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BY

J. A. PASSMORE

*Professor of Philosophy in the
University of Otago*



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CONTENTS

PREFACE	<i>page</i> vii
ABBREVIATIONS	ix
CHAPTER I IN DEFENCE OF THE MORAL SCIENCES	I
II THE CRITIC OF FORMAL LOGIC	18
III THE METHODOLOGIST	42
IV THE POSITIVIST	65
V THE PHENOMENALIST	84
VI THE ASSOCIATIONIST	105
VII THE SCEPTIC	132
EPILOGUE: HUME'S ACHIEVEMENT	152
INDEX	161

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PREFACE

Books ought not to be multiplied except of necessity; commentaries on Hume have flourished so exceedingly, and even excessively, that the present work might seem to flout that admirable general principle. In extenuation, I should explain that this is not a commentary, that it in no way supersedes Laird's *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature* or Kemp Smith's *Philosophy of David Hume* but seeks rather to complement them. I have not tried to write a page-by-page account of Hume's philosophy; my object has been to disentangle certain main themes in that philosophy and to show how they are related to Hume's main philosophic purpose, in the expectation that an account of the way in which he develops these themes will be philosophically as well as historically enlightening. Criticism and scholarship are intermingled, out of a conviction that criticism without scholarship is cavilling, and scholarship without criticism is pedantry. The book has, I hope, a unity. At the same time, since some readers will no doubt be interested in one of these themes rather than another, I have tried to make each chapter a relatively independent discussion, even at the cost of occasional repetition.

My interest in Hume was first aroused by the lectures of Professor John Anderson, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Sydney, and his pupils will recognize that I am much indebted to him, especially perhaps in the second chapter but in one way and another throughout the whole book. But my method of interpretation is not his; it was first suggested to me by Professor N. Kemp Smith's articles on 'The Naturalism of Hume' (*Mind*, Nos. 54-5); for some time my work ran parallel with his, as I discovered from his *Philosophy of David Hume*; I owe a great deal to that book, to his edition of Hume's *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, and to his personal encouragement. Of my other predecessors, John Laird and T. H. Green are the ones to whom I feel myself most indebted, but I have borrowed copiously from innumerable sources. A number of friends, colleagues and students have been good

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enough to read one or other of the earlier versions of this book; if I single out two, Professor Gilbert Ryle and Mr Denis Grey, it is because they proved my most troublesome and therefore most rewarding critics. Mr R. Durrant freed the text of a great many blemishes by his careful scrutiny of the proofs; my wife added to her other trials by helping with the index and proof correction. If errors remain, it is only because no one can fully protect me against the consequences of my own carelessness.

For the rest, I should like to express my gratitude to the library staff of the University of Otago for its patience when confronted by my constant demands upon its time, and to the Research Committee of the University of New Zealand and the Arts Research Committee of the University of Sydney for their financial assistance, which so greatly facilitated the writing of this book. Finally, but not least, I should like to thank my wife, my family, and my colleagues for not only submitting for so long a time to my preoccupation with Hume but even encouraging it, by relieving me of tasks which would otherwise have fallen to my lot.

JOHN PASSMORE

*University of Otago,
November 1951*

ABBREVIATIONS

THE following abbreviations and short titles are used:

- T, 1: Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1896), page 1.
- E, 1: Hume's *Enquiries concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 2nd ed., 1902), page 1.
- G.G., 1, 1: *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London, 1874), vol. 1, page 1.
- A, 1: Hume's *An Abstract of a Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. J. M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge, 1938), page 1.
- D, 1: Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. N. Kemp Smith (London, 2nd ed., 1947), page 1.
- Letters*, 1, 1: *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford, 1932), vol. 1, page 1.
- Recherche*, 1, 1: Malebranche's *Recherche de la Verité*, éd. Flammarion (Paris, n.d.), vol. 1, page 1.
- References to the works of Descartes are to the translation by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, second edition, Cambridge, 1931, in two volumes.
- References to Newton's *Principia Mathematica* are to the edition translated by Andrew Motte and edited by W. Davis, in three volumes (London, 1803); references to his *Opticks* are to the fourth edition, London, 1730, reprinted by George Bell and Sons, London, 1931.