

HUME, HEGEL AND HUMAN NATURE

CHRISTOPHER J. BERRY

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by

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TO MY PARENTS

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PREFACE

This is both a modest and a presumptuous work. It is presumptuous because, given the vast literature on just one of its themes, it attempts to discuss not only the philosophies of both Hume and Hegel but also something of their intellectual milieu. Moreover, though the study has a delimiting perspective in the relationship between a theory of human nature and an account of the various aspects that make up social experience, this itself is so central and protean that it has necessitated a discussion of, amongst others, theories of history, language, aesthetics, law and politics.

Yet it is a modest work in that, although I do think I have some fresh things to say, the study does not propose any revolutionary new reading of the material. I am not here interested in the relative validity of the theories put forward – I do not ‘take sides’. Nevertheless it is part of the modest intent that recourse to Hume and Hegel in arguments pertaining to human nature will be better informed and more discriminating as a consequence of this study. Additionally, some distinctions herein made also shed light on some assumptions made in contemporary debates in the philosophy of social science, especially those concerning the understanding of alien belief-systems.

I endeavour here to account for the nature and extent of Hume’s belief in the constancy and uniformity of human nature and to explain the meaning of human nature as a concrete universal in Hegel. I make use of a concept of contextualisation to specify the nature of the difference between Hume’s and Hegel’s accounts of the relationship between human nature and society and, since these relationships are temporal as well as spatial, crucial to the difference between Hume and Hegel is their estimation and conception of history.

This is neither a work of analytical philosophy nor is it a work of the history of ideas strictly so termed but, rather, it is an exercise in intellectual history. This explains its tri-partite structure. The first Part sketches a general intellectual milieu into which the discussions of Hume and Hegel, in Parts II and III respectively, are placed. I am not here tracing the development or movement of ideas about human nature between Hume and Hegel: the lack of any sustained discussion of Rousseau would then have been inexcusable. Rather, I put forward a general in-

terpretation of the theories of human nature held by Hume and Hegel and trace some of the consequences of their respective theories on the rest of their thought. Although in Part III there is some comparative discussion, the work is not intended as a systematic piece of comparison. The treatments are relatively discrete and can stand on their own, but they also comprise an overall picture. Parts II and III exhibit a similar formal thematic structure. Each is divided into four chapters of which the first is devoted to Hume's and Hegel's concept of human nature itself; the second to its impact on their notions of the character and constitution of society; the third to their explanation of social diversity and the fourth to their interpretation of the interaction between men and society. Additionally, there are a number of persistent themes, which coalesce around the issue of a change, which is sketched in Part I, that occurred in the understanding of, and conceptualisation of, human nature between the writings of Hume and Hegel.

I have utilised where available existing translations but supply a precise reference to the original. With respect to Hegel, the basic text is the *Lasson* edition, but this is supplemented by referring to the first edition of 1845 et seq. of Gans and his associates, as well as to the Jubilee edition of Glockner. Full details of the works cited in the Notes are given in the Bibliography.

I have incurred many debts. Portions of my own manuscript, at various stages in its career, have been read by colleagues and friends. At my own university I have benefited from the comments of, and discussions with, Harold Betteridge, Dudley Knowles, Michael Lessnoff, David Lloyd-Jones, Andrew Lockyer, Bill Mackenzie, Adrienne Redshaw and Eva Schaper. Outside Glasgow I am indebted to John Chapman, Jim Moore, Peter Nicholson and Stewart Sutherland. As is customarily proper they should be absolved from all responsibility for what follows.

This book was a long time in the writing and a long time has elapsed since it was written. Its appearance has been made possible by the generosity and persistence of the Publications Board of the University of Glasgow to whom I tender my grateful thanks. Gratitude is also owed to Elspeth Shaw, Jean Barclay, Celia Wallace and Barbara Cooper for shouldering the onerous task of typing and copying.

For the right to reproduce the odd paragraph and sentence scattered in the text I am grateful for the permission of © Journal of the History of Ideas, Inc. for 'From Hume to Hegel: the Case of the Social Contract', Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct. – Dec., 1977) pp. 691 – 704; of © New York University 1980 for 'Property and Possession: Two replies to Locke – Hume and Hegel' in *Property (NOMOS XXII)*, edited by J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman; of © Pergamon Press Ltd. for 'Hegel on the World-Historical' in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1981); of © Wesleyan University for 'Hume on Rationality in History and Social Life' in *History and Theory*, Vol. 21 (1982, May).

In accord with prefatory tradition, the final word is familial: more than thanks to my parents, to whom I dedicate this work, to Christine and to Craig and Paul, whose arrivals put the whole enterprise into perspective.