

Book Reviews



Robert J. Fogelin

Hume's Presence in the 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion'. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xv + 150. ISBN 978-0-19-067350-5.

Like David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Robert J. Fogelin's study of it was published posthumously. Professor Fogelin (1932–2016) taught philosophy at Dartmouth College from 1980 to 2001 and published widely, including other books on Hume. Readers of this journal may be most familiar with *Hume's Skepticism in the 'Treatise of Human Nature'* (1985), *A Defense of Hume on Miracles* (2003), and, most recently before the book under review here, *Hume's Skeptical Crisis: A Textual Study* (2009). As the author explained in his preface to the volume reviewed here, "After completing *Hume's Skeptical Crisis* in 2009, I moved on to other things. Then, asked to comment on the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, I renewed with great pleasure my friendship with David Hume" (ix). The resulting book is one that will be read with pleasure and benefit by all who are interested in Hume, from seasoned scholars to newer students of Hume's writings.

This book has two sections. Section I, "A Textual Study," provides a summary and close reading of the twelve parts of Hume's *Dialogues*. Readers are introduced to the *Dialogues'* three main characters: "Cleanthes (an advocate of natural theology), Philo (a freewheeling skeptic), and Demea (a combination dogmatic rationalist and mystic)" (3). But they also meet the young scholar Pamphilus ("a man of letters in the making" [97]), who communicates to Hermippus, "his pen pal" (5), the conversation about natural religion he heard between Cleanthes, Philo, and Demea.

Determining "Who speaks for Hume?" has been a perennial problem in Hume historiography. Most modern scholars see Philo as representing Hume. Fogelin cautions that "At times it is not altogether clear whether Hume is expressing his own views through his characters" (28). His slim book is largely an effort to determine Hume's voice. Fogelin's starting point—laid out in the first paragraph of the "Introduction"—is the "striking feature" that "Cleanthes

and Philo seem well versed in the works of the philosopher David Hume. Their arguments often echo in content—even wording—claims found in Hume’s central philosophical writings” (3). While others have noted some of those parallels, none have fleshed them out as thoroughly as is done here. What does Fogelin’s approach yield?

Fogelin finds Cleanthes at times to be quite Humean, especially when he invokes “something akin to Galen’s urbane Pyrrhonism” (31), a skeptical attitude that “attempts to reach suspension of judgment with respect to matters that are abstruse, remote, and refined” (31). “When we coolly examine the contents of Philo’s remarks,” however, “we see that they, for the most part, echo central passages found in Hume’s *Treatise*. There is an embarrassment of riches illustrating this claim” (9). Summarizing Philo’s critique of Cleanthes’s argument from design (“that the world resembles a human artifact, namely a machine” [54]), Fogelin does “not speculate on whether Hume was directly acquainted with Agrippa’s five modes leading to the suspension of belief as presented by Sextus Empiricus’ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. He nowhere mentions them, but Philo, as Hume presents him, is a master of their use” (55). Fogelin, it seems, is building to a bigger point.

Those who are familiar with Fogelin’s earlier books on Hume will hear echoes of them in this one. In Hume’s *Dialogues*, Fogelin finds additional evidence for his understanding of Hume’s overall philosophical development: “By examining parallel passages in Hume’s *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, I will try to show how they fit together. This, however, will prove a complex matter, because there are important shifts in Hume’s treatment of skepticism from the *Treatise* to the *Enquiry*” (78). The Hume of the *Treatise*, writes Fogelin, was “thoroughly rattled” (87) by his skeptical leanings: “As *the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection* on those subjects [placing faith in our senses], it always encreases the further we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it” (87, Fogelin’s emphasis). “Having shone a light on our cognitive faculties,” Fogelin summarizes, “he [Hume] is appalled at what he discovers” (88). But the Hume of the *Treatise* does not “abandon philosophical inquiry altogether,” he adopts “a skeptical standpoint where we accept things as they strike us, and let them go at that” (88). Hume wrote: “A *true sceptic* will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical convictions; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction which offers itself, upon account of either of them” (89, Fogelin’s emphasis).

Not so for the Hume of the *Enquiry*: “In the *Enquiry* ... Hume seems to move on to a significantly different way of responding to the challenge of skepticism that haunted his earlier work” (91). That is, he “discovered *empirically* that a small tincture of Pyrrhonism, properly balanced by a deep draft of natural