Introduction

'Have a little patience good Charon . . .'

—DAVID HUME[1]

The essays in this collection are all concerned with major figures and central topics in the history of early modern philosophy. Most are concerned, more specifically, with the philosophy of David Hume, one of the great figures in the history of philosophy. The collection represents more than three decades of work and includes both recent and earlier contributions. Throughout this period many significant developments have occurred within the field. I believe, nevertheless, that all of these essays continue to be of interest and relevance for the purposes of contemporary scholarship.

One way of approaching the rationale for a collection of this kind is to consider it on analogy with an exhibition of an artist's work—in particular, a "retrospective." An artist's various works may already be on display in a number of different venues. This does not mean, however, that there is no value in putting on a comprehensive exhibit which brings them together and displays them in a single venue. A good exhibit (or a good art book) will arrange these works together in such a way that each piece can be seen in relation to the others—presenting each individual piece and the whole collection in an entirely different light and perspective. The particular way that an exhibit is "curated" will, therefore, matter greatly not only to how *each work* is seen and understood by the viewer but also to whether or not the collection is seen to fit together *as a whole*. For this reason, the exhibit needs to be organized and

1. Hume's remarks in his last conversation with his close friend Adam Smith, 8th August 1776. Hume's remarks are recorded in Smith's letter to William Strathan [9th November, 1776], as reprinted in *The Letters of David Hume*, J.Y.T. Grieg ed. (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1932), II. 450–2. Details of this conversation are described in Ernest Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 600–1.

Recasting Hume and Early Modern Philosophy. Paul Russell, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2021.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197577264.001.0001

arranged in a way that relates these items in the right way (e.g., by placing them in separate "rooms" that still flow together). Considerations of this general kind also apply to the collection now before the reader.

Drawing on this analogy, this collection is selected and arranged in a manner that highlights and draws attention to features and qualities of the specific contributions, as well as to various interconnections among them, that might otherwise be lost or overlooked. While each individual essay serves to provide a fresh and different perspective on some particular aspect or issue, the aim of the collection, taken as whole, is to show how these otherwise dispersed and fragmented concerns and interests are relevant to each other, as well as to various topics in contemporary philosophy. Presenting a collection of this kind in a single volume, and in a manageable format, should also make it possible for readers to get a complete picture of the major contributions on offer, without them having to read longer and more demanding studies that they otherwise may not have time for.

The fundamental aim of this collection is to provide a more complete account of Hume's philosophy and of its enduring interest and significance. The unifying thread, running through most if not all of these essays, concerns the relevance of Hume's *irreligious* motivations and objectives to his philosophy. No proper contemporary appreciation of Hume's overall contribution can afford to downplay, much less ignore, this central theme in his work. There is no major work by Hume, nor any major topic that he addressed, that is untouched by his core irreligious aims and objectives. It is these motivations and concerns that not only serve to shape and structure his philosophy but also account for the way that it is related to the work of other major figures of his own period. Whatever other important concerns and interests Hume may have had, they must be integrated with and understood in terms of his fundamental irreligious motivations. While some of the essays in this collection emphasize this feature of Hume's philosophy more than others, it is a theme that surfaces, one way or another, throughout.

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The contents of this collection are divided into five parts with sixteen essays in total. The contributions are arranged under the headings that cover metaphysics and epistemology, free will, ethics, religion, and the general interpretation of Hume's philosophy. As already mentioned, the majority of these essays focus on some aspect of David Hume's

philosophy. Other important figures discussed include Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, Nicolas Malebranche, Pierre Bayle, Samuel Clarke, George Berkeley, Joseph Butler, Adam Smith, and Baron D'Holbach—along with briefer discussions of a number of other less well-known figures. Several of these essays also aim to relate these historical and interpretative issues directly to various debates in contemporary philosophy.

The following is a summary and review of the essays as they fall into their relevant parts or "clusters":

I. *Metaphysics and Epistemology*: Among Hume's most important contributions to philosophy are his discussions of causation and necessity, the problem of induction, and the existence of the external world. The interpretation of his views on these topics is, however, a matter of considerable debate. Each essay in this part of the collection offers a distinctive interpretation of Hume's arguments and aims on these topics. The first argues for the relevance of Hume's views concerning the ontology of "double existence" for his "two definitions" of causation. An appreciation of the perception/object distinction, I maintain, is crucial for understanding Hume's commitments relating to the nature of causation. Among other things, this interpretation is also very relevant to the ongoing contemporary debate about Hume's "causal realism" (an issue that I briefly discuss in an "Appendix" to this essay). The second essay is on the issue of what is now generally referred to as "the problem of induction." In this essay I argue that both Hume's skeptical and naturalist motivations have to be explained with reference to his more fundamental irreligious aim to discredit the doctrine of a future state—particularly as defended by Joseph Butler in the *Analogy of Religion*. In the third essay I take up Hume's influential but deeply puzzling views on the existence of the external world. After examining the views of Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Bayle, and others, I argue that Hume's core concern is to show that the inevitable deception of our senses serves as a basis for denying the existence of God. The last essay in this part of the collection is an examination of the extended debate in Britain in the first half of the 18th century about causation, causal reasoning and the scope and limits of philosophy. The discussion and analysis of these limits is focused on their particular relevance for cosmological issues and various problems of religion. The issues addressed in this essay are

situated at the interface between metaphysics and epistemology, as found in the writings of Clarke, Berkeley, and Hume, the three key figures around which this analysis is presented. One particularly significant conclusion drawn from this analysis is that the framework of "British Empiricism" is wholly inadequate for understanding this debate and the views of the principal philosophical figures concerned (an issue I return to in two essays in the last part of this collection).

II. *Free Will and Moral Luck*: A central concern of my own work over the years has been the topic of free will, with much of this being directed at early modern contributions. The essays in this part begin with an examination of Hobbes's compatibilism and the criticisms it has been subject to, beginning with those advanced by Hobbes's contemporary John Bramhall. At the heart of much of this criticism has been the objection that Hobbes's conception of "liberty" fails to distinguish responsible agents from those who are not. I argue that this criticism is misplaced because it turns on a misrepresentation of Hobbes as a "simple compatibilist," one who holds that voluntariness serves as a full and satisfactory basis for moral agency. Contrary to this account, I maintain that Hobbes holds that a proper resolution of the free will controversy rests with his contractarian moral theory, not with his definition of "liberty" as such. The second essay in this part pursues a similar set of aims in relation to Hume. Along with Hobbes, Hume is widely regarded as the principal representative of classical compatibilism. In "Hume's 'Lengthy Digression'" I describe an alternative naturalistic interpretation of Hume's arguments and aims and contrast it with the classical compatibilist account. The central thrust of the naturalistic interpretation turns on the crucial role that moral sentiment plays in our understanding of the nature and conditions of moral responsibility. This is a strategy, I suggest, that anticipates key elements of P. F. Strawson's hugely influential discussion in "Freedom and Resentment," one of the most important contributions to the contemporary free will debate. Hume's naturalistic position on this subject is also relevant, I argue, to Bernard Williams's important and recent critique of "the morality system." The next essay in this part of the collection provides an analysis and critique of Hume's views on the relationship between responsibility and punishment. I argue that Hume is a "teleological retributivist" and that in important respects his views resemble the position defended by H.L.A. Hart, one of the great figures of late-20th-century legal philosophy. In explaining the

divergent but overlapping justificatory issues that arise for considerations of responsibility and punishment, I also contrast Hume's teleological retributivism with Adam Smith's positive retributivist account. The fourth and last essay in part II explores Smith's (rather neglected) views on the subject of moral luck. I argue that although Smith's contribution runs into significant difficulties and objections, and his core claims are unconvincing, what he has to say on this subject is still of considerable interest and relevance to the contemporary debate. Among other things, it provides an approach to the problem of consequential luck that rests on a naturalistic theory of responsibility, as opposed to the more familiar Kantian approaches (e.g., as we find in the work of Thomas Nagel).

III. *Ethics, Virtue, and Optimism*: The first essay in the third part of this volume provides a general overview of Hume's theory of virtue. Among the issues and topics taken up are passion and character, the variations and vulnerabilities of virtue, voluntariness and moral luck, and the relevance of religion to our virtues and vices. The second, accompanying essay in this section is a discussion of the relationship between Bernard Williams's ethical views and those of Hume. Although Williams had great admiration for Hume, he increasingly came to see Hume as endorsing "a somewhat terminal degree of optimism." In this essay I explore and assess this charge against Hume, arguing, among other things, that the gap between Williams and Hume, in respect of optimism and pessimism, is not as great as Williams took it to be. This essay is not only directly relevant to the first essay in this part of the collection, on Hume's virtue ethics, it also addresses a number of issues taken up by essays in the second part of this collection (e.g., relating to Hume's proto-Strawsonian views on moral agency and free will).

IV. *Skepticism, Religion, and Atheism*: This part of the collection consists of three essays that examine Hume's views on central problems in the philosophy of religion and a fourth that concerns Adam Smith's view on this subject. The first essay in part IV considers the relationship between Hume's views about the origins and roots of religion in human nature and his practical objective to discredit or dislodge the role of religion in human life (i.e., his "Lucretian mission"). It is argued, in particular, that there is no fundamental conflict or inconsistency in his position in the sense that his "Lucretian mission" is in some sense self-refuting or self-defeating. The second essay defends

a (hard) skeptical atheist reading of Hume's position on the subject of the existence of God. The interpretation advanced argues that even with respect to a "minimal" or "attenuated" understanding of divine existence, Hume's position is not simply one of suspension of belief or mere doubt—he is committed to denying any such hypothesis as unreasonable and running contrary to our experience. It is also argued that Hume's (mitigated) skeptical principles are not, in practice, inconsistent with his atheism. The appendix to this essay argues that Hume's (hard skeptical atheistic) arguments can be easily recalibrated to accommodate an abductive framework, contrary to what some recent critics of Hume's have suggested. The essay that follows, "'True Religion' and Hume's Practical Atheism", although it returns to the topic of the practical value of religion, devotes most of its attention to the question of Hume's attitude to "true religion." This issue is evaluated by way of a contrast between Spinoza's doctrine of "true religion" and D'Holbach's "militant atheism." The essay concludes with a discussion of the relevance of these issues to the contemporary debate about "new atheism." In "Irreligion and the Impartial Spectator in Smith's Moral System," the last essay in part IV, I consider Smith's moral theory in relation to his theological beliefs and attitudes. Smith's views on the subject of religion are difficult to decipher and, although plainly of considerable interest, they have not attracted a great deal of attention or commentary. In this essay I argue that behind a veneer of orthodoxy there are significant irreligious undertones apparent in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (and that these became more pronounced in later editions of this work).

V. *Irreligion and the Unity of Hume's Thought*: The fifth and final part of this collection consists of two essays that are both concerned with the question of "British Empiricism"—especially as it relates to the general interpretation and significance of Hume's philosophy. The first essay begins with an account of the familiar view of Hume as being one of the most prominent—perhaps *the* most prominent—figure in the British Empiricist tradition. Having provided an account of this general interpretation, in which skeptical concerns and epistemological interests are particularly salient, I go on to describe the alternative irreligious interpretation, which does much to discredit the framework of "British Empiricism" as a way of understanding Hume's philosophy. The essay concludes with a discussion of the way in which

Hume's (established) legacy is, nevertheless, indisputably bound up with the Empiricism versus Rationalism schema and maintains that we must find a way to fit together myth and reality in the picture of Hume that emerges from all of this. The last contribution, which concludes the whole collection, ties together many of the overlapping themes and concerns that are discussed in a number of the earlier essays. Unlike these other contributions, however, this essay provides a general overview of the irreligious interpretation of Hume's entire philosophical system and contribution, beginning with the *Treatise* and extending to his later works. The strengths and merits of the irreligious interpretation, I maintain, serve to discredit British Empiricism as a credible framework of interpretation of Hume's philosophy and expose it as a myth.

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It may also be helpful if I make a few remarks about how this collection relates to two earlier studies of Hume's philosophy that I have published. The first of these was *Freedom and Moral Sentiment* (Oxford University Press, 1995), which presents a systematic examination of Hume's views on freedom and moral responsibility. The key theme of this work is a defence of a "naturalistic" account of Hume's compatibilist commitments. Clearly, the essays in the second part of this collection, on free will and moral luck, are all closely related to this earlier study. The essay on responsibility and punishment, although it was published separately, eventually became a chapter of *Freedom and Moral Sentiment* (Chap. 10). The first essay in this collection, on Hume's "two definitions of cause," was also part of *Freedom and Moral Sentiment* (Chap. 2). In that context it served to explain a crucial feature of Hume's overall position on this subject: namely, why he thought that misunderstanding about the nature of causation as it exists in the operations of *matter* had led on to further confusion on the subject of free will. For the purposes of this collection, however, it is crucial that both of these essays be unshackled from the framework of *Freedom and Moral Sentiment* and considered independently, with a view to other essays and themes (without, of course, losing sight of their relevance to the general argument of *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*).

If there is any fundamental, unifying theme that holds the essays in this collection together, it is, as already mentioned, the subject of

Hume's irreligious aims and intentions. This is also the key theme of my 2008 study *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*. This study, as the title indicates, is more narrowly focused on Hume's arguments and intentions in the *Treatise*. In contrast with this, my concerns and interests in the essays included in this collection extend well beyond the *Treatise*, although the *Treatise* remains of *fundamental* importance for understanding Hume's philosophy *as a whole*. Three of the essays in this collection appeared as chapters in *The Riddle* (although all were also published as independent essays prior to that). In this context, however, they are allowed to stand on their own and be considered in relation to Hume's philosophy more broadly conceived and as discussed in other essays in the collection. It is particularly important, for example, to appreciate how Hume's irreligious aims and intentions in the *Treatise* (e.g., relating to causation, induction, and the external world) stand in relation to his later work (e.g., the *Dialogues*), as well as in relation to the general interpretation of Hume's philosophy and its legacy (as examined and discussed in part V). In general, what is crucial about this collection is that it *extends and advances* the arguments and interpretations on offer in my earlier study. It shows, in particular, that this theme extends to many of Hume's other (later) works and unifies his philosophy as a whole. In the absence of this collection much of this might be lost to the reader. The close reader will also notice that there are a few points of evolution and development in my own thinking about Hume and the irreligious interpretation that I have advanced and defended over a period of several decades. Over the years I have come to the view that the irreligious interpretation needs to be *strengthened*, both in respect of the importance of irreligious motivations for shaping and structuring Hume's entire philosophy and in respect of the extent or degree of his atheistic commitments.

While the aim of this collection is certainly heavily focused on the importance of Hume's irreligious intentions for understanding his philosophy, it is in no way my objective to close off all other avenues of investigation and discussion that might lead away from this narrower focus. On the contrary, it is my hope and intention that these essays, individually and together, might encourage any number of different points and perspectives from which to consider the issues, texts, and arguments that Hume examines and discusses. While it is certainly important to clear away misunderstandings and misinterpretations of these matters, and to provide an accurate and convincing way of reading

and understanding them, there remain many worthwhile and valuable points of entry and exit for the many readers who come to Hume's work. Nevertheless, no one should enter—much less exit—Hume's philosophy without a clear appreciation of his lifelong ambition to contribute to the "downfall of superstition."[2]

2. '. . . "Have a little patience, good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of the public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition." But Charon would then lose all temper and decency. "You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years. Do you fancy I will grant you a lease for so long a term? Get into the boat this instant, you lazy loitering rogue." ' [*Letters*, II, 451]