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The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays, by Margaret Watkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. x + 265.

1. Introduction

This thoughtful study is a treasure trove of insights into Hume's *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (hereinafter, 'the *Essays*'). Margaret Watkins argues that the *Essays* should be counted among Hume's philosophical works and that they demand and reward philosophical scrutiny—and she amply demonstrates the latter by example. Her book poses a serious challenge to scholars of Hume's philosophy who have 'contemptuously dismissed or politely ignored' the *Essays* (Watkins 2019, p.2). I confess that I myself have hitherto been a polite ignoror. To others who share this vice with me, I wholeheartedly commend Watkins's book.

The title may be somewhat misleading. It led me to expect either an argument that the philosophical content of the *Essays* is superior to (and therefore constitutes 'philosophical progress' relative to) that of the earlier *Treatise*; or an argument that Hume refined the philosophical claims and arguments of its constituent essays themselves (and in this sense made 'philosophical progress') over the long course of writing them, from the first appearance of the *Essays Moral and Political* in 1741 and 1742, via the *Political Discourses* of 1752 and the *Four Dissertations* of 1757, to the final edition of the *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* that he prepared for publication, which appeared posthumously in 1777; or both kinds of argument. However, neither kind of argument is central to the book. The first, concerning the *Essays*' philosophical superiority to the *Treatise*, appears only in Chapter 4, where Watkins makes a fascinating case that Hume's essays supply a lacuna in his earlier account of the passions. And the second, concerning the development of Hume's essays themselves, appears only occasionally and peripherally.

2. Thematic Overview

Instead, as I see it, the book explores three related themes concerning the *Essays*. One is Hume's conception of philosophy. Watkins argues that this conception is 'broad' or inclusive, such that doing philosophy, as Hume conceives it, consists in achieving (or, perhaps, attempting to achieve) a perspective that is 'distant' or 'detached' from one's objects of study. In connection with this first theme, she also argues that the Hume of the *Essays* has a Hellenistic 'cast of mind' (Watkins 2019, p.235), according to which doing philosophy is a path to tranquility, at least for those who are 'philosophically minded' (Watkins 2019, p.236). Here, she opposes James Harris (2007, p.233), who argues that Hume's four 'essays on happiness'—particularly, 'The Sceptic'—repudiate the view that philosophy can be 'medicine for the mind'; and that, in later works such as the *Political Discourses*, Hume therefore aims instead to provide philosophy that is 'medicine [only] for the state'.

This first theme strikes me as the most fundamental of the three, in that Watkins's claims and arguments in connection with it underlie and explain what she says in connection with the other two themes.

The second theme is the relation between the *Essays* and those of Hume's works that are more widely considered 'philosophical', especially the *Treatise* and *Enquiries* (let us call these his *uncontroversially philosophical works*). Here, Watkins aims to chart a middle course between two extreme views (Watkins 2019, pp.2–4).

According to one extreme, the *Essays* are discontinuous with the *Treatise* (and, on some versions of this view, with Hume's other uncontroversially philosophical works). A crude example of this extreme is T. H. Grose's (1875) view that, after writing the *Treatise*, Hume by and large abandoned philosophy in favour of popular dross. A more subtle example is James Harris's (2015, p.13) view that Hume's *Treatise* and later works embody different conceptions of philosophy: in the *Treatise*, Hume attempted to develop a philosophical system; thereafter,

he abandoned systematic philosophy in favour of ‘several distinct and different kinds of philosophical projects’.

According to the other extreme, advocated in a series of articles by John Immerwahr, the *Essays* are, in Watkins’s words, ‘the outworking of a plan that Hume envisaged prior to or during the composition of the *Treatise*’ (Watkins 2019, p.3). According to Immerwahr (1991), the *Treatise* stands to the *Essays* as “anatomy” stands to “painting” (in the terms of Hume’s famous analogy). Immerwahr (1991, p.7) infers that, in Hume’s eyes, the *Treatise* derives its value from that of the *Essays*: the *Essays* are ‘the end, for which the *Treatise* was the means’.

Watkins’s intermediate position is that the *Essays* are continuous with the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*, insofar as all of these works are examples of ‘philosophy’ in (what she takes to be) Hume’s broad sense of that term, and that Hume’s view of what philosophy can accomplish does not change between the *Treatise* and the *Essays*. She thereby posits more continuity between the *Treatise* and *Essays* than Grose (and perhaps Harris) would allow, without taking on Immerwahr’s stronger claims that Hume conceived the *Essays*’ project in the 1730s or that the *Treatise* has only derivative value. Also, unlike Immerwahr, Watkins makes no use of the distinction (or distinctions) between two ways of treating ‘moral philosophy’ that Hume draws in a 1739 letter to Francis Hutcheson, the Conclusion of *Treatise* Book 3, and Section 1 of the first *Enquiry*—a point to which I return below.

The third theme is *progress*, including both *social progress*, i.e. the movement of a society towards better social arrangements (including, but perhaps not limited to, political arrangements), and *individual progress*, i.e. the movement of an individual person towards greater happiness or virtue. According to Watkins, progress is among both the *contents* and *goals* of Hume’s *Essays*. Progress is among their *contents*: as Watkins ably shows, the *Essays* have much to say about the kinds of social progress that ‘moderns’ (that is, Hume’s contemporaries) have made relative to the ancients; about the ways in which further social

progress might be brought about or hindered; and about the ways in which individual people can make progress with respect to happiness and virtue. And progress is among the *Essays*' goals: according to Watkins, Hume hopes that his readers' engagement with the *Essays* will improve them as individuals; in keeping with his Hellenistic cast of mind, he conceives the *Essays* as a philosophical work that constitutes 'medicine for the mind[s]' of those who read and engage with it, contrary to Harris's view. For Watkins's Hume, social and individual progress are causally interdependent (Watkins 2019, p.55, and pp.86–96).

3. Chapter-by-Chapter Summary

So far, I have offered a thematic overview of the book. Let us now turn to its details. It is divided into an Introduction, seven chapters, and a Conclusion. The Introduction presents Watkins's view that the *Essays* are an example of 'philosophy', hence are continuous with the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*, and sketches a defence of this view. It also raises three questions to be explored in the main body of the book, especially in its first two chapters: (1) have human lives improved significantly, in comparison with past ages (the 'assessment question'); (2) in our politics, should we aim to conserve the goods of the past or to encourage progress via governmental intervention (the 'political intervention question'); and (3) whether and how we should hope for further progress (the 'predictive question').

Each chapter then explores a theme within the *Essays*: governing, domineering, working, composing, self-loving, loving, and thinking. Chapters 3 and 7, on working and thinking, seem especially important to Watkins's overall arguments, so I will give them more attention than the other chapters here.

Chapters 1 and 2, on governing and domineering, focus mainly on issues of social (especially political) progress. Chapter 1 addresses the political intervention question and the assessment question. Watkins examines Hume's views about resistance to social change,

which, according to Hume, often derives from an irrational reverence for the past due to ‘the antiquarian principle’—a natural human ‘disposition to value things simply because they are old’ (Watkins 2019, p.12), which he explains in the *Treatise* (T 2.3.8). She then shows how Hume exposes illusions about the British constitution that derive from this principle and argues that, insofar as Hume seems to endorse conservative political views, his endorsement derives from his views about the present psychology of the populace, not from any supposed value accruing to the past as such.

Chapter 2, which reads largely as a commentary on the essay ‘Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations’, introduces a new question, the *human nature question*: to what extent is human nature static, in Hume’s view (Watkins 2019, pp.58–59)? Watkins defends Hume against the objection that his method of conjectural history involves implausibly strong assumptions about the immutability of human nature (Watkins 2019, pp.58–59). In her view, this objection derives from scholars’ excessive focus on the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*. She argues that careful attention to the *Essays* shows that Hume holds a modest view, on which there is a permanent human nature, but it comprises dispositions that manifest differently under different historical and cultural circumstances. Chapter 2 also returns to the assessment question, and argues that Hume sees the modern world as improving upon the ancient world with respect to warfare and slavery, but not with respect to the priesthood. This argument includes interesting discussions of why, in Hume’s view, owning slaves or serving as a priest damages one’s character. These discussions mark the start of a shift of focus from social to individual progress (or regress).

Chapter 3, on working, also concerns both social and individual progress. Watkins distinguishes industry as a trait of an individual person (industry-as-virtue) from industry as an attribute of a society (industry-as-commerce). She argues that Hume sees the two as interconnected: a society’s industry-as-commerce tends to promote industry-as-virtue among

individuals within that society, and vice versa—an example of the interdependence between social and individual progress.

Watkins then examines Hume's four 'essays on happiness': 'The Epicurean', 'The Stoic', 'The Platonist', and 'The Sceptic'. This discussion is a crucial part of her argument that Hume has a Hellenistic conception of philosophy, and that the *Essays*, as a work of philosophy so conceived, are 'medicine for the mind'. Each of the 'essays on happiness' is a monologue with its own speaker. Collectively, they constitute a 'rhetorical dialogue' on human happiness (Immerwahr 1989, p.309). According to a common interpretation, the Sceptic speaks for Hume. This interpretation supports Harris (2007) against Watkins, for the Sceptic seemingly denies that philosophy can provide a roadmap to happiness (EMPL 161–162). However, Watkins argues that the Sceptic does not invariably speak for Hume.

Additionally, Watkins argues for two further claims about the 'essays on happiness': (i) they collectively present a philosophical thesis about happiness and moral character, viz. that it is a 'static principle of humanity' that we need industry-as-virtue for happiness (Watkins 2019, p.101); and (ii) the philosophical activity of working through these essays is meant to have a therapeutic effect on the reader—the moderation of their passions (Watkins 2019, pp.102–104). Immerwahr (1989) and Colin Heydt (2007) have defended claims like (ii), but Watkins has a novel view of *how* engaging with these essays is meant to improve us. She argues that, despite their differences, there is significant overlap among the views held by the speakers in Hume's 'rhetorical dialogue': each emphasizes the value of industry-as-virtue for human happiness. This feature of the four essays is crucial to their therapeutic effect (Watkins 2019, p.102). Moreover, thanks to their common endorsement of industry-as-virtue, the four essays collectively present a philosophical case that valuing industry-as-virtue is a constant feature of human nature; and so, they contribute to Hume's answer to the human nature question.

Lastly in Chapter 3, Watkins considers whether the value Hume places on industry commits

him to accepting that each individual person is a mere means to promoting economic growth, via their industry-as-virtue. She argues no: for Hume, industry-as-virtue is valuable for its agreeableness to its possessor, not just for its usefulness; and economic growth is valuable not for its own sake, but, in part, because it fosters progress in the liberal arts.

These first three chapters address both social and individual progress. The others focus largely on matters of individual progress. Chapter 4's theme is 'composing', by which Watkins means 'the portion of human life devoted to producing and appreciating beauty created by human activity' (Watkins 2019, p.110). Its focal question is: how can someone with emotional defects—excessive tendencies to feel 'aggressive' or 'melancholy' passions—overcome them, so as to develop 'strength of mind', i.e. dominance of calm passions over violent ones? Watkins argues that *Treatise* Book 2's account of the passions provides no satisfactory answer to this question. She claims that the Sceptic recognizes this problem (Watkins 2019, p.135), and that Hume's essays on aesthetics provide the following solution. Aesthetic experience helps us develop strength of mind, by providing various kinds of therapy for aggressive and melancholy passions. In these essays, then, Hume makes philosophical progress relative to the *Treatise*, offering a more satisfactory account of how we may cultivate virtuous emotional dispositions.

Although Watkins does not say so, this argument coheres with Amyas Merivale's (2019) view that Hume's *Four Dissertations* (not, as commonly assumed, the *Dissertation on the Passions* alone) constitutes his 'Enquiry concerning the Passions', that is, his "recasting" of *Treatise* Book 2. Two of the four dissertations—'Of Tragedy' and 'Of the Standard of Taste'—provide evidence for Watkins's claims about the therapeutic value of aesthetic experience. So her argument provides evidence that, taken collectively, the four dissertations provide a fuller and more satisfactory account of the passions than *Treatise* Book 2 alone.

Another nice feature of Chapter 4 is that Watkins beautifully illustrates her claims with literary and musical examples. Shakespeare, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Placido Domingo

all make appearances here. One feels that one is in the hands of a guide who knows well, first hand, the emotional benefits of aesthetic experience.

Chapters 5 and 6 concern, respectively, love of self and love of others. Watkins helpfully distinguishes three forms of self-concern that Hume recognizes—self-love, pride, and vanity—and argues that, for Hume, each can contribute to individual virtue, e.g. by bolstering one’s capacity for friendship. Turning next to love of others, Watkins gives fascinating arguments that, given his theory of the passions, Hume should see significant obstacles to combining virtuous private friendships with political moderation and public spirit. She then considers Hume’s views on sexual love and friendships among men and women. She argues that, with some important qualifications, these views are largely progressive. Watkins has a dry wit and is especially funny here. My favourite one-liner follows this quotation: ‘Nature has implanted in all living creatures an affection between the sexes, which ... begets a friendship and mutual sympathy, which runs through the whole tenor of their lives’ (EMPL 131). Watkins adds, parenthetically: ‘We must assume that Hume was either unaware of or preferred not to think about the prevalence of postcoital cannibalism among insects’ (Watkins 2019, p.201).

Chapter 7, on thinking, makes crucial contributions to Watkins’s arguments concerning several of the book’s overarching themes. It argues that the Hume of the *Essays* has a ‘broad’ or inclusive conception of philosophy; that he regards philosophical thinking as a path to tranquility; and that the *Essays* are a work of philosophy that can contribute to this kind of individual progress, hence are an abandonment neither of philosophy (contra Grose) nor of the view that philosophy can be ‘medicine for the mind’ (contra Harris). The chapter contains two main lines of argument. The first aims to identify Hume’s conception of philosophy in the *Essays*—a stepping stone to showing that the *Essays* are a work of philosophy, as Hume conceives it. Watkins starts by arguing that the *Essays* ascribe three positive functions to ‘philosophy’: it improves individual character, cures superstition, and provides counsel to

politicians (Watkins 2019, p.228). She then argues, with reference to both the *Essays* and the first *Enquiry*, that thinking can serve these functions—hence, can be philosophical—*only if* it involves ‘regarding one’s world and the people who inhabit it from a certain distance’ (Watkins 2019, p.228); achieving the relevant sort of distance involves “sympathetically taking up multiple points of view” (Watkins 2019, p.235). Watkins seems to infer that thinking is philosophical *if* it involves this kind of distance (Watkins 2019, p.233). In the Conclusion, she adds that the preceding chapters, collectively, show that the thinking on display in Hume’s *Essays* meets this condition, hence is an example of philosophy as Hume conceives it: ‘I hope it is clear that all of the earlier chapters in this book are about thinking. They show the breadth of Hume’s thinking in the *Essays*. Given the understanding of philosophy sketched in Chapter 7, this thinking is all to some degree philosophical’ (Watkins 2019, p.245).

Chapter 7’s second main line of argument concerns Hume’s Hellenistic cast of mind. It aims to show that philosophy, as Hume conceives it, is a path to ‘tranquility’, at least for those with a suitable temperament; it thereby contributes to answering the predictive question (that is, whether and how we should hope for further progress). Watkins notes that Hume’s mitigated scepticism consists in achieving a kind of distance from one’s own thinking: an attitude of ‘hesitation, reserve, and suspense’ that he describes in his essay ‘Of the Protestant Succession’, when characterizing the temper of a philosopher (EMPL 506–507), and in Section XII of the first *Enquiry*, when characterizing mitigated scepticism. She claims that this attitude is ‘the primal distance on which all other forms of philosophical distance depend’, and that achieving this kind of distant perspective is ‘our best hope for tranquility’ (Watkins 2019, p.236).

4. Critical Remarks

I turn now to critical remarks. Let’s first consider Watkins’s view that the *Essays* are not an abandonment of philosophy. To make this case, she needs to show that they are a work of

philosophy in just the same sense as Hume's uncontroversially philosophical works. Otherwise, her opponent can reply that the *Essays* are an abandonment of philosophy *in the sense in which these other works are philosophical*—although, of course, they may be 'philosophical' in some other sense.

A shortcoming of Watkins's argument here, I think, is her decision not to examine Section 1 of the first *Enquiry*, 'Of the Different Species of Philosophy', which is Hume's most detailed discussion of the nature of philosophy. There, he famously distinguishes 'two different manners' of treating 'moral philosophy, or the science of human nature' (E 1.1): an 'easy and obvious' one and an 'accurate and abstruse' one (E 1.3), which stand to each other as painting stands to anatomy (E 1.8). Hume continued to revise the first *Enquiry* for new editions throughout his life, so this section presents his last word on the nature of philosophy. He included both the first *Enquiry* and the *Essays* in his collected *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*. So, the first *Enquiry*'s discussion bears crucially on the question of whether the *Essays* are a work of philosophy and, if so, of what kind. I am therefore unsure why Watkins neglects it here.

It is especially important for Watkins to engage more thoroughly with the first *Enquiry* because it both poses a challenge to her view and affords her resources with which to reply. The original, 1748 edition of this work was entitled *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, and its title page attributed it to 'the AUTHOR of the ESSAYS MORAL and POLITICAL', which Hume had published earlier in the same decade. Readers sympathetic to Grose's view that the *Essays* are an abandonment of philosophy might regard this title page as grist to their mill: the implicit contrast between the 'philosophical' essays that constitute the first *Enquiry* and the earlier 'moral and political' essays suggests that, on some occasions, Hume works with a narrower conception of philosophy than the 'broad' one that Watkins describes—a conception that the first *Enquiry* exemplifies, but that the 'moral and political'

essays do not.

One plausible hypothesis, along these lines, is that the first *Enquiry* is ‘philosophical’ in the sense that it provides a theoretical foundation for the *Essays Moral and Political*. In the latter, and in the 1752 *Political Discourses* that were eventually included in the *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, Hume tries to develop an empirical social science. As Watkins and other scholars have noted, this science is based to a significant extent on the psychological theories presented in Hume’s uncontroversially philosophical works: for example, Eugene Rotwein argues in detail that Hume’s ‘economic psychology’ is grounded in the general psychological theory of the *Treatise* (Rotwein 2007, pp.xxxvi–liii).

The first *Enquiry*, in particular, plausibly provides a theoretical foundation for social science. In Sections 4–6 and 9, Hume argues that matter-of-fact reasoning and belief-formation involve no causally undetermined faculty of will—the source of affirmation and denial in Cartesian philosophy—but are instead due to law-governed psychological processes that (he argues) we share with brute animals. In Section 8 (‘Of Liberty and Necessity’), he argues that human behaviour is just as regular and empirically predictable as that of non-human natural phenomena. If successful, these arguments have the upshot that human thought and action are suitable objects for empirical, inductive investigation using the same kinds of methods that had proven so fruitful in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural philosophy. (For a similar point about *Enquiry* Section 8, see Millican 2007, p.xxx and pp.xlvi–xlviii.)

A reader might therefore reject Watkins’s view on the grounds that the first *Enquiry* (and, perhaps, Hume’s other uncontroversially philosophical works) exemplify philosophy conceived as a foundational discipline, whereas the *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* do not, hence that the *Essays* are an abandonment of philosophy as conceived in the first *Enquiry*.

Section 1 of the first *Enquiry* affords Watkins resources with which she might answer this kind of challenge. Anatomy provides a theoretical foundation for painting. Watkins might say,

then, that the first *Enquiry* exemplifies the ‘accurate and abstruse’ way of treating moral philosophy, whereas the ‘moral and political’ essays exemplify the ‘easy and obvious’ way, with the former providing a theoretical foundation for the latter. Both would then be works of ‘moral philosophy’ (the genus), albeit different species of it. John Immerwahr (1991) has defended this kind of picture of the relation between Hume’s uncontroversially philosophical works (Immerwahr focuses on the *Treatise*) and the *Essays Moral and Political*. We might expect that Watkins would also favour this kind of picture: her emphasis on the ‘practical aim’ of the *Essays* (Watkins 2019, pp.4–5) suggests that they are an example of ‘easy and obvious’ moral philosophy, which aims to ‘allur[e] us into the paths of virtue’ (E 1.1).

However, Watkins seems to reject Immerwahr’s picture (3). I am unsure why. Her objection seems to focus on Immerwahr’s view that the *Essays* are (as she puts it) ‘the outworking of a plan that Hume envisioned prior to or during the composition of the *Treatise*’ (Watkins 2019, p.3). But this claim about Hume’s intellectual biography seems dispensable: Immerwahr’s main point—that the *Essays* belong to the painterly species of philosophy, the *Treatise* to the anatomical species—is independent of it.

I can imagine two further reasons Watkins might give for rejecting Immerwahr’s view of the relation between the *Essays* and the uncontroversially philosophical works. First, she may think that—unlike the early *Treatise*, perhaps—Hume’s *Enquiries* aim to *combine* the painterly and anatomical approaches, as E 1.17 perhaps suggests. (Abramson 2001, 2006, and 2007 defend this kind of view.) If so, then Watkins might reject Immerwahr’s picture on the grounds that Hume’s uncontroversially philosophical works do not, in general, take a purely anatomical approach to moral philosophy.

Second, the argument that Watkins finds in Hume’s aesthetic essays, detailed in Chapter 4 of her book, is plausibly an example of the ‘anatomical’ approach to moral philosophy. If so, then she might reject Immerwahr’s picture on the grounds that the *Essays* do not, in general,

take a purely painterly approach to moral philosophy.

If Watkins does reject Immerwahr's view for these or other reasons, then she owes us some other account of how the *Essays* relate to Hume's various uncontroversially philosophical works, with respect to the first *Enquiry*'s distinction between two ways of treating 'moral philosophy'. One important question here is whether Hume's uncontroversially philosophical works all approach 'moral philosophy' in the same way(s), or whether they differ in this respect: for example, it seems plausible to me that the *Treatise* takes a purely anatomical approach, whereas the first *Enquiry* and Hume's other mature works take a combined anatomical-cum-painterly approach. If this hypothesis is correct, then Watkins would need to distinguish different claims about the *Essays*' relation to Hume's various uncontroversially philosophical works. To my mind, her detailed arguments about the *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* suggest that, taken as a whole, this collection treats 'moral philosophy' in both anatomical and painterly ways. In this respect, I think, it resembles the *Enquiries* but not the *Treatise*.

Let's now turn to a point on which Watkins seems largely to agree with Immerwahr: her thesis that the Hume of the *Essays* has a 'Hellenistic cast of mind', insofar as he sees philosophy as 'medicine for the mind'. I want to consider two possible reasons for rejecting this thesis (hereinafter, *the Hellenistic Thesis*). The first is James Harris's (2007) argument that the Sceptic speaks for Hume and rejects the view that philosophy can be medicine for the mind. In response, Watkins argues that the Sceptic does not invariably speak for Hume, but often takes stronger positions than Hume himself would endorse. The Sceptic's rejection of philosophy as medicine for the mind is an example. I want to suggest an additional line of response that she may find attractive. We have seen that the painterly kind of 'moral philosophy' discussed in Section 1 of the first *Enquiry* aims to improve the moral character of its readers (E 1.1). If Hume's *Enquiries* or his other mature works combine the anatomical with the painterly, then

they presumably share this aim, in which case the mature Hume did not abandon philosophy as medicine for the mind. This consideration does not, by itself, falsify Harris's view. But it does show that the interpretive issues we have considered are interdependent: we cannot determine whether the Hellenistic Thesis is correct, independently of determining what kind of philosophy—atomical, painterly, or a combination—Hume means to offer in his *Essays* and in his mature uncontroversially philosophical works. Here, then, we see a further reason for Watkins to engage more fully with the first *Enquiry*'s distinction between the different ways of treating 'moral philosophy'.

The second possible reason for rejecting the Hellenistic Thesis, which neither Harris nor Watkins considers, is that Hume does not seem to find philosophy medicinal. On the contrary, in the famous Conclusion of *Treatise* Book 1, he reports that his investigations of the understanding induce 'philosophical melancholy and delirium', of which philosophy itself is powerless to cure him (T 1.4.7.9). When, thanks to the natural course of his passions, this unhappy state passes and his 'serious good-humour'd disposition' is restored (T 1.4.7.11), Hume does report that he finds philosophy pleasurable (T 1.4.7.12) and that it is a safer and more agreeable guide to the universe 'beyond the sphere of common life' than superstition (T 1.4.7.13). But these claims on philosophy's behalf seem rather weaker than Watkins's claim that philosophy can promote happiness and virtue in those who engage in it.

Here, again, it may have been valuable for Watkins to distinguish the early *Treatise* from the later of Hume's uncontroversially philosophical works. The first *Enquiry*, Hume's 'recast' version of *Treatise* Book 1, contains no report of 'melancholy and delirium'. It does note Pyrrhonian philosophy's potential to induce a momentary state of 'amazement and confusion' (E 12.23). But, to a greater extent than the *Treatise*, it emphasizes the benefits of this state to the individual thinker: 'Pyrrhonism, or excessive scepticism' can 'result' in a 'durable and useful' state of 'mitigated scepticism' (E 12.24, 12.25); and 'a small tincture of Pyrrhonism' is

recommended as medicine for the excessive intellectual pride of the learned (E 12.24). Therefore, Watkins's view that Hume regards philosophy as 'medicine for the soul' is more plausible when construed as a claim about the Hume of the first *Enquiry* than when construed as a claim about the Hume of *Treatise* Book 1.

The upshot of these critical remarks is that Watkins's arguments would have been strengthened in several ways had she paid more attention to the differences between the *Treatise* and the later of Hume's uncontroversially philosophical works, and had she devoted more space to examining the latter in relation to the *Essays*. The view that the *Essays* exemplify the same conception of philosophy as Hume's uncontroversially philosophical works is more plausible when restricted to the *Enquiries* and Hume's other mature works, especially if Abramson is right that the *Enquiries* are meant to offer a combination of anatomical and painterly philosophy. And the Hume of the *Enquiries* more plausibly regards philosophy—even sceptical philosophy—as 'medicine for the mind'. As a result, Watkins's view that the *Essays* are continuous with Hume's uncontroversially philosophical works, not an abandonment of philosophy, is more attractive when restricted to his mature works. She is in a position to claim, with considerable plausibility, that the *Enquiries* and *Essays* alike offer a combination of anatomical and painterly 'moral philosophy'; and that both exemplify a Hellenistic cast of mind, in offering philosophy that aims to improve the character of its readers. With respect to each point, Watkins's book would have benefited from a thorough examination of the first *Enquiry*'s distinction between anatomical and painterly approaches to 'moral philosophy'. Its neglect of this distinction is, I think, its main shortcoming.

5. Conclusion

I want to finish by emphasizing that, notwithstanding the shortcomings I (claim to) have identified, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays* is a rich and rewarding study. It

constitutes progress in Hume scholarship, by providing a much-needed commentary on Hume's *Essays* as a whole, and I am confident that it will contribute to further progress by inspiring scholars who have neglected the *Essays* to mend their ways. At any rate, Watkins has inspired me to revisit Hume's *Essays* and consider how they bear upon my own research, which has hitherto focused on the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*. In this way, like the *Essays* themselves, her book has contributed to individual progress, at least in my case.

I commend *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays* to all Hume scholars, especially those who have not hitherto made the *Essays* a focus of their work, and to all readers interested in the history of thinking about human progress.

JONATHAN COTTRELL

University of Edinburgh

j.cottrell@ed.ac.uk

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