

Review

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Review by: Paul Russell

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## Critical Notice

ANNETTE BAIER, *A Progress Of Sentiments*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1991. Pp. xi + 333.

... it must be extreme hard to find out the opinions and meanings of those men that are gone from us long ago, and have left us no other signification thereof but their books.... (Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, F. Toennies, ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1927], I, 13.8)

Ironies surround the reception and influence of Hume's *Treatise*. In a short autobiographical sketch written near the end of his life Hume claimed, famously, that his *Treatise*<sup>1</sup> 'fell dead-born from the press.' His 'want of success,' he thought, 'had proceeded more from the manner than the matter' of his work.<sup>2</sup> In the Advertisement to the posthumously published 1777 edition of his *Essays and Treatises* Hume dismisses the *Treatise* as a 'juvenile work' and disowns it in favor of his later writings.<sup>3</sup> Time has shown that Hume's attitude to the *Treatise* was rather ill-judged. Whatever its failings in respect of style and presentation — and Hume certainly exaggerates them — the *Treatise* constitutes Hume's most substantial and sophisticated contribution to philosophy. In order

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1 *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1978). Hereafter abbreviated as T.

2 Hume, 'My Own Life,' in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, Eugene F. Miller, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics 1985), xxxiv-xxxv. *Essays* hereafter abbreviated as ESY.

3 The Advertisement is reprinted in Hume, *Enquiries*, L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975), 2. Hume's attitude to the *Treatise* is discussed in N. Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study Of Its Origin and Central Doctrines* (London: Macmillan 1941), Ch. 24.

to achieve the easy elegance of the *Enquiries* Hume had to cut much of the rich, fine cloth that constitutes the detail of the *Treatise*. We have done well, I believe, to ignore the author's assessment of the relative merits of his own works.

Other ironies surround the reception and influence of the *Treatise*. This work received a particularly hostile reception in Hume's native Scotland. The following century Scottish philosophy turned firmly in the direction of Kant and Hegel. The culture that had given rise to the *Treatise* seemingly had — with a few notable exceptions — little taste for it.<sup>4</sup> In England, by contrast, Hume's philosophy found a more receptive audience. In particular, several of the more gifted English philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — most notably Mill, Russell, and Ayer — championed the basic doctrines of Hume's *Treatise*. This turn of events, however, has not been without its drawbacks. Instead of considering the philosophy of the *Treatise* as a whole, commentators and critics (especially since the turn of the century) have been content to carve the *Treatise* into small, digestible slices. They have selected 'passages' which have been deemed interesting primarily because they anticipate subsequent developments in the empiricist tradition. On this approach, Hume's thought in the *Treatise* becomes fragmented and disjointed. His work is reduced to a series of loosely connected philosophical discussions that are read largely in isolation from each other (e.g. causation, perception, personal identity, free will, morality, etc.). What is lost by this approach is, obviously, any sense of Hume's deeper interests and purposes. Nothing seems to hold the *Treatise* together as a unified, coherent work.

For more than half a century Hume scholars have been increasingly concerned to articulate Hume's objectives and intentions in a way that is faithful both to the text as a whole and to the historical circumstances in which it was written. Before the end of the Second War a number of important studies and advances in Hume scholarship had brought the traditional skeptical interpretation into some question.<sup>5</sup> Most impor-

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4 Details concerning the reaction to Hume's *Treatise*, and to his philosophy in general, can be found in Ernest C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1980).

5 The traditional skeptical interpretation is usually associated with critics of Hume such as Thomas Reid, James Beattie, and T.H. Green. On this see, e.g., Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 3-8. Rev. Sydney Smith provides a brief and neat summary of this view of Hume (Introduction to *Sketches of Moral Philosophy*): 'Bishop Berkeley destroyed this world in one volume octavo; and nothing remained, after his time, but mind; which experienced a similar fate from the hand of Mr. Hume in 1739.'

tantly, it was argued by Norman Kemp Smith that Hume's philosophy could be 'more adequately described as naturalistic than as skeptical, and that its main governing principle is the thorough subordination ... of reason to the feelings and instincts.'<sup>6</sup> Smith supported this general interpretation with a fairly detailed analysis of Hume's historical context and circumstances. He argued that it was Hutcheson and Newton, as much as Locke and Berkeley, who shaped the structure and character of Hume's project. Until quite recently Smith's 'naturalistic' interpretation established itself as something of the new orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> The textual and contextual foundations of this alternative account are, however, every bit as suspect as the original skeptical (Locke-Berkeley-Hume) account.

There is, therefore, an irony inherent in the present state of Hume scholarship. While there has been an enormous improvement in our understanding of the detail of Hume's life and thought as it is manifest in the *Treatise*, there is nevertheless as much disagreement as ever as to how Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise* should be characterized and described. Annette Baier's *A Progress of Sentiments* (hereafter abbreviated as PS) is a significant and ambitious attempt to make further headway over this difficult and much disputed terrain.

## I Hume's *Treatise*: The Baier Necessities

According to Baier, Hume scholars generally agree that there is some 'unifying goal' directing Hume's thought throughout the *Treatise*, but they do not agree about how that goal can be best characterized (PS, viii). Baier argues that Hume's thought in the *Treatise* is essentially dynamic and dramatic in nature. The *Treatise*, she maintains, should be read as exhibiting 'a progress of thought and sentiment' (PS, viii; cp. 27, 158, 181). Hume's method and approach in the *Treatise* involves a process of continually correcting, amending and expanding on the principles and positions that he has already taken up (PS, 158). This is why Hume claims that his work acquires 'new force as it advances' (T, 455). Once the dynamic and dramatic features of Hume's thought are properly appre-

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6 Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 84; cp. 11 and 45

7 See, e.g., Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1977), xi. Stroud says that his study presents 'a more systematic and more consistent naturalistic interpretation' of Hume. Compare, however, Terence Penelhum, *Hume* (London: Macmillan 1975), 17-18.

ciated then, on Baier's account, the nature of his intentions in various specific passages of the *Treatise* take on a rather different shape and appearance. It is, accordingly, one of Baier's central concerns in this study to show us that we cannot properly understand the parts of Hume's *Treatise* unless we first acquire a better feeling for the whole.

Baier maintains that the conclusion of Book One of Hume's *Treatise* 'serves as a microcosm of the work as a whole' (PS, 27). The dynamic structure of the concluding section of Book One, it is argued, mirrors the dynamic structure of the whole *Treatise*. For this reason Baier's study begins with a detailed analysis of this section of Hume's book. The conclusion of Book One, Baier claims, is 'the most dramatic moment in Hume's *Treatise*' (PS, 2). At this point in the *Treatise* Hume takes a 'philosophical turn' which sends the reader in an entirely different direction in Books Two and Three. The turn involves a move away from the 'solitary intellectualist reason' of an isolated 'Cartesian intellect' and takes us in the direction of a 'more passionate and sociable successor' (PS, 21, 285). In the early parts of the conclusion of Book One — as with Book One taken as a whole — Hume exposes the contradictions and illusions which intellectualist or rationalist conceptions of reason lead us into. It is necessary to take 'reason' to the 'end of its tether,' on this account, so that sentiment can gradually take on its guiding role (PS, 20). The 'dialectic' and 'transitions' in the later stages of this section (i.e. T, 269-74) are interpreted by Baier as 'dictated by feeling' and viewed as 'swings in moods, not zigzags of argument' (PS, 20). However, according to Baier reason is not abandoned by Hume but is, rather, 'reconstructed, moralized and made sociable' (PS, 285; cp. 278).

Baier's interpretation of the conclusion of Book One provides us with the framework of her general interpretation of the *Treatise*. Hume, she says, begins the *Treatise* by showing the fundamental limitations of 'rationalist reason.' This is done in order to lay the foundations for 'the crucial Humean turn, from intellect to feeling' (PS, 20). This means reason is transformed into 'active, socialized reason' as guided by our calm moral sentiments (PS, 288). For Hume, Baier argues, it is 'nonsense to see reason and passion as potentially opposed combatants' (PS, 160). The whole force of Baier's overall interpretation is to show how Hume's philosophy is concerned to bring these elements of human life together — he seeks to 'unite feeling and thought' (PS, 181). Rationalist reason, unguided by passion and sentiment, brings human beings to a condition of melancholy and despair. This is not where Hume's philosophy leaves us. On the contrary, with reason 'reconstituted' in the way described, we are left without 'any hint of melancholy' (PS, 285).

On Baier's interpretation, Hume's *Treatise* initiates a 'discipline of reflection on human nature' (PS, 20). This discipline is broader than the science of psychology as we now understand it. Reflection on human

nature is practiced by a self-conscious animal that has a capacity to examine and evaluate its own thought and feelings. This sort of philosophy turns our attention 'towards human persons, instead of towards God and the universe' (PS, 25). The point of this discipline is simply to acquire self-understanding and to secure the sorts of pleasure that such reflection naturally brings us (PS, 22-6).

The chapters that follow Baier's opening discussion of the conclusion of Book One constitute a running commentary on Hume's text. Baier gives fairly even weight to all three books of the *Treatise*.<sup>8</sup> Although Baier's discussion is both historically and critically sensitive, these are not her primary concerns. Rather, her primary objective is to present a sympathetic and lucid account of Hume's position on the various specific issues that are touched on in the *Treatise*. Her method for achieving this end is a careful and detailed examination of Hume's text.

Baier does not interpret Hume as a Pyrrhonian or radical skeptic. Hume's 'true skepticism' is moderate in nature. It is a skepticism that does not reject all claims to causal knowledge, but insists only that such claims be accompanied by an appropriate diffidence and willingness to be corrected (PS, 58). Indeed, Baier argues, Hume cannot reject all claims to causal knowledge since he is 'giving us a causal account of our causal inferences' (PS, 59; cp. 99-100). Hume's skeptical doubts 'are directed at overinflated claims concerning "pure" intellect and what it can make "intelligible"' (PS, 61). Hume's constructive concern is to discover those mental causes of our beliefs that constitute 'good reasons.' 'The whole *Treatise*,' says Baier, 'searches for mental operations that can bear their own survey, sorting those that can ... from those that get into "manifest contradictions" or self-destructive conflict when turned on themselves' (PS, 97). When Hume says that 'belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cognitive part of our natures' (T, 183) this is said, Baier maintains, 'to disown any ultimately skeptical intentions, not to embrace them' (PS, 97). Baier supports this general interpretation of

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8 The traditional skeptical interpretation tends to place heavy emphasis on the metaphysics and epistemology of Book One. Kemp Smith did much to alter this slant on the *Treatise*. Unfortunately, however, Kemp Smith gives very little attention to Book Two — which he regards as 'the least satisfactory of the three Books which constitute the *Treatise*' (*Philosophy of David Hume*, 160). Similar sentiments concerning the merits and relevance of Book Two have been expressed recently by Antony Flew (*David Hume: Philosopher of Moral Science* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986], 122). Pall Ardal's *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1966) — a work which Baier refers to as a 'recent classic' (PS, ix) — has done a great deal to restore interest in the contents of Book Two and the way that it relates to the *Treatise* as a whole.

Hume's views on causal reasoning with an illuminating discussion of several neglected sections of Part III of Book One — specifically, sections 11, 12, and 13 on probability, and section 15 on the 'rules' of inference.

Although Hume is satisfied at the end of Part III of Book One with 'his system's story about how we can tell what really causes what,' Baier suggests that things change dramatically in Part IV (PS, 105). In this part of the *Treatise*, it is said, Hume sets out to look at skeptical systems from the perspective of a thinker who is as 'resolutely a single unaided thinker as Descartes in his meditations' (PS, 106; cp. 33). Hume, Baier claims, finds Cartesian-style justification wanting. He is, indeed, particularly concerned to show that skeptical conclusions are a direct result of ignoring or overlooking the social basis of human knowledge and understanding. We inescapably rely on, and hence must trust, the 'testimony' of our fellows no less than the testimony of our senses. If this were not possible then we would not be able to free ourselves from the isolation and despair that skeptical systems lead us into (PS, 119-22; cp. 27).<sup>9</sup>

Baier has a number of interesting observations to make on Hume on personal identity. Her discussion of Hume's analogy between the mind (i.e. 'our stream of thought') and rivers, for example, brings to the fore Hume's concern with the action of the mind considered as an explanation of its (psychological) identity (PS, 125). Even more interesting is Baier's discussion of Hume on personal identity as he presents it in Book Two. In Book Two, Baier claims, Hume 'seems to realize that the best picture of the human soul is the human body' (PS, 131). The philosophical worries raised in Book One and the Appendix 'exist only for [the contrived] solipsistic intellectualist views of unique inner selves' (PS, 138). In this way, it is argued that Hume in Book Two presents people as 'essentially incarnate' and social beings. In seeing ourselves as others see us, and as we see them, we acquire a better understanding of our self than we ever could through private introspection (PS, 139-42).

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9 Hume, of course, is often interpreted as being an epistemological 'individualist' of the sort that is typical of British empiricist philosophy. See, e.g., Jacob Bronowski, *Science and Human Values* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1964), 60-1. Ironically, Bronowski goes on to defend the very thesis which Baier attributes to Hume: 'The positivist would break [scientific knowledge] into still simpler pieces, and would then propose to verify each. But it is an illusion, and a fatal illusion, to think that he could verify them himself.... [All] our knowledge, has been built up communally; there would be no astrophysics, there would be no history, there would not even be language, if man were a solitary animal' (62). This is an interesting thesis, although I find Hume's presentation of it more obscure than Baier's discussion suggests.

Baier's commentary next turns to Hume on the passions and moral life. These chapters of *A Progress of Sentiments* reach an especially high plain of scholarly achievement. It is not possible to do complete justice to Baier's rich and comprehensive exposition of this aspect of Hume's thought, but a few basic themes stand out. The attack on philosophical 'rationalism' that was launched in Book One is continued in Books Two and Three. Although Hume sometimes misrepresents himself, it is Hume's view that our passions, in so far as they presuppose beliefs, 'incorporate the influence of reason' (PS, 159-60; cp. 164). Our passions do not copy things, but they certainly refer to them — an observation which is especially important in light of the fact that 'Hume's whole treatment of our passions makes them fundamentally person-directed' (PS, 52). Once again, therefore, Hume is concerned to establish the inter-dependency of reason and sentiment. Contrary to the standard view, it is argued that Hume holds that reason's influence on the passions, will and action is considerable (see esp. PS, 180-1).

The critical side of Hume's thoughts about morality, Baier suggests, is directed against those 'rationalist moralists' whose morality 'typically takes the form of commandments or laws, which are supposed to produce obedience' (PS, 184; cp. 169, 195). Baier notes that this attack on the 'rationalist moralists' is closely connected with Hume's hostility to Christian (self-denying and monkish) morality (e.g. PS, 200-7, 214-16). Hume's alternative version of morality 'will minimize flat prohibitions' (PS, 169). It takes the form of 'a list of approved "characters" [i.e. virtues] with reasons why we approve of them' (PS, 184). The virtues, on this account, are passions approved by moral sentiment (PS, 188-9, 195-6). So moral sentiment 'is a sentiment or pleasure taken in other human pleasures or passions. It is the sentiment of humankind for kinds of human sentiment' (PS, 196). Hume's moral system, says Baier, 'is a happiness-bent one, and gives a central place to the agreeable' (PS, 202; cp. 219). It is nevertheless very important, Baier argues, to note that Hume does not reduce all virtues to the (utilitarian) 'useful' — he retains a separate and distinct class of virtues which are approved simply because they are 'agreeable' (PS, 204-5; cp. 211-15).

Baier briskly dismisses any effort to approach Hume's moral philosophy in terms of either 'emotivism' or the more fashionable contemporary concern with 'realism.' She points out that Hume's position is entirely different from the emotivist's 'Hurrah-Boo theory.' It is crucial to Hume's moral system that we are capable of taking up the (impersonal) moral point of view and that we be able to articulate and share our moral evaluations with each other (PS, 190-1). Similarly, Baier does not find the language of realism 'very helpful for reflection on moral evaluation, or for reflection on Hume's views about it' (PS, 194). The important point, she argues, is that the character traits that we morally evaluate are really



'out there' (PS, 195; cp. 191, 193) and that the sentiments which 'stain' these characters with some relevant moral evaluation are also 'psychologically real traits' (PS, 194). There is, therefore, 'no good reason to see [Hume] as likening the status of virtues to that of "secondary qualities" if these are seen as somehow less real than others, labelled "primary" ones' (PS, 194).<sup>10</sup>

The longest and most substantial chapter in Baier's book concerns Hume's views on justice (ch. 10). Baier's approach in this chapter differs somewhat from the discussion in the other chapters. More specifically, she allows herself more scope for a certain degree of philosophical criticism of Hume's position, and she also seeks to tie up Hume's views more carefully with his historical predecessors. Baier is especially concerned to assess and compare Hume's position on justice with that of Hobbes (e.g. PS, 222-5, 228, 250-4). For both Hobbes and Hume reason has an important role to play in so far as human beings must 'invent' a solution to the problem of social cooperation (see, e.g., PS, 176, 229-34). Baier maintains, however, that some prominent contemporary followers of Hobbes (e.g. David Gauthier) have exaggerated the similarities between Hobbes and Hume on this subject, and that in consequence they misrepresent or overlook what is distinctive and particularly interesting about Hume's position on justice (PS, 250-3). Baier points out two especially important features which distinguish Hume's 'artificial' morality from that which Hobbes put forward. First, on Hume's account justice arises from within a social context. Unlike 'the typical contractarian parties,' Hume's convenors have 'sympathy with each other's concerns and a limited amount of generosity' (PS, 251). These individuals are not 'solitary and forlorn' (PS, 236), but on the contrary, they already have experience of the advantages of cooperation with family and friends (PS, 228). Second, and related to the first point, Hume's convenors of justice do not 'aim to eliminate a climate of violence against persons, but a climate of incommodious insecurity of possession of material goods' (PS, 223). So society, on this account, 'first becomes advantageous not as a control on aggressive impulses, but for what it brings in increased power, ability and mutual aid' (PS, 224). Baier, in short, does not deny that Hume was 'helped by Thomas Hobbes's earlier discussion' on these matters, but she rejects the suggestion that either Hume's problem(s) or his solution(s) is basically that found in Hobbes. What Baier has to say on this aspect of Hume's philosophy is, I think,

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10 Baier has the work of John Mackie (*Hume's Moral Theory* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1980]) particularly in mind in this context. See her references at PS, 312 (nn. 21, 22, 23, and 24).

both interesting and well-supported. However, I also take the view that Baier rather downplays the (equally) significant affinities and parallels between these two thinkers' positions and strategies — and that to this extent she exaggerates the divide between them.<sup>11</sup>

Baier's book concludes with some helpful further elaboration on the general interpretation provided in the opening chapter. 'Hume's project all along,' she says, 'has not been so much to dethrone reason as to enlarge our conception of it, to make it social and passionate' (PS, 278). Reason, when it works, produces truth as its effect, and this consists essentially in agreement. What is true is trustworthy and reliable; and this holds in both epistemological and moral contexts (PS, 285-6).<sup>12</sup> In this way, Baier concludes that 'after Hume had employed skepticism to subvert both rationalist reason and fantastic skepticism itself, and placed moral sentiment on the vacated throne, the power drama is repeated, as reason is given shelter under the throne occupied by calm moral sentiment. But this time, once reason gets its seal and patent from the moral sentiment, it proves not the imbecility of its sovereign, but her competence, so that it strengthens rather than weakens the governing power' (PS, 287).

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11 It is significant that it is not just contemporaries such as Gauthier, Mackie, and Jean Hampton who maintain that Hume's theory of justice bears a strong resemblance to the position of Hobbes. Hume's own contemporaries took very much the same view. One early review of the *Treatise* says, for example, that Hume's views on the origin of justice and property are simply 'the system of Hobbes dressed up in a new taste.' (For further details see my 'Skepticism and Natural Religion in Hume's *Treatise*,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 [1988] 247-65, at 255-7.) I would agree with Baier, however, that there are important differences to be noted between these thinkers in this sphere. More importantly, Baier is certainly right to challenge John Mackie's strongly Hobbesian reading of Hume's moral philosophy (cp. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 151).

12 I have some serious reservations about this account of Hume's conception of truth. See, in particular, Hume's remarks in his essay 'The Sceptic' (ESY, 168: 'To this operation...'). In this essay Hume argues that the foundations of the distinction between truth and falsehood are not the same as those that support the distinctions that we draw concerning 'the qualities of beautiful and deformed, desirable and odious.' More specifically, what is true or false, he claims, does not depend 'upon the particular fabric or structure of the mind,' but rather on 'a real, though often unknown standard, in the nature of things.' In the case of morals and aesthetics, however, all relevant distinctions require that we 'feel a sentiment of delight and uneasiness, approbation or blame.' I take these remarks to suggest that truth is not simply a matter of (social) agreement for Hume, but that moral distinctions — in so far as they depend on the structure of human feeling — are basically a matter of established human agreement (i.e. shared feeling).

## II

The running commentary and exposition of Hume's *Treatise* provided by Baier is of a very high standard indeed. Every chapter of *A Progress of Sentiments* is balanced and reliable. Baier's interpretations of the various specific aspects of Hume's thought are, moreover, frequently fresh and original. They bring into sharper focus important but neglected elements of Hume's philosophy. The exposition of Hume's moral philosophy in the *Treatise* is, I think, as good or better than anything that is currently available. Throughout this study the intricate inter-connections holding among the diverse parts of Hume's philosophy are carefully stitched together. If there is any general weakness in Baier's presentation and discussion it is that it lacks the sort of critical bite that some readers may be looking for (and that Baier provides in some parts of her study: e.g. ch. 10). Nevertheless, it is, on the whole, a clear virtue of Baier's study that it avoids the temptation to cloud and confuse the exposition offered by inserting superficial and unhelpful critical asides. The task at hand — to convey an understanding of the sense and substance of Hume's thought — is more than demanding enough.

There is one particular aspect of Hume's thought in the *Treatise* which, in my view, Baier does not treat with the thoroughness and detail required. What Baier has to say about Hume's position on free will is, I think, rather slight and insubstantial (PS, 152-7). Baier's account provides the reader with no clear view of the basic structure of Hume's arguments on this subject, nor even the nature of the problem that he was addressing. A few insightful and unusual observations are made, but taken as a whole the discussion of this issue is too sketchy to be very helpful or enlightening.

It is especially unfortunate that Baier has treated the free will issue in such a casual manner. In the first place, as other commentators such as Stroud have pointed out, what Hume has to say on this subject 'is important and famous.'<sup>13</sup> At the time that Hume wrote the *Treatise* the free will issue was hotly debated and was regarded as an issue of the greatest moral, social and theological concern. Clearly this is a problem that relates to our conception of human kind and our place in nature, the presuppositions of moral life and practice, and to the fundamental questions of religion and faith. It is, moreover, an issue which has direct ramifications for other major parts of Hume's philosophy. In my view,

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13 Stroud, *Hume*, 144; see also Penelhum, *Hume*: 'It is not, however, his attempt...' (120).

Hume's discussion of free will (i.e. *Treatise*, Bk. II, Pt. iii, sect 1 & 2) is a pivotal section of the *Treatise* — one in which Hume ties together his views about causation, the nature of mind, and moral life. It is, in other words, the bridge over which Hume travels from metaphysics to morals, and it does much to bind the contents of the *Treatise* into a coherent whole. It is a notable merit of Baier's book that she makes 'the contemplation of character' the central concern of Hume's approach to morals. I would argue, however, that we cannot properly understand what Hume has to say about the nature and conditions of 'the contemplation of character,' and how it relates to his theory of the passions, without a more detailed account of the relevance of his views on free will to these matters.<sup>14</sup>

### III

The specialized Hume scholar will likely find Baier's general interpretation of the unity of Hume's thought in the *Treatise* to be the most interesting aspect of *A Progress of Sentiments*. Baier's general interpretation can, I think, be usefully contrasted with the very different account that has recently been advanced by Robert Fogelin.<sup>15</sup> Fogelin argues that Hume is an extreme ('wholly unmitigated') skeptic and that his fundamental objective throughout the *Treatise* is to 'deprecate' reason in both the theoretical and practical sphere. (To this extent Fogelin's interpretation is something of a return to the traditional view of Hume.) Contrary to Fogelin, Baier argues that Hume is in no way concerned to discredit and undermine the role of reason in human life. He seeks, rather, to describe properly its nature and conditions of operation. Central to a proper understanding of the role of reason in human life, Baier takes Hume to be saying, is an understanding of the social context of reason

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14 I discuss this issue in 'On the Naturalism of Hume's "Reconciling Project"' (*Mind* 92 [1983] 593-600). Other papers of mine of related interest include 'Causation, Compulsion and Compatibilism' (*American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 [1988] 313-21) and 'Hume on Responsibility and Punishment' (*Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 20 [1990] 539-64). See also Ardal's *Passion and Value*, Ch. 4.

15 *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1985). Another virtue of *A Progress of Sentiments* is that the discussion of secondary literature is generally kept to a minimum and largely confined to the footnotes. Baier does, however, pay particular attention to Fogelin's interpretation (PS, 54-60).

and the way that it depends on human passions. In general terms, I find myself very largely in agreement with Baier on this issue.<sup>16</sup>

Although I am convinced by the core theses that Baier argues for in her general interpretation of Hume's *Treatise*, I do not believe that these theses — important and significant as they are — serve to characterize properly Hume's basic intentions in the *Treatise*. Nor do I think that they adequately explain or identify the unity of Hume's thought in this work. My basic disagreement with Baier on this matter comes down, in the final analysis, to a question of methodology and approach. Baier's study proceeds on the assumption that these issues can be assessed and settled largely on the basis of close textual analysis. That is, it is claimed that the text itself (i.e. through a study of the significance of the conclusion of Book One, etc.) will reveal the structure and character of Hume's thought in the *Treatise*. I believe that this assumption is mistaken. The only way to understand the unity of Hume's thought in the *Treatise*, I would argue, is by approaching it through a close, detailed examination of the historical context in which it was written. Without an approach of this nature, I suggest, it will not be possible properly to identify and describe the significance of Hume's arguments and the way that they have been put together.<sup>17</sup>

Baier is more aware of the relevance and interest of historical and biographical detail to an understanding of Hume's thought than many other commentators (e.g. Fogelin). Nevertheless, her own general interpretation of the *Treatise* lacks any detailed or thorough historical foundation(s). (In this respect her interpretation differs greatly from both the traditional 'Locke-Berkeley' account and from Kemp Smith's 'Hutch-

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16 In my review of Fogelin's *Hume's Skepticism* I argue that the tendency of his interpretation is to 'exaggerate the extent of Hume's skeptical commitments and to play down or ignore those aspects of Hume's philosophy which emphasize the importance and indispensability of rational procedures and principles' (*Mind* 95 [1986] 392-6, at 394). This places me much closer to Baier than Fogelin. However, as I explain below, I take a rather different view from Baier of the way that Hume's skepticism and naturalism in the *Treatise* should be characterized and how they are related.

17 There has, of course, been a great deal of discussion recently concerning these methodological issues. See, e.g., Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,' reprinted in James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1988); John Dunn, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas,' in *Political Obligation in its Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980); and Richard Rorty, 'The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres,' in R. Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner, eds., *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984).

esonian' account.) Indeed, it is not easy to tell how we are supposed to make sense of Baier's interpretation when viewed from an historical perspective. These are matters that are never really directly addressed by Baier.

Baier's lack of interest in the wider contextual issues raised by her interpretation may explain, in part, why she has overlooked an important source of evidence concerning Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise*. It is surprising to find that Baier does not ever refer to — or even cite — Hume's *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh* (1745) (E.C. Mossner and J.V. Price, eds. [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1967]). This is, I think, a serious omission in a study that is exclusively concerned with the interpretation of the *Treatise*. Hume's *Letter* is a pamphlet that was written in reply to certain accusations made against him (i.e. 'atheism,' 'universal skepticism' etc.) while he was applying for the Chair of philosophy at Edinburgh University. It contains a great deal of information regarding Hume's general intentions in the *Treatise* — particularly as they concern his skepticism in relation to matters of religion.<sup>18</sup> The *Letter* also makes plain that Samuel Clarke's philosophy was one of the more important targets of Hume's skepticism throughout the *Treatise*.<sup>19</sup> (I will explain below why Clarke's philosophy is of such significance for the *Treatise*.) Whatever interpretation we advance, the contents of the *Letter* come directly from Hume, and evidence of this nature should not be entirely ignored.

I have suggested that a proper examination of Hume's context is essential if we are to arrive at a satisfying and plausible account of his fundamental intentions and the unity of his thought. In what follows I will provide a brief sketch of the interpretation which I have argued for

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18 See my 'Skepticism and Natural Religion in Hume's *Treatise*,' 253-7. When reading Hume's *Letter* it is important to keep in mind that Hume was trying to 'defuse' the charges made against him in order not to be disqualified for the Chair that he was applying for. For this reason much of what he says in this context is patently insincere and evasive. Nevertheless, both the charges made against him and his replies give considerable insight into the nature of his objectives and intentions in the *Treatise*.

19 Baier mentions Clarke only twice (PS, 13 and 22). Both references are slight and passing. I discuss the evidence regarding Hume's deep interest in Clarke's philosophy, and the significance of it for the general interpretation of the *Treatise*, in some detail in the papers cited in n. 19 below. See Clarke's *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of Christian Revelation* (6th ed., London, 1725).

in more detail elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise*, I maintain, are best characterized as essentially anti-Christian or 'atheistic' in nature. The general argument of the *Treatise* is, therefore, deeply concerned with matters of religion. These aspects of the *Treatise* are not transparent from a reading of the text. They are, however, very apparent when Hume's specific concerns are placed in the relevant historical context. There are two especially important historical components or aspects of this ('atheistic') interpretation.

(1) The project of the *Treatise* is modelled or planned after Hobbes's very similar project in *The Elements of Law* and the first two parts of *Leviathan*.<sup>21</sup> The structural parallels which hold between Hobbes's works and Hume's *Treatise* are indicative of the fundamental similarity of their projects. Both Hobbes and Hume are agreed that moral and political philosophy must proceed upon the same scientific methodology that is appropriate to the natural sciences (although they disagree about the nature of that methodology), and they agree that this scientific investigation of morals must begin with an examination of human thought and motivation. The metaphysical foundation of this project is their shared naturalistic and necessitarian conception of man.

(2) One of the principal targets of the skeptical arguments of Hume's *Treatise*, as I indicated above, was Samuel Clarke. Clarke was the most eminent Newtonian philosopher in early eighteenth-century Britain, and he was a severe critic of Hobbes. In his highly influential Boyle Lectures of 1704-5 — published as *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God* — Clarke sought to demolish Hobbes's 'atheistic' philosophy. In

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20 These papers include 'Hume's *Treatise* and Hobbes's *The Elements of Law*' (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 46 [1985] 51-64); "'Atheism" and the Title-Page of Hume's *Treatise*' (*Hume Studies* 14 [1988] 408-23); 'Skepticism and Natural Religion in Hume's *Treatise*'; 'Epigram, Pantheists and Freethought in Hume's *Treatise*' (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 [forthcoming 1993]).

21 Hume begins the Abstract as follows: 'This book [i.e. the *Treatise*] seems to be written upon the same plan with several other works that have had great vogue of late years in England' (T, 645). It is generally assumed that Hume has in mind the works of the thinkers whom he mentions in a passage further below (T, 646; see also T, xvii) — i.e. Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Butler. The striking fact is that it is not their works, but rather Hobbes's works which have the same 'plan' or structure as the *Treatise*. Moreover, the very title 'Treatise of Human Nature' is taken from a relevant work by Hobbes. (Hobbes's *Elements of Law* was not published as a single work under that title until 1889. Hume and his contemporaries would have read *The Elements* as two separate works, the first of which had the title *Human Nature* and the second *De Corpore Politico*. The former work is repeatedly referred to in the latter as the "Treatise of Human Nature.") For further details see my 'Hume's *Treatise* and Hobbes's *The Elements of Law*.'

general, it was Hobbes's secular perspective and his extension of scientific naturalism to the study of man that Clarke and other Christian critics regarded as particularly threatening to religion and morals. In response to the religious or theological skepticism of Hobbes and his 'followers' Clarke sought to introduce demonstrative reasoning into the spheres of metaphysics and morals with a view to defending the truth and certainty of the Christian Religion.

Putting these two points together, it seems clear that there is a close relationship between these two aspects of Hume's *Treatise*. That is, in order to defend and articulate an essentially Hobbist, anti-Christian philosophical project Hume found it necessary to undertake a skeptical attack against the leading light of the opposing Newtonian tradition. We may characterize Hume's fundamental objectives in the *Treatise*, therefore, in more general terms, as an effort to refute Christian metaphysics and morals with a view to defending a secular, scientific account of moral and political life.<sup>22</sup>

There is an obvious explanation for why Hume was not more explicit and open about his anti-Christian (and Hobbist) intentions in the *Treatise*. Clearly he lived at a time when a work of this nature was liable to be ruthlessly suppressed by the authorities, and the author of such a work subject to hostile public censure and even prosecution. In any case, despite Hume's effort to exercise due caution and 'prudence' in this regard, his own contemporaries were under no illusion about the anti-Christian nature and character of his project. As a result, throughout Hume's life the *Treatise* was repeatedly cited by his contemporaries as evidence of his 'atheism' and character as an 'infidel.' Later in his life Hume became much less cautious about openly stating his anti-Christian views and doctrines. It is, accordingly, much easier for our

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22 The title-page of the *Treatise* makes plain Hume's anti-Christian intentions and objectives. As noted above, Hume takes his title from a relevant work by Hobbes. Furthermore, the epigram from Tacitus was used by Spinoza for the title of the last and particularly important chapter of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (a work which was widely discussed and better known in Britain at this time than the *Ethics*). Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century Hobbes and Spinoza were widely regarded as the two most infamous 'atheists.' Significantly, the subtitle of Clarke's *Discourse* states that his work is an 'answer to Mr. Hobbs, Spinoza and their Followers' (i.e. other deniers of natural and revealed religion). These features of Hume's title-page would be quite obvious to a suitably informed audience. The anti-Christian significance of the epigrams which Hume placed on the title-pages of the *Treatise* (Book Three has an epigram taken from Lucan) are discussed and explained in my "'Atheism" and the Title-Page of Hume's *Treatise*' and in 'Epigram, Pantheists and Freethought in Hume's *Treatise*.'



own contemporaries to identify and recognize Hume's intentions in his later works (e.g. *Enquiries*, *Dialogues*, etc.) simply by reading the relevant text. For Hume's contemporaries, however, as they were perfectly familiar with the immediate controversies which direct and structure Hume's thought in the *Treatise*, it was no difficult task to see the general drift of his thought and the way in which its various elements are held together by Hume's 'atheistic' concerns and objectives. Subsequent generations have either ignored or lost sight of the relevant controversies which particularly concern Hume in the *Treatise*, and therefore they have failed to see what was perfectly obvious to Hume's own contemporaries.

Baier does not entirely ignore Hume's concerns with matters of religion (e.g., PS, 23, 25, 90, 214-15, 245). However, the general interpretation that is offered places little emphasis on these issues. On Baier's account the skepticism and naturalism of the *Treatise* are only loosely and indirectly related to problems of religion. No effort is made to show the way in which Hume's concern with the problem(s) of religion brings the various parts of the *Treatise* together into a coherent whole. To this extent, therefore, I think that Baier's interpretation (like others before it) fails to do adequate justice to Hume's most fundamental concern in the *Treatise* — his attack on Christian metaphysics and morals.

#### IV

*A Progress of Sentiments* is a pleasure to read in every way. The book itself is attractively printed and produced. (It includes, for example, some well reproduced and unusual portraits of Hume, a useful chronology of Hume's life, and a carefully organized and comprehensive index.) Baier writes in a lively, smooth, and clear manner. She entirely avoids jargon and needless technicalities. The commentary and discussion is full of insight and interesting observations on the details of Hume's philosophy. The general interpretation that is argued for presents the substance of the *Treatise* in a rather new light. Baier's theses and claims concerning Hume's thought are effectively defended and well supported. This is a study which can be recommended both to students who are coming to Hume's work with little background knowledge, and also to the established Hume scholar who is thoroughly familiar with the territory that Baier is covering. Anyone who reads this book with the care that it deserves will learn a great deal from it.

Although I have a very high opinion of the merits of this study, I do not think that Baier has succeeded in reaching the summit that she set

out to conquer — i.e. finding a satisfying general interpretation of the *Treatise*. Nevertheless, I do believe that *A Progress of Sentiments* takes us well up the mountain, and that it opens up new vistas on Hume's thought. Baier's work shows us that substantial progress can and has been made in the field of Hume scholarship. *A Progress of Sentiments* will serve as a valuable guide to the *Treatise* for generations to come.<sup>23</sup>

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PAUL RUSSELL  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, BC  
Canada V6T 1W5

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