic superstition. On this point, Hume can be more easily depicted as a liberal rather than a conservative thinker.

Precisely because of the book's close focus on the issue of Hume's alleged conservatism, the question "What, then, is Hume?" is discussed only in *negative* ways. Berry demonstrates his sympathy for J. B. Stuart's interpretation of Hume as a liberal, but, as both admit, Hume is clearly not a liberal in terms of adopting a rights-based philosophy (48–49, 98). If Hume is considered to be a liberal, therefore, the issue remains of what kind of liberal he is. Although such an investigation might be inappropriate given the nature of this series, readers might still wish that Berry had addressed the issue more clearly.

The extent to which some elements of the philosophy that Berry depicts are peculiar to Hume is not clear. Although Hume's writings contain the harshest criticisms of religious superstition among Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, he shared his basic stance with many of his friends. Hume's criticism of superstition, that is bad customs, should therefore be re-grounded in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment. Moreover, Berry never indicates whether he believes that

Hume's views on good customs or manners were nothing but eighteenth-century prejudices, as McIntyre says in *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1985, p. 231). If they were not the prejudices of a particular time but more universal, how can we distinguish Hume's emphasis on pain and pleasure in his moral theory and his criteria of good manners from those of, say, Jeremy Bentham?

I would suggest some alternative strategies to refute or challenge the common depiction of Hume as a conservative. One is to question the theoretical framework behind our own understanding of Hume's thought. The connection between Hume's skeptical understanding of causation in epistemology and his (allegedly) conservative politics has been reiterated since the nineteenth century. Furthermore, scholars have consistently linked Hume's liberalistic defense of commerce to his theory of justice. As Berry claims, this packaging of Hume's various strands of thought has been justified by what Hayek calls the theory of spontaneous order. This theory explains and justifies Hume's claims about the superiority of unintended social institutions produced by self-interested individuals over those based on human rational design. For Hayek, the epitome of the former is the free-market economy, while the latter category includes the idea of a planned economy and models based upon the theory of social contract. Despite Berry's cautious qualifications, his treatment of the central themes in this book follows Hayek's precedent in amalgamating various elements of Hume's thought. Although I admit the usefulness of Hayek's theory as a theoretical framework, the theory is a conceptual amalgam when viewed as an historically accurate interpretation of the social philosophy of Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment. Certainly, Hume emphasized the importance of justice for the foundation of economic activities and mentioned money as one example of spontaneous order. However, in Book 3 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, it becomes clear that he regarded private property, not the market, as one of the arenas in which spontaneous order would manifest itself. Furthermore, one of Hayek's pet phrases—Adam Ferguson's "the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design" (*Essays on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Saltzberger [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 119)—does not refer to commerce or economic activities but rather to political subordination. (See, for example, F. A. Hayek, "Individualism: True and False," in *Individualism and Economic Order* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948], 7.) More significantly, Hayek blurs two different strains of thought in Smith's "invisible hand" theory: as Rothschild puts it, "The two conceptions—the equilibrium and the evolutionary versions of the invisible hand—correspond to different economic theories, and to different views of economic policy" (Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* [Harvard University Press, 2001], 155). Compared with the latter, the former is "less dependent on faith or hope. It is a deduction of consequences from conditions; its

optimism, if any, is about the efficiency of economic policy in establishing the rules or conditions of economic institutions" (Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 155).

Even leaving aside the nuance of Adam Smith's own arguments, possible differences between Hume and Smith may have become indistinct in the shroud of Hayek's theorizing. The fact that Hume criticizes some elements of mercantilist customs in a way similar to Smith does not necessarily show that Hume claims that we *should* reform the market to maximize competitiveness in the same way or to the same extent as Smith does. I do not deny that the two philosophers had many things in common, especially in the field of economic thought. However, to calibrate such nuanced differences it would be helpful to depict Hume's position without using Hayek's framework.

A possible alternative approach to combating claims of Hume's conservatism that Berry could have used would have been to (re)emphasize Hume's important contributions to radicalism in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Some radicals, particularly Godwin and the Philosophical Radicals, not only read Hume's writings very attentively but also absorbed his associationism and utilized it for their political or pedagogical reforms. Berry could perhaps have supported his central point by demonstrating that, historically, elements of Hume's social philosophy have not been exclusively linked to the conservative strain of thought but have had a formative effect on strands of various other political philosophies.

Considering the nature of the series "Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers" in which this book appears, Berry performs his duty as a contributor very well, while consistently maintaining his own position. Overall, the arguments in this book are well-articulated and readable for both beginners and experts, which is an important merit for works in this type of series.

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