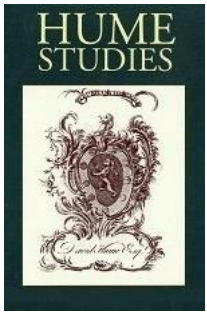

Alison McIntyre

Hume on Art, Emotion, and Superstition: A Critical Study of the Four Dissertations, by Amyas Merivale

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Book 1 of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (T) was reshaped into the first *Enquiry*, while the second *Enquiry* further develops some themes from Book 3. What became of Book 2, "Of the Passions" (T2)? Did Hume never extend his thinking in that area? Amyas Merivale notes that the standard answer to that question is that Hume did not do much in the way of rethinking T2 beyond selecting a few passages to excerpt, almost verbatim, in his "Dissertation on the Passions." In this fine, wide-ranging, scrupulously researched and carefully argued book, Merivale offers a more intriguing and satisfying answer: the essays collected in the *Four Dissertations* (FD), "The Natural History of Religion" (NHR), "Of the Passions" (DP), "Of Tragedy" (TR), and "Of the Standard of Taste" (ST) constitute Hume's mature philosophy of the passions. The thesis is not that the FD constitutes a thorough reworking of T2 material, rather that it displays some specific further developments in Hume's thinking about the passions that draw on elements in the *Treatise* accounts.

The first two chapters of Part I provide the textual and historical context for Hume's views on the passions. This makes for stimulating reading; it is rich in references to other figures in the period, provides insightful summaries of their positions, and advances many extremely compelling interpretive claims. Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Butler receive detailed attention. It is worth studying on its own as a freestanding commentary on the particular *Treatise* passages it discusses, and on the 17th- and 18th-century conversations to which Hume was responding.

Chapters 3 and 4 of Part I describe what Merivale takes to be the single most important change in Hume's account of the passions. He argues that Hume was a psychological hedonist and egoist, influenced by Hobbes, Locke and Mandeville, when he wrote T2. "Shortly afterwards, however, he read and was persuaded by Butler's anti-egoist arguments, and consequently became one of the clearest and keenest opponents of his own earlier view" (3). Merivale argues that T 2.3.9.8, which he dubs "the Butler paragraph," shows Hume blatantly contradicting the account of the passions that had preceded it.

> Beside good and evil, or in other words, pain and pleasure, the direct passions frequently arise from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly unaccountable. Of this kind is the desire of punishment to our enemies, and of happiness to our friends; hunger, lust, and a few other bodily appetites. These passions, properly speaking, produce good and evil, and proceed not from them, like the other affections. (T 2.3.9.8; SBN 43)

Merivale suggests that this paragraph might be a late addition to the manuscript of the *Treatise* that indicates the influence of Butler's anti-hedonist and anti-egoist arguments in Sermon 11, "Upon the Love of Our Neighbor—Rom. xiii. 9." This influence is allegedly carried over to the DP, which displays a rejection of the hedonism and egoism of the T, as Hume embraces the motivational pluralism defended by Butler. Each of these claims is certain to be controversial.

Merivale's discussion introduces important questions about how best to characterize and classify the views on motivation of Hume's antecedents, Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Butler, as well as Malebranche, Clarke, and Wollaston, and to what degree Hume follows, adapts, or opposes their views.

The "Butler paragraph" introduces a distinction between two kinds of passions, those that *proceed from*, or *arise from*, good and evil, and those that arise from a natural impulse or instinct and *produce* good and evil. The first two paragraphs of the DP gracefully combine them, so it is not clear that Hume felt that this was a complete volte-face as opposed to a refinement of the view that predominates in the *Treatise*.

In the *Treatise,* Hume declines to employ the hedonist and egoist forms of explanation typical of Mandeville, for example, to explain why we love the rich and famous (T 2.2.5; SBN 357–365) or why we desire to promote the happiness of friends (T 2.2.6.3, 2.2.6.6, 2.2.9.3, 2.2.9.4; SBN 367, 368, 382, 382). All of this precedes T 2.3.9.8 (SBN 439). We also find a wholesale rejection of Mandeville's stipulation that "all Passions center in Self-Love" (cited by Merivale, 38). Pride is presented as a perpetual appetite for the rewards of social approval by Mandeville, while T 2.1.1–12 is devoted to showing that it is the possible outcome of an episode of self-evaluation, just as humility is. Hume wryly remarks that if pride were a constant and "perpetual" motivating presence, then humility would be perpetual as well, since it has the same relation to the self (T 2.1.5.7; SBN 287–88).

In Part II, a pair of chapters is dedicated to each of the four essays.

Chapters 5 and 6 extend the T 2.3.4–10 discussion of hope and fear by working out the implications of this view for religious belief, as discussed in the NHR and section 1 of the DP, which immediately follows NHR. Merivale argues that in selecting from T2, Hume preserved in the DP "only the material that was relevant to *The Natural History of Religion* and *Of Tragedy*" (17–18). Merivale maintains that Hume organized his discussion in the NHR in terms of a contrast between

superstition and *true religion*. On Hume's account, two quite different aspects of our passionate nature give rise to religious beliefs of two very different kinds with very different forms of evidential support. The sources of *superstition* are "our curiosity, excited most by things close to us and out of the ordinary; our hopefulness and fearfulness, especially the latter, excited by uncertainty and unconstancy" (117). The inferential step to the existence of supernatural deities with qualities somewhat like our own yields polytheism. The step from superstitious polytheism to superstitious monotheism lies "in the felt need to flatter one deity above all others" (119) and to rely on his capacity to intervene in the order of nature by particular volitions. *True religion* arises from milder emotional responses. Attention to evidence of regularity, constancy, and order in the universe may provoke wonder and admiration that support an inference to a divine designer. However, these sources of theistic belief provide no grounds for fear. Merivale adds, "it is very doubtful that the God of true religion can, for Hume, be the cause or the object of *any* of our passions (except perhaps a calm, disinterested curiosity" (119). In the end, true religion is "in this context the face-saving escape route that he is strategically offering to his orthodox readers" (98).

Chapter 7 takes up Hume's views on the intentionality of the passions in the *Treatise* and in the DP, and combines textual analysis with a thorough review of interpretive options concerning vexed questions about the relations between a particular passion, its cause and its object. Merivale argues that the DP provides a more consistent and satisfying approach to defining particular indirect passions like pride and love and specifying their relation to the sensation involved and to the object of the passion: "In the *Treatise,* pride was a certain simple and indefinable satisfaction which happened as a matter of contingent fact to be causally related to self. In the *Dissertation*, however, it is defined as a complex perception, part satisfaction and part self" (139). The impossibility of the combat of passion and reason is discussed in Chapter 8. Nicolas Malebranche and Samuel Clarke are given the full attention they deserve as the targets of Hume's critique. The critique itself, and in particular, the argument for the conclusion that passions cannot be contrary to reason is deemed question-begging (158–60); this is invoked to explain why it does not appear in the DP.

Remarking that in common life "nothing can be more disagreeable than fear and terror," Hume notes "'tis only in dramatic performances and in religious discourses that they ever give pleasure" (T 1.3.9.15; SBN 115). Such terrors enliven the mind and fix our attention in a way that can be pleasing, Hume explains, because of our want of belief in them. The conversion principle reappears in Hume's discussion of the causes of the violent passions in T 2.3.4.2, where it explains how two conflicting passions may be resolved in such a way as to strengthen one of them. It reappears in section 6 at the end of the DP, before being applied in the third dissertation, "Of Tragedy," to explain the pleasure that onlookers take in

responding to portrayals of tragic events. In Chapter 9, Merivale discusses the solutions offered by Jean Baptiste Du Bos and Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle to this puzzle, and argues that Hume was aware of them and had attempted to reconcile them in the *Treatise.* "Of Tragedy" introduces a new explanatory factor, Merivale observes, the pleasurable passions that arise in response to the artwork itself and the artistry with which it was created.

Chapters 11 and 12 take up "Of the Standard of Taste" (ST). Merivale gamely takes on criticisms of that essay and of Hume's goal in it "to offer a standard of taste with which to silence the relativist," and shows great resourcefulness in identifying responses to be made on Hume's behalf. One challenge receives no clear answer within Hume's essay: what justifies Hume's assumption that true judges will tend to converge in their sentiments, that "amidst all the variety of caprice and taste" there will be "general principles of approbation and blame" (ST 11–12, 233)? Taken together, Merivale observes, the *Four Dissertations* provide evidence that such general principles could be found (219).

Many scholarly virtues are displayed here: a commitment to close textual interpretation, thoughtful attention to Hume's intellectual context, candor about the shortcomings of Hume's arguments, clarity in focus, and great reserves of ingenuity called upon on Hume's behalf. Merivale's wonderful book will enliven scholarly debate in many areas of existing Hume scholarship, while encouraging others to look to the *Four Dissertations* as a whole to discern Hume's second thoughts about his treatment of the passions in the *Treatise.*

ALISON MCINTYRE
Department of Philosophy
Wellesley College
106 Central St.
Wellesley MA 02481