

# *Introduction*

MARINA FRASCA-SPADA AND P. J. E. KAIL



Hume's thought and works have made different impressions in the different areas of literacy, historical, and philosophical investigation represented in this volume. Thus his writings can be taken as transparent vehicles for philosophical intuitions, problems, and arguments that are still at the centre of philosophical reflection today. On the other hand, there are readings that try to locate Hume's views against the background of concerns, debates, and discussions of his own time. And this is not all. Hume's texts may be read as highly sophisticated literary-cum-philosophical creations: in such cases, the reader's attention tends to be directed at issues of genre and persuasive strategies rather than philosophical questions and arguments. Or they may be regarded as moments in the construction of the ideology of modernity, and as contributions to the legitimation of a given social order. As the true classics that they are, Hume's works are typical 'open texts', in which readers keep finding an ever new and varied bounty of inspirations. It is the editors' conviction that the borders between these approaches are far from neat; and that as much trespassing as possible is to be promoted. The volume that we present here offers a range of such approaches and interests.

We start with M. A. Stewart's article, which is a biographical and intellectual reconstruction of Hume's career, from his entering the College of Edinburgh at the age of 10 to the completion of his main philosophical writings thirty years later. Much of the emphasis is on the hitherto under-researched earlier part of this period; and the result challenges much of the present literature both on Hume's biography and on the relative weight we should assign to his different philosophical writings. In the first two sections, this article offers a detailed picture of the intellectual scene which would have met a young student starting to attend the College. It then moves on to examine the documentary traces of the young Hume's presence at Edinburgh, assessing them against remarks which Hume scattered throughout his work, to tease out what exactly and how he is likely to have been taught. There follows a fresh look at Hume's correspondence and early writing, and an assessment of his likely range of readings and conversations, philosophical or otherwise, with friends and correspondents. The article concludes with a discussion of the projects Hume was entertaining around

the time of the publication of the *Treatise*, and of how he revised his plans and adjusted his interests in the post-*Treatise* period. Throughout Stewart emphasizes the need for caution in weighing the evidence, including that supplied by Hume himself. His ‘thick descriptions’ establish a seamless continuity between life and thought, and restore to us the author of the *Treatise* as a compellingly concrete intellectual and human presence.

But there are other ways in which Hume is a lively presence for us. Peter Lipton’s contribution is a good expression of how questions that emerge from Hume’s writings and, in turn, Hume’s own position are taken up by those who are first and foremost concerned with philosophical problems rather than the history of philosophy. Hume was an original source for Lipton’s own interest in the subject. What is interesting here is to see a philosopher reflect again on his forebear. Lipton offers a hypothesis about why Hume was the first major thinker to formulate the famous problem of induction. Certainly, according to Lipton, induction had attracted some sceptical attention, but this was due mainly to a general sceptical thesis: namely, the underdetermination of theory by data. Hume’s contribution, says Lipton, was to shift the focus from the deliverances of induction to the methods and presuppositions themselves. Part, but only part, of this shift has to do with Hume’s abandonment of an epistemology which gives demonstration pre-eminence, and with his rejection of the view that the connection between cause and effect is intelligible to us. But Hume’s scepticism is ultimately located in his naturalism about the mind and in what Lipton calls the ‘ubiquity’ of induction: namely, in Hume’s idea that the only source for any unobserved ‘matter of fact’ is inductive inference.

What Lipton reflects on, Mark Sainsbury exhibits: his paper shows how Hume’s thoughts about cause and effect continue to play a central role in contemporary metaphysical discussions. Sainsbury starts with what is known as Hume’s ‘second definition’, and finds in it a definition not of causation *per se*, but of causal belief. Sainsbury then distinguishes between implicit and explicit causal beliefs, where, roughly, the former can be possessed by creatures who lack the concept of causation (allowing, as Hume does, for animals to have causal beliefs), and a more sophisticated way of having the belief which does involve possession of the concept. Thinking of the second definition as a definition of causal belief allows us to combine a reductionism about the metaphysics of causation (roughly, singular causal relations are particular events subsumed under a regularity, in the spirit of Hume’s first definition) with a projectivist account of the modal aspect of causal belief. What Hume’s second definition captures is a *mode* of belief in a constant conjunction. There is not here a distinct modal *content* to causal belief, but instead a difference in the way in which the constant conjunction is viewed. This proposal, which bears affinities to the views of Frank Ramsey and, more recently, Simon Blackburn, is then given more

detailed investigation. Concentrating on the mode of belief distinctive of causal generalizations, rather than of singular causal transactions, Sainsbury considers how the contrast between causal and accidental generalizations can be drawn in terms of a difference not in content or in the kind of facts affirmed, but in the mode of belief. To believe in causal mode is to be in the 'grip' of the regularity, but this is not so for the accidental mode of believing. Sainsbury's investigations are at once hopeful and negative: the prospects for drawing the distinction in terms of Hume's second definition look bleak, but the general project seems more promising if we think in terms of modes of belief having different degrees of modal resilience. The brilliance of Hume's second definition is therefore, as Sainsbury concludes, in its being the (brilliant, if incorrect) answer to a brilliant new question.

In different ways, both Lipton and Sainsbury attend strictly to philosophical content, examining Hume's ideas from the perspective of current philosophical concerns. The philosophical substance of Hume's work is also the focus of Martin Bell's study, which takes Deleuze's critique of Hume as an occasion to reflect on the relation between philosophy and its history. Kant's view of empiricism, according to Deleuze, fails to capture a distinctly Humean thought: namely, that in addition to mere experience, association of ideas is required for thought, and centrally for beliefs about the external world and the self, and so in some sense there must be 'synthesis' as well as mere 'experience' for Hume as well as for Kant. Bell considers Deleuze's own characterization of what makes Hume an empiricist, which rests on Hume's treatment of *relations*. Deleuze says that any theory is 'non-empiricist' in so far as it holds that '*in one way or another*, relations are derived from the nature of things'. Hume is an empiricist in so far as for him relations are not derived from the nature of things. Here the principles of association make their appearance, determining 'natural relations' among ideas. These relations do not depend on the 'qualities of the ideas themselves', but are 'the effects of the principles of human nature'. More provocatively, even the four philosophical relations which depend 'solely on the ideas' (resemblance, proportion in quantity and number, degrees in quality, and contrariety) are not 'derived from the nature of things'. Although these relations are said to be discovered by comparison, they are also said to 'arise merely from the comparison' itself. This is a crucial move: 'discovered' sounds epistemic, of ideas standing in relations that are 'there anyway'; but even these relations are imposed on inchoate experience, a view that sounds quite Kantian. A related form of empiricism makes its presence felt in Hume's emphasis on passion and affect, and Bell connects this briefly with Hume's distinction between personal identity 'as it regards our thought and imagination' and 'as it regards our passions'. Viewed as the former, there is nothing but distinct perceptions, and any relation is 'external'; but viewed as the latter, there is activity and concern. In the final section of the paper, he turns to

Deleuze's 'transcendental empiricism'—an apparent oxymoron. But this stance concerns the source of relations holding among experiences, and for Deleuze's Kant the issue turns on whether the relations are empirical or non-empirical in Deleuze's sense. For this Kant, the twist is that relations among experiences derive from the 'nature of things' in a sense that the ultimate source is the transcendental subject. This rethinking of Kant, suggests Bell, both offers a different perspective on Hume and the relation of his thought to Kant's and widens our view of Hume's legacy to philosophy beyond the analytic tradition.

Two contributions, Susan James's and Peter Kail's, discuss aspects of Hume's thought in light of his reading of Nicolas Malebranche. The importance of Malebranche's writings as background to Hume's reflection is increasingly acknowledged in philosophical and historical-philosophical studies of Hume. James adds further evidence for this by comparing aspects of Malebranche's treatment of the passions, in particular of esteem and contempt, with Hume's own views expressed in Book II of the *Treatise*. She discusses Malebranche's complex theory of the passions, and shows how it is taken up and modified by Hume. Some of Hume's alterations are, James suggests, markers for the different political structures that each account of the passions serves to legitimate. In Malebranche's account, pride and esteem work so as to be subservient to hierarchical societies, thus reflecting the absolutism that marks seventeenth-century France. For Hume, by contrast, pride, admiration, and contempt are checked by the operation of sympathy. In this way love and compassion come to play a more prominent role in the Humean psychological economy, which leads to an investment in common good fortune.

Kail devotes his paper to a fascinating and ambiguous page of Hume, the conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise*, and reads it as a point-by-point response to Malebranche. His purpose is to foreground once more the primacy of ethical concerns in Hume's philosophical work. Here Kail considers not only Malebranche's major and best-known work, *De la Recherche de la vérité*, but also his *Traité de morale*. Malebranche is, together with Pascal, the ideal representative of that Christian ethic which regards as the purpose of human life the enhancement of man's similarity to God. To this purpose, it sets human rationality against human nature, and preaches the promotion of the former by means of the mortification and denial of the latter. Famously inspired by Malebranchean analyses of perception and of the ideas of cause and effect, Hume is, however, repelled by this ethic, against which he reacts very strongly. The conclusion of Book I is an expression of that reaction. The philosophy 'in a careless manner' which Hume advocates, apparently shallowly, is in fact, if read against Malebranche's ethical theory, the outcome of Hume's firm ethical commitment to human nature and to the defence of a humane moral philosophy against the artificiality of

‘monkish’ virtues. So Malebranche embarks on his search after truth because he follows St Augustine in identifying truth with God himself. And Hume reflexively puts forward a typically down-to-earth and naturalistic alternative: we search after truth because we draw pleasure from hunting that particular sort of quarry. The unexpected conclusion of this close textual reading is the identification of a parallel between Hume’s discussion of curiosity and the love of truth in terms of the pleasures of hunting, and the Nietzschean condemnation of the ‘ascetic ideal’.

A reassessment of Hume and religion is also at the centre of James Harris’s contextual study. A popular understanding of Hume on religion is that he argues for an enlightened atheism by showing that there can be no rational grounds for the existence of God. In its simplest version, this reading faces some textual and contextual obstacles. Hume was no doubt familiar with strains of religious thinking, such as fideism and Calvinism, which quite readily admit, and even embrace, reason’s impotence in religious matters. Reason is one thing, faith quite another. This contextual fact needs to be borne in mind when considering the textual facts. For there are a number of places where Hume seems to suggest that faith has the upper hand, and that scepticism is ‘the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian’. Such remarks are most often read as heavy-handed irony. Harris articulates a more interesting hypothesis. He takes the Calvinist rhetoric in the First *Enquiry* as his focus and, building on work by M. A. Stewart, locates its place in Hume’s response to his rejection for the Chair at Edinburgh. It is now known that the main opposition to Hume came not from the old guard, but from the more moderate thinkers, Hutcheson among them; and the First *Enquiry* should be seen in part as a response to them. Harris thinks that Hume’s talk of faith is an element of that response. For the moderates, the traditional doctrines of Calvinism, that human reason had been ruined by the Fall, and that faith, and faith alone, is the route to salvation, needed to be superseded by a natural theology and a more optimistic view of reason’s scope. Hume’s sceptical philosophy sets itself against the optimism of the kind of natural religion which seeks to prove that this is the best of all possible worlds. In offering Calvinist rhetoric in conjunction with his own sceptical broadsides, Hume presents his philosophy as more amenable to Christianity than that of his opponents, and inserts himself into the eighteenth-century debate between the moderate and orthodox wings of the Church of Scotland. None of this means that Hume actually endorses Calvinism, as Harris is very careful to emphasize—indeed, the article closes with a caution against trying to determine what Hume’s personal attitude to religion really was.

Marina Frasca-Spada’s contribution considers in tandem Hume’s *Treatise* and Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote*, a novel of 1752, whose central character, Arabella, has a view of the world derived solely from

seventeenth-century French heroic romances. As a consequence, she is unaware of any difference between real life and romantic fiction. Reading the *Treatise* in the company of *The Female Quixote* situates Hume's notorious discussion of belief and its relation to vivacity and 'feeling' against the background of the eighteenth-century culture of sentiment. Hume's reflections on the different feelings and judgements involved in reading history and fiction are thus illumined by, and of a piece with, his remarks on female readers and with contemporary authors' reflections on the impact of books on their different readerships. One of the interesting issues to emerge from this concerns Hume's use of idea as mental object and idea as act of the mind. Enthralling romances may produce very vivid ideas, but not the attitudes associated with beliefs; beliefs are, in the first instance, accounted for in terms of 'manners of conception' or acts of the mind. However, further complications and causes can enter here, and it is not so easy to distinguish true belief from mere liveliness of content—as Frasca-Spada's discussion of the solution of Arabella's case then goes on to illustrate—when 'folly', 'madness', and Quixotic confusion need to be corrected by resorting to 'general rules' and sociability.

Hume's remarks on 'general rules' and his pragmatics of the understanding have recently become the object of increasing attention in Hume scholarship. R. Serjeantson considers them against the background of a dissatisfaction with regard to human nature and human understanding which characterizes philosophy in the seventeenth century. This is the dissatisfaction—variously expressed from Bacon and Descartes to the Port-Royalists and Malebranche to Leibniz and Locke—with the traditional discipline of logic in the face of contemporary developments in the investigations of nature. Within this frame of reference, Hume's rules belong with the attempts to give a less 'artificial' account of the reasoning process, more in tune with the intellectual character of the recent 'experimental natural philosophy'. Hume's approach does, however, have its own distinctive features. The most characteristic is his denial of a clear-cut distinction between the rules which obtain in natural philosophy and those appropriate for the study of human nature and human society. The continuity between the two realms means that the investigation of natural phenomena is guided by the same kind of mental (logical) processes as that of moral and political phenomena. As a result of Serjeantson's reconstruction, Hume's general rules turn out to be crucial to define the distinctive nature and tasks of philosophy. Indeed, it is in the very ability to unify our inevitably fragmented experience by extracting rules from it that Hume singles out the difference between the philosopher—natural and moral—and the 'vulgar'. Moreover, these rules, which turn out to be of such fundamental theoretical importance in the abstract reasonings of the *Treatise*, reappear again, in applied forms, in Hume's political essays, in his historical writing, and in his essays

in criticism. The historian of ideas is thus able to identify a deeper unity in Hume's varied intellectual enterprises.

Serjeantson locates Hume's views of general rules within a fascinating history of ideas developed over two centuries across many countries. Emilio Mazza's essay considers Hume's approach to religion and to the general task of philosophy in light of his philosophical temperament, his scepticism and its mitigations, and does so from a very specific and individual standpoint by exploring in close and colourful detail an episode in the reception of Hume. The main character of Mazza's series of Humean vignettes is Alessandro Verri, a young and lively Italian traveller to Paris and London in 1766–8, who was later to become one of the major figures of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Milan. In the course of his journeys Alessandro described, in his frequent letters to his older brother Pietro, his curiosities, excitement, and discoveries—in particular, Mazza highlights for us his disillusion with Paris and the French thinkers and his subsequent love affair with London and the English. In Alessandro Verri's letters the irritation with the more extreme and flamboyant attitudes of the Parisian *philosophes* on matters of politics and religion is combined with frustration at the quarrels and rivalries within his own cultural milieu. In this way Hume's dispute with Rousseau became, to Alessandro's eyes, a counterpart, or even a kind of amplification, of his own row with Cesare Beccaria. It is in this context that he ended up developing his own interpretation of Hume's mitigated scepticism as a mild, indeed as he put it as a 'meek', alternative to what he perceived as the intellectual pushiness and aggression of the French. According to Mazza, Alessandro's reading of Hume's views on religion and on the manner in which such matters as religion should be discussed casts a new light on Hume's famous denial of ever having met an atheist, on his underlying attitude to religious belief, and indeed, on his philosophy itself as a style of life and thought. It is also telling about the ways in which that philosophy is apt to be appropriated—by philosophers and historians of philosophy today as it was, yesterday, by the French *philosophes* and by such Enlightened Milanese as the Verri brothers.

Susan Manning's essay is devoted to uncovering ideological elements in Hume's theorizing by means of analysis of his language in the *Treatise*. She starts from his view of the self as a 'bundle' or 'heap' of unconnected perceptions. In the *Treatise* Hume famously used the classical image of a 'republic' as a metaphor for the self: in both cases the changes in personnel/perceptions are smooth enough to allow our imagination to construct the notion of an underlying continuity. And this accounts for our tendency to think of each of them as a union above and beyond all turn-over in the elements constituting them. This metaphor is revealing of the more comprehensive presence in the *Treatise* of a reflection on notions of unity, divisibility, and fragmentation. It also alerts us to the frequent presence in Hume's

philosophical prose of political language and images hidden or disguised under a psychological and epistemological veneer. In this sense Hume's philosophy is to be regarded as a crucial genealogical moment of the ideological reflection on union and connection which is characteristic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish and American literary texts as well as in contemporary political rhetoric. And in this respect the *Treatise* itself is, in Manning's view, a particularly powerful expression of the concern with those ideas of integration and disintegration with regard to crucial matters of selfhood and nationhood, but expressed in the abstract and apparently neutral language of metaphysical elaboration on the nature and composition of the physical world. It is also Hume's unified, systematic presentation of his philosophical thought, and expresses the individualism and solitariness of his analytic phase—Hume's Shandean phase, so to speak. That thought was subsequently fragmented by Hume when it was presented in the socialized and 'conversable' form of communication of the essays; and in his *History* the unifying mode is clearly prevalent. The *Treatise's* legacy of anxieties in the face of the risk of disintegration can still be traced, however, both in the opposition it aroused in the Common Sense philosophers, and in the literary production of Enlightenment Scotland and in Scottish Romanticism.

Sarah Pearsall's article is concerned with a fundamental stage in the construction of views of marriage, gender, and authority: the passage from marriage viewed as a contract to marriage as an intimate mutual friendship. The theme is how the moral-philosophical language of sympathy, sensibility, and sentiment was used and altered in the course of concrete negotiations in cases of marital disagreement. A concrete individual life story is set alongside contemporary theoretical elaborations: the transatlantic correspondence of an American couple discussing, after the Revolution, plans for their common future—where should they settle? The ways in which the two spouses negotiate their different views and aspirations are examined alongside Locke's political treatises, Hutcheson's moral writings, and Hume's essay 'On marriage', casting light on the theories' impact on contemporary lives, and thus throwing their features and their limitations into particularly sharp relief. Pearsall bridges the gap between the views of Hume *qua* moral philosopher and the concrete problems and life experiences of his contemporaries.

Our agenda was to assemble a cornucopia of varied Humean traces and 'impressions' of Hume. Yet, as is probably already evident from this introduction, it is easy to identify some recurrent themes. For example, in their different ways the essays by Serjeantson, Frasca-Spada, and Kail all involve attention to the issue of 'general rules' and the pragmatics of belief, which is also central to Sainsbury's analysis. Stewart and Serjeantson go in different, but complementary, directions from a common interest in Hume's

early philosophical training; and both, together with Lipton, discuss Hume's reaction to traditional logic. Hume's attitude to religion attracts new approaches in the papers by Mazza and Harris. Several papers share a preoccupation with the task which Hume attributed to philosophical reflection—for instance Kail, Serjeantson, and Mazza. Many of them concentrate on the more abstruse and challenging text of the *Treatise*, even though most of them refer often to Hume's other philosophical and historical works for comparison or confirmation—witness Stewart, Bell, Manning, and James. The ideological import of Hume's work and figure runs through the papers by Manning, Pearsall, and James. Most of the papers combine the attention to a fine-grained location of Hume's work against the culture of his time and place with the provision of a better understanding or further appreciation of its philosophical significance. And taken as a whole, they show the endless fascination of Hume's writing and thought.