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David Hume on Morals, Politics, and Society, ed. by Angela Coventry and Andrew Valls (review)

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Angela Coventry and Andrew Valls, eds. *David Hume on Morals, Politics, and Society*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018. Pp. lvi + 350. Paperback ISBN 978-0-300-20714-9, \$15.00.

This is a fascinating collection of Hume's texts and essays by experts on Hume. It introduces students and general readers to a panorama of his moral and political philosophy in a readable and informative way. The collection consists of the following sections: Introduction by Andrew Valls, Index of Names, "Texts," and "Essays." The texts include the entirety of *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, and selected essays from "Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary." This is followed by four "interpretive essays" by Mark G. Spencer, Elizabeth S. Radcliffe, Frederick G. Whelan, and finally Peter Vanderschraaf and Andrew Valls.

In his introduction, Valls contends that Hume on morals and politics is still relatively neglected, in spite of the extraordinary richness of his texts (xi). This volume, published in the series *Rethinking the Western Tradition*, is intended to make that richness more accessible. It is highly successful in doing so. Besides its compact size and affordable cost, the fresh combination of the second *Enquiry* and a selection from "Essays" will enable a broader spectrum of readers to follow the texts, as Valls expects (xiv–xv). Hume himself wished for this sort of accessibility; indeed "Essays" and the *Enquiry* were included in his own edition of *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*. Valls's introduction vividly provides a synopsis of Hume's thought by helpfully referring to the interpretive essays in the collection, and by engaging characteristics of his thought by comparison with other great thinkers.

In the primary texts section, diction and punctuation diverge in a few places from other editions like that of *Hume Texts Online* (<https://davidhume.org>) and the texts are slightly less understandable where divergences occur. Moreover, on page 21, the first five lines of paragraph 25 are duplicated and appear at the end of paragraph 24 as well. While there are minor editorial errors, there are also editorial merits. For instance, the editorial annotations added to the footnotes, specifically translations of Hume's quotes in Latin and so on, are beneficial.

The essays by the masterful contributors evidence another outstanding merit of the present collection. The contributors detail how one can understand the main theses of Hume's texts and situate them in both their historical backgrounds and in our contemporary debates. Readers will find here considerably wider, deeper, and more interdisciplinary resources than in a typical editor's introduction (though sometimes, a single introduction has unusual width and depth, like Eugene Rotwein's monumental introduction to his edition of *Hume's Writings on Econom-*

ics, republished with a new introduction by Margaret Schabas (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007).

The first essay by Spencer focuses on the historical Hume. It illustrates how his works were composed, read, and responded to by reviewers of his time and great thinkers such as Adam Ferguson, Henry Home, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and James Madison. Spencer's succinct but lively intellectual biography prompts readers to see Hume's works from viewpoints of the past. One fascinating episode recounted is Thomas Ewell's assemblage of the first American edition of Hume's works in 1817 (257). It is inspiring to see Hume's wish to make his works "accessible to many beyond the learned few" (245) was respected by Ewell's edition, and has been even further realized by the present volume, as American students and readers in the twenty-first century will see.

Radcliffe's essay explicates the decisive relevance of Hume's moral philosophy for various studies in contemporary ethics. She focuses on the impact of Hume's motivational anti-rationalism, moral sentimentalism, and discussions on the "is-ought" gap (265–66), and carefully measures both connections and differences between Hume's theses and contemporary theories. In surveying diverse comments on the "is-ought" gap, for example, Radcliffe finds Nicholas Sturgeon's view of attributing moral distinctions to sentiment and thereby accepting a move from "is" to "ought" as doing the most justice to Hume's texts (273–75). The following essays take similar standpoints (291, 310, 323), which provide one of the several nexuses present in this volume for bridging disciplinary differences.

Next, Whelan illustrates the interrelation between (descriptive) "political science" and (normative) "political theory" in Hume's essays included in this volume (290–91). Though referring to several historical contexts, Whelan puts more emphasis on Hume's move from descriptive analyses to normative judgements on such topics as constitution, liberty, the republic, political economy, parties, and legitimacy of government. Hume's criticism of contract theory, for instance, consists in descriptive claims attached to normative forces, and thus indicates his movement from "is" to "ought" (308–10). Whelan further investigates values guiding Hume's normative judgements. A revealing example is the internally strained combination of "past-oriented custom and future-oriented utility" concerning legitimacy of government (311), which exemplifies Hume's normative theory, combining "conservative teaching with positions that were (in his time) both liberal and progressive" (314).

In the final essay, Vanderschraaf and Valls discuss "Hume's views of individual decision-making and of cooperation and coordination," and its relevance to "his moral and political thought" (317). As with Radcliffe's, this essay situates Hume's thought within the context of contemporary theories in a nuanced way. The authors emphasize Hume's innovative ideas preceding such contemporary developments as the analysis of history-dependent strategies in repeated games (329–32),

while pointing out that Hume is scarcely interested in single-agent decision, and is thus quite distant from typical focuses of modern decision theory (318). This balanced portrait spares readers from an oversimplified application of Hume's texts to the present, and invites them for a more sensitive reading of the past.

To these expert essays, I have nothing to add, except for a few minor notes. Radcliffe writes that Hume's discussion on the advantage of a general system of justice (not any particular action of it) in the second *Enquiry* "is prefigured in Hume's essays," and she quotes a passage from "Of the Origin of Government" (278). A more relevant precedent to that discussion can be found in (T 3.3.1.12; SBN 579), and the theme quoted from the essay above probably appeared only in T 3.2.7.6 (SBN 537) when the *Enquiry* was published. Moreover, Whelan remarks that "Of the Liberty of the Press" is mainly scientific rather than normative (296–97). It is reasonable to exclude a heavy complication in a volume meant for students, but the revisions to this essay in 1770s marked "perhaps the most striking example of a retreat in the later Hume from a liberal to a less liberal position" (Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 184), and for this reason seem worth considering. Lastly, Vanderschraaf and Valls divide Hume's conventions into "pure coordination" and a combination of "coordination and conflict." They put forward, as an example of the former, the convention between "wagoners passing each other on the road" (326–27). I am just curious whether wagoners in haste do not have any potential conflict.

These are no doubt trifling annotations. Students and general readers with different interests and from different fields will receive inspiration from this volume. Steered through the various pathways set by Hume's texts, driven by the vivacity of his philosophical enquiries, and guided by the masterful essays of experts, they will likely find themselves invited to explore the fields and interests of others. This invitation to think in other ways constitutes a further virtue of this collection, a virtue which Hume himself no doubt championed in his works amidst the divisions of religion, politics, and historiography of his time.

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