

Donald C. Ainslie. *Hume's True Scepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv + 286. Cloth, \$70.00.

In this rigorous and thorough discussion of David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* 1.4, entitled "Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy," Donald Ainslie aims both to provide detailed textual exegeses of all seven sections, and to offer a way of understanding them as unified by the recurring theme of the dangers of "false" philosophy and a defense of "true" philosophy or "true scepticism." To understand the compatibility of Hume's skeptical conclusions and his philosophical ambitions, and so to be in a position to properly interpret 1.4.7, we must "fully contextualize" it in "what has preceded it, especially elsewhere in Part 4" (5).

Ainslie tells us he will argue "that true scepticism involves a domestication of philosophy" (2). Philosophers cannot occupy a position that transcends common life, or employ methods that are immune from our ordinary "vulgar" experience. This domestication has two effects: philosophy is "unable to offer a justification or a repudiation of our fundamental tendencies to believe"; and "there is no special *obligation* to philosophize . . . those who are not interested in things philosophical should not be thought to exemplify some kind of failing" (2). I have sympathy with both these conclusions though I think the second effect, as Ainslie states it, can be misleading.

To establish the first claim, it is important to understand Hume's view of introspection and reflection. Ainslie argues that Hume rejects Locke's view of reflection, and most importantly that he rejects Locke's notion of consciousness. For Locke we have immediate awareness and knowledge of our mental operations. For Hume, we have the *capacity* to reflect on our mental operations and do so when we introspect. But this observation of mental operations is "not something that is always forced upon us" (121). Because such reflection is optional, the skeptical challenge that asks whether our ideas are veridical is not one that we have to face; we do not normally need to *decide* that our most basic beliefs are well-founded. When we philosophize, these questions *do* become legitimate. But when we ask whether we should believe the verdicts of reason or of the senses, our "reflective interference" leaves us unable to answer, for the tools we use to try to answer are the very same ones whose legitimacy we have put into question.

Our inability to accept the conclusions of skeptical arguments is not a "brute fact" about us, neither displaying our fundamental irrationality nor revealing that our "natural tendencies" are normatively superior, but is the result of reflective interference (149). This recognition is key, for Ainslie, to understanding Hume's view of philosophy that avoids the pitfalls of both the skeptical and naturalist interpretations of Hume's view as presented in "Conclusion of this book." Ainslie calls his view a "*philosophical* interpretation," arguing that this section's primary purpose is to explain how philosophy fits into everyday life (237). The overarching message is that philosophy needs to recognize its limits. When we are immersed in our world of reasoning and sensing we do not *require* a philosophical grounding. Philosophical reasoning will naturally lead us to ask for one; and then we are faced with a choice between "false" philosophy that will provide an answer filled with contradictions, and "true" philosophy that will recognize that these questions cannot be answered.

While I agree with much of what Ainslie says, and philosophy is not something we must all undertake, to say that it is not the case that the unexamined life is not worth living is not the same as saying the unexamined life is *no better* than the examined one. At times, Ainslie's view seems to fail to do justice to how Hume thinks "true philosophy" could be of value, especially as it can offer alternative ways of addressing questions to those offered by superstition and religion. While Ainslie notes that this is one of the reasons Hume cites to return to philosophy after a period of away from it (225), he underplays the significance of this benefit of philosophy, as well as the ubiquity of philosophical questioning. Hume says that humans differ from beasts in that "tis almost impossible for the mind of man to rest . . . in that narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action" (1.4.7.13).

This brief review cannot do justice to the book's richness and breadth. For any puzzle or ambiguity or seeming inconsistency in the seven sections of 1.4, Ainslie has a suggested interpretation of how to make sense of it or solve it. His analyses push us to think about a wide range of interpretive puzzles and seriously consider his way of addressing them. Some of the questions are ones rarely posed or thought of, thus revealing the complexity of Hume's ideas. Especially for those scholars immersed in Hume's texts, it is good to be reminded that even the most seemingly simple of Hume's claims are often ambiguous or overstated.

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Andre C. Willis. *Toward a Humean True Religion: Genuine Theism, Moderate Hope, and Practical Morality*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014. Pp. xii + 248. Cloth, \$74.95.

Andre Willis argues that although Hume is generally credited with being a "devastating critic" of religion, it is a mistake to view Hume solely in these terms or to present him as an "atheist." This not only represents a failure to appreciate Hume's "middle path" between "militant atheists and evangelical theists" (8), it denies us an opportunity to "enhance" our understanding and appreciation of the positive, constructive value of religion through a close study of Hume's views (6). Willis's study presents Hume as committed to a "bifurcated approach to religion" that rests on the fundamental distinction between "false religion" and "true religion" (3). False religion, which includes Christianity, is a destructive force in human society. Although Hume devotes most of his philosophical energies and attention to discrediting and undermining false religion (54), his account of true religion presents a positive alternative. It is Willis's basic aim to articulate and elaborate Hume's understanding of "true religion" in order to reorient contemporary religious sensibilities and further develop "a moderate religious consciousness" based on Hume's views (187–90).

There are three "cornerstones" to Hume's true religion, constituted by "the genuine theism engendered by our feelings of basic theism; the equanimity brought by collective, calm hopes and fears, and the development of virtuous character inspired by practical morality" (181). Articulating these presents a challenge, since Hume's writings are "inchoate" and "underdeveloped" and "offer little explicit positive content for his notion of 'true religion'" (4, 16). Willis is undeterred by the lack of detail in Hume's texts and proceeds to "cobble together substance for his underdeveloped idea of 'true religion'" (19–20). His three central chapters address the three cornerstones:

*Genuine theism* is grounded in "basic theism," described in terms of our (natural) sense of regularity and purposive order, which "irresistibly orients the mind to the idea of an Author of Nature" (45–46)—a "moderate claim" that is "largely uncontroversial" (47–48, 75–76) and presupposed by Hume's entire philosophy (80, 82). Basic theism can evolve either into false or true religion, though the latter is rare (86). Textual evidence for this interpretation is thin; and Willis concedes that he may be "pushing [Hume] further than he wants to go" (49). The primary authority for Willis's reading of Hume on true religion is Donald Livingston (84–86), whose general interpretation of Hume Willis draws on to argue that genuine theism does not aim to establish itself as true or to justify itself in terms of abstract thought, logic, or evidence. It is founded on habits, customs, and conventions—not philosophical argument.

*Moderate hope* constitutes a core feature of religion's "proper office" (89) and guides us to be "confident that the future will be what it will" as we "face life's vicissitudes" (103, 105). This "fundamental hope" provides "a sense of well-being that we might consider 'religious' in the broad sense of the term" (90). Willis draws heavily here on Joseph Godfrey, which arguably forces an alien framework and language onto Hume's (very different) concerns and approach.