

interpretation

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translated the initial “aussi” as “thus” or “therefore” rather than as “also” (“Also, here below . . .”). In addition, if the phrase “the mind looks forward to things, it looks at things, and it looks back on things” on p. 81 is meant as a translation of St. Augustine’s “animo . . . nam et expectat et attendit et meminit,” I find it extraordinarily free. Finally, there are far too many repetitions of quotations as well as changes with respect to the way those same passages are quoted (see pp. 19 and 39; 23 and 139; 61 and 82; and 33–34, 95, 103, and 115).

Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life. By Donald W. Livingston. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. xiv + 371 pp.: cloth, \$30.00.)

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Livingston’s work reflects and heralds a significant development in Hume scholarship. It is in part a distillation of the current revolution, which views Hume as a positive thinker, not just a negative one, and as more than just an epistemologist who followed Locke and presaged positivism. Hume is viewed from a fresh perspective, and his work is treated as a coherent whole. What Livingston contributes to this revolution is an examination of Hume’s philosophical and historical writings, which is mutually illuminating. The emphasis should be on the ‘mutual’ and, if anything, on the fundamental significance of historical narrative to human thought. Unlike even recent good work, that traces the continuity between the epistemology and Hume’s social and political positions, Livingston reveals how the epistemology is itself better understood from an historical perspective. The result is a picture of Hume as a serious “historicist” philosopher and the originator of a secular philosophical conservatism.

The title of Livingston’s volume, “Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life,” indicates the central role of common life (a judicious improvement over ‘common sense’ and an expression actually used by Hume). Common life is the sum total of past cultural practices that have emerged unplanned and unintended into a framework in terms of which we both interpret the world and make practical decisions. As such, common life contains implicit norms, and the job of the philosopher is to explicate such theoretical and practical norms. In addition, philosophers have the therapeutic function of pointing out when thought, including philosophy, violates the framework of common life.

According to Livingston, true philosophy for Hume “presupposes the authority of common life” (p. 3) which thereby gains a kind of transcendental status. False philosophy, on the other hand, comes about when we try to make common life an object of critical reflection. The attempt to do so is an attempt to turn phi-

osophy itself into an autonomous discipline with an authority all its own. When fully developed, such an autonomy principle results in total skepticism. In addition, there is a curious lack of integrity in false philosophy since it is itself only intelligible when it presupposes the correctness of common life. This is why, as Livingston stresses, the reader must pay attention to the style and rhetoric of Hume's writings as Hume exposes such a lack of integrity, not just to the ostensible argument. Put into contemporary jargon, all theoretical activity presupposes the pretheoretical, but we cannot theorize about the pretheoretical, only explicate it. So history, not natural science, becomes the chief paradigm of knowledge.

Livingston applies this insight to various issues in Hume's epistemology. He argues that Hume's brand of empiricism is historical as opposed to phenomenalism, pragmatism, and logical positivism, which attempt to explain concepts in terms of future experiences. In Hume's system to say that an idea is derived from a past impression is to say something about the conventions of language, specifically that some concepts are past-entailing. For example, to say that someone is a husband or a senator is to refer to social events that took place in the past. Again, to explain a causal judgment is to explicate the historical conventions of making causal judgments. This application of Livingston's thesis deserves serious attention, but, no doubt, the neanderthal analytic reader will greet it with invincible ignorance.

Given the "historicist" framework in Hume, we can better understand and appreciate Hume's critique of atemporal social philosophies (dubbed 'Cartesian' by Livingston), specifically Hume's rejection of natural rights, natural law, and the social contract. In addition, given the historical and secular conservative framework in Hume, we can see more clearly Hume's rejection of false conceptions of the narrative order, such as providential views, whether sacred (for example, Priestley) or secular (for example, Turgot). The extended application to Kant, Condorcet, Hegel, Marx, and liberalism is just as obvious. Finally, Hume's analysis of the Puritan Revolution in his *History of England* is but another example of a critique of a misguided atemporal theory.

The conclusion to Livingston's treatment is most instructive. Burke was led by the pressure of events to reject the French Revolution, but Hume's rejection of false revolution (ideological instead of conservative) is the articulation of a philosophical critique of the autonomy principle. Because it is rooted in a deep theoretical outlook, Hume's view is much more a theory of conservatism than a sentiment or a pose. Hume was also the first to warn of the rise of "metaphysical political parties" animated less by interest than by false philosophies. Such a condition is endemic to the rhetoric and practice of modern political life.

One may quibble here and there, but Livingston has done a superb job. No commentator on Hume's social and political philosophy can dare to ignore this work.