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Donald T. Siebert

David Hume's Last Words:
The Importance of *My Own Life*



...A genuine and hearty pride, or self-esteem, if well conceal'd and well founded, is essential to the character of a man of honour, and...there is no quality of mind, which is more indispensably requisite to procure the esteem and approbation of mankind.

A Treatise of Human Nature
Book III, Part iii, section 2

Before I left Edinburgh, I wrote a small piece (you may believe it would be but a small one) which I call the History of my own Life....It will be thought curious and entertaining.

Letter to William Strahan
8 June 1776

David Hume's is a remarkable autobiography, even though it may lack the usual attractions of that genre. Anyone hankering for startling revelations or amusing anecdotes had better look elsewhere. We are tempted to imagine that Hume, knowing exactly how his "pupil" Rousseau would display himself in lengthy *Confessions*, wanted to make *My own Life* as different as possible: modest, restrained, scrupulously factual, and

brief, so brief indeed that T.E. Jessop has called it "one of the shortest autobiographies written by famous men."¹ Yet if we expect the temperamentally unlike to treat themselves differently, what about two figures much more closely resembling Hume in character and philosophy, who were known and respected by Hume, and who also wrote autobiographies--Benjamin Franklin and Edward Gibbon? In these cases the similarity among memoirs is intriguing, for in all three accounts we can hardly fail to notice that tone of self-satisfaction almost irritating in its resolute complacency. Is anything more amazing than finding these three spokesmen of their times, who we might remember were not exemplars of piety and conventionality, reviewing their own lives and pronouncing, "It was a great success"? There is no self-doubt or anguish, and yet no reliance on some extra-personal source of strength and assurance; rather, a cheerful resignation to what is. But there the resemblance stops. The accounts of Franklin and Gibbon are truly biographical. We see more of how they perceived themselves as human beings, caught up in relationships with others, working out their beliefs in reaction to people and books. In both there is the wealth of *ana*, for which eighteenth-century literature is so known, a characteristic almost entirely lacking in Hume's account. Even in its smugness Hume's *Life* might seem more extreme. In Franklin we have the playful admission of printer's errors, his "errata"; these were only slips, to be sure, prominently listed for the reader's benefit but hardly affecting the meaning of the work; still, these errata do acknowledge some human weakness. Likewise, Gibbon is not very upset by any of his miscalculations, yet there is at least a tepid degree of humanity in confessing, "I sighed as a lover: I obeyed as a son." There is none of this sort of thing in Hume.

Nonetheless, in spite of Hume's failure to admit mistakes and the pervasive self-assurance, *My own Life* is not an insufferably vain work. Like Franklin, he deals with the problem partially by getting it out in the open. The act of talking about oneself is itself vain. Franklin speaks of his struggle to vanquish his pride, achieving finally only the *appearance* of humility (which is often a prudential equivalent), and rationalizes with wry ingenuity: "In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural Passions so hard to subdue as *Pride*....You will see it perhaps often in this History. For even if I could conceive that I had compleatly overcome it, I should probably by [be] proud of my Humility."² Hume goes even further in anticipating the charges of vanity, for he begins and ends his *Life* with an open assertion that what he is doing will seem vain. Hume appears almost embar-

raised by the topic and determined to show his sensitivity to the issue. Franklin is self-confident and even a bit coy; Hume is defensive in his final sentence: "I cannot say, there is no Vanity in making this funeral Oration of myself; but I hope it is not a misplac'd one; and this is a Matter of Fact which is easily clear'd and ascertained."³ The challenging tone is softened by the exaggerated term "funeral Oration"--his *Life* has clearly been neither funereal nor oratorical--but the hint of defiance is still noticeable. More telling and convincing is Hume's resolution to avoid the snare of vanity by controlling the unavoidable consequences of talking of oneself: if every such word is vain, then limit such talk to a bare minimum. This will be the condition under which Hume will write his *Life*, as he emphasizes from the start:

It is difficult for a man to speak long of himself without Vanity: Therefore I shall be short. It may be thought an Instance of Vanity, that I pretend at all to write my Life: But this Narrative shall contain little more than the History of my Writings; as indeed, almost all my Life has been spent in literary Pursuits and Occupations. The first Success of most of my writings was not such as to be an Object of Vanity.

Anyone familiar with Hume's life, even any reader of the *Life* itself, realizes that the indifferent reception of his works scarcely made Hume think less of his achievement, but no one can argue against the other claim. *My own Life* is unquestionably a short history, shorter indeed than most of Hume's admirers and even his enemies might wish for. In that respect it is at least minimally vain.

Admittedly, Hume could have avoided the imputation of vanity completely by not writing at all, but we might remember that Hume took a great deal of care in seeing to it that this work would be prefixed to a posthumous edition of his writings.⁴ Thus the importance of this final statement, which was to stand at the head of his works, should not be underrated. If one of the primary assumptions behind eighteenth-century critical thinking is that a man's life and his works are inextricably connected, that we want and need to know what sort of person a writer was, that his character is part of any consideration of what his works amount to, then here we have Hume putting the finishing touches on his own life's work. What kind of man was he? Though Hume's *Life* is brief, let no one doubt that Hume has taken pains to indicate precisely how that question ought to be answered. The impression must be as favorable as possible.

Hence again the concern with vanity. If Hume is to reinforce an impression of himself as a good man, *le bon David*, as he was affectionately known, any hint that writing his life was self-serving and vain would be unthinkable. On the other hand, in his philosophical teaching Hume had boldly redefined virtue, insisting that greatness of mind and pride were more essentially virtuous than humility. Consider these statements in Hume's seminal *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), which anticipate exactly the problem Hume faced in writing his *Life*:

But tho' an over-weening conceit of our own merit be vicious and disagreeable, nothing can be more laudable, than to have a value for ourselves, where we really have qualities that are valuable....and 'tis certain, that nothing is more useful to us...than a due degree of pride, which makes us sensible of our own merit, and gives us a confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprizes....[but] That impertinent, and almost universal propensity of men, to over-value themselves, has given us such a *prejudice* against self-applause, that we are apt to condemn it, by a *general rule*, wherever we meet with it; and 'tis with some difficulty we give a privilege to men of sense, even in their most secret thoughts. At least, it must be own'd, that some disguise in this particular is absolutely requisite; and that if we harbour pride in our breasts, we must carry a fair outside, and have the appearance of modesty and mutual deference in all our conduct and behavior.⁵

Thus vanity is a good thing, if decorously masked. Vanity is also a good thing if it results in virtuous action: "NERO had the same vanity in driving a chariot, that TRAJAN had in governing the empire with justice and ability. To love the glory of virtuous deeds is a sure proof of the love of virtue."⁶ It is with this justifiable and even noble kind of vanity that Hume would prefer to be associated. It would be necessary for him only to demonstrate a reality of personal virtue in *My own Life*. In that sense the record would speak for itself, as indeed he avers in the final sentence.

In what ways is an image of *le bon David* projected in the few pages of *My own Life*? The Hume of this narrative is everywhere polite and well-intentioned, pursuing his studies and his writing (his "ruling Passion"), for some reason unaccountably exciting the resentment of some very clamorous factions. One almost forgets just how explosive many of Hume's ideas were, or how easily offended some understandably were by

those ideas. Hume does not dwell on this facet of his publications. They are his innocent progeny who do not merit the disregard or antagonism they receive. We pity the father and his unfortunate family: the *Treatise of Human Nature* "fell dead-born from the Press"; the second volume of the *History of England* "helped to buoy up its unfortunate Brother." Their father was himself an orphan, a "younger Brother" with but a slender patrimony, who looks back on his infancy: "My Father, who passed for a man of Parts, dyed, when I was an Infant; leaving me, with an elder Brother and a Sister under the care of our Mother, a woman of singular Merit, who, though young and handsome, devoted herself entirely to the rearing and educating of her Children." Here speaks the grateful son in a passage capable of stimulating a faint heartthrob in an eighteenth-century reader. Yet Hume, ever industrious, persevering, and cheerful, accepts his lot. We cannot miss the engaging self-deprecation when he boasts, "My Appointments, with my Frugality, had made me reach a Fortune, which I called independent, though most of my Friends were inclined to smile when I said so: In short, I was now Master of near a thousand Pounds."

But the unassuming "younger Brother" does have friends; he is always surrounded by company who know how to value such a man. The concluding character sketch--"My Company was not unacceptable to the young and careless, as well as to the Studious and literary: And as I took a particular Pleasure in the Company of modest women, I had no Reason to be displeas'd with the Reception I met with from them"--merely underscores that acceptance by *polite* society made clear throughout Hume's narrative. Hume does not neglect to highlight his reception in Paris. He may affect embarrassment at the adulation--"The more I recoiled from their excessive Civilities, the more I was load'd with them"--yet the next remark surely indicates what this lionization meant for Hume: "There is, however, a real Satisfaction in living at Paris from the great Number of sensible, knowing, and polite Company with which the City abounds above all places in the Universe." For Hume virtue is always to be associated with civilized company, and acceptance by the highly civilized, as here, is no trifling endorsement. This sense of a man being appreciated by the knowing is also strengthened by the many instances of Hume's being sought after by the important and influential for help. The "Friends and Family" of the Marquess of Annandale "were desirous of putting him under my Care and Direction: For the State of his Mind and Health required it"; "I then received an Invitation from General St clair to attend him..."; "the Faculty of Advocates chose me their Librarian"; "I received...an Invitation

from Lord Hertford, with whom I was not in the least acquainted, to attend him on his Embassy to Paris..."; "I received from Mr Conway an invitation to be Under-Secretary; and this Invitation both the Character of the Person, and my Connexions with Lord Hertford, prevented me from declining." Hume is willing to interrupt his studies to engage in public service; one imagines that he had no other motive than to be obliging and to do his duty. There is no mention that Hume may have needed the money and in fact had been receptive to efforts by friends to secure him positions, preferment, and pensions, nor is there any mention of efforts that did not succeed, such as the two fruitless bids for professorial appointment.

I am not suggesting that Hume was being devious or misleading. Rather he was understandably making sure that the facts he presented spoke in his favor; the others he could pass by or play down. Thus we are told that he was invited to go with General St. Clair on an expedition first directed against Canada and finally against France, but not of the farcical misadventures of that expedition; we are told that he was chosen by the Faculty of Advocates as their librarian, but not of the careful engineering it took his friends to get him this appointment. And there is no hint of the troubles Hume experienced in the chaotic household of the mad marquess.⁷ Anything that might sully the image of the man of the world and philosopher was downplayed or ignored. A sentence Hume struck out in manuscript is revealing in that regard. The sentence deleted follows the one quoted earlier concerning his being loaded with civilities in Paris: "Dr Sterne told me, that he saw I was [two words illegible] *Town* in the same manner that he himself had been in London: But he added, that his Vogue lasted only one Winter."⁸ For one thing, there would seem a certain pettiness, not to mention vanity, in measuring one's "vogue" alongside someone else's. Perhaps more damaging still, what credit would there be in suggesting any kind of association with the notorious Lawrence Sterne? However he may have liked Sterne, Hume had no desire to intimate that he was in any way a mere wit or trifler.

Rather, Hume was presenting himself as dignified and modest, as well-loved and socially accepted, as sensitive and moral--as a man of feeling above all. It is no accident that the most rhetorical sentence in the *Life* portrays Hume in this capacity. It records his *History's* initial reception. Because of the subject itself and his impartiality, Hume confesses that he was "sanguine" in his expectations. "But miserable was my Disappointment: I was assailed by one Cry of Reproach, Disapprobation, and even Detestation: English, Scotch, and Irish; Whig and Tory; Churchman and Sectary, Free-

thinker and Religionist; Patriot and Courtier united in their Rage against the Man, who had presumed to shed a generous Tear for the Fate of Charles I, and the Earl of Strafford...." Hume's presentation is hyperbolic, for the reception was hardly one of universal detestation; moreover, all these disparate groups would have no reason equally to condemn the treatment of Charles I in itself. In this case, however, Hume's intention is to contrast his own benevolence with the selfish malice of the world. The point here is that Hume had not actually sided with King Charles so much as he had pitied him. "To shed a generous Tear" gives it all away: it is the grand gesture of the man of feeling. The sentimental catchword "generous" is particularly noteworthy, for it stresses the highmindedness, the magnanimity of the act.⁹ Threatening the man of feeling is a mob, united only in their irrational hatred, an image nicely intensified by Hume's piling up of "English, Scotch, and Irish; Whig and Tory" and so on, into as unlikely a collection of bedfellows as one can imagine. It is a picture calculated to win sympathy.¹⁰

Besides the heightening and exaggeration involved, the rhetorical function of this passage becomes clear in another respect. For after the part just quoted, the sentence ends, "And after the first Ebullitions of this Fury were over, what was still more mortifying, the Book seemed to sink into Oblivion." What we see here is that Hume intends to enjoy the benefits of being identified as a man of feeling without giving the opposition the satisfaction of thinking he suffers on their account. If it is worse to be ignored than to be vilified by the mob, then we must conclude that their rage is impotent against a good man, whose feelings are stirred only by objects worthy of his generosity. Thus to punish the ill-natured as they deserve, Hume suggests throughout that he is not affected in the least by "their senseless Clamour." Like his benevolence, this equanimity is the gift of nature: "Such is the force of natural Temper, that these disappointments made little or no Impression on me." Yet the serene philosopher knows how to value the gifts of nature: "I was ever more disposed to see the favourable than the unfavourable Side of things; a turn of Mind, which it is more happy to possess than be born to an Estate of ten thousand a Year"; and he knows how to cultivate those gifts: "I was now callous against the Impressions of public Folly; and continued very peaceably and contentedly in my Retreat at Edinburgh..."; so that by the end, in the character sketch, benevolence seems appropriately fused with equanimity into a sweetness of temper that looks with pity and forgiveness on the ill-natured mob: "In a word, though most men any wise eminent, have found reason to com-

plain of Calumny, I never was touched, or even attacked by her baleful Tooth: And though I wantonly exposed myself to the Rage of both civil and religious Factions, they seemed to be disarmed in my behalf of their wonted Fury." If it would not be rather inappropriate for Hume, one could almost see in this attitude true Christian charity.

It is more a satirical strategy than it is Christian charity, however. Hume can well afford to appear indifferent or even charitable at this point, for he has had a number of previous opportunities to twit his enemies on their fecklessness. Hume has paid them again and again the supreme insult of not taking them seriously, and they are not taken seriously because they are so small and contemptible. In places the atmosphere seems almost mock-heroic, as a crowd of dunces clamors in vain for a chance to inflict some mean and gratuitous injury on the invulnerable hero. It is an atmosphere of "literary Squabbles," with each dunce scribbling an impotent pamphlet to be consigned to oblivion. "Answers, by Reverends, and Right Reverends, came out two or three in a Year: And I found, by Dr Warburtons Railing that the Books were beginning to be esteemed in good Company." The Warburtonians are especially malicious--and amusing. "I published at London, my natural History of Religion...Its public Entry was rather obscure, except only that Dr Hurd wrote a pamphlet against it, with all the illiberal Petulance, Arrogance, and Scurrility, which distinguishes the Warburtonian School. This Pamphlet gave me some Consolation for the otherwise indifferent Reception of my Performance."¹¹ Such attacks were apparently the consolation of philosophy. In the next sentence Hume seems to echo the title of his friend Gibbon: "In 1756, two Years after the fall of the first Volume, was published the second Volume of my History...." My association of Hume's phrasing with Gibbon's title is not as fanciful as it might first appear. Hume wrote this sentence within a month after reading the initial volume of *Decline and Fall*, and in a letter to Gibbon (18 March 1776), in that strain of bitterness toward the factious public so pervasive in his later correspondence, he uses the memorable words of the title to predict the same hostile reaction to Gibbon which his own works had received: "...among many other marks of Decline, the Prevalence of Superstition in England, prognosticates the Fall of Philosophy and Decay of Taste...."¹² At any rate, the phrase "fall of the first Volume" in the *Life* shows Hume playfully indifferent (or so he might like to pretend) to public hostility, and it may slyly hint that his enemies, like those of the Roman Empire, were barbarians and Christians.

It is apparent that Hume enjoyed writing his own *Life*. An

apologia pro vita sua, it allowed him to vindicate himself and to indulge that sportive humor for which he was well known among his friends. In fact, much of the *Life* is aimed at two different readers--one an outsider, the other an insider. The outsider might be sympathetic; he would be instructed and inspired by this story of a true philosopher triumphing over ignorance and malice. The unsympathetic outsider would be looking for something unfavorable, for evidence of Hume's unsavory character, or his suffering and regret, and looking in vain. The insider, on the other hand, knowing Hume intimately, would read between the lines. He would recognize the suppressions of detail and the understatement.

The insider would know the full meaning of Hume's saying "I received little or no Emolument" from being librarian of the Faculty of Advocates, because he would know that Hume had arranged for the blind poet Thomas Blacklock to receive the stipend in bond of annuity.¹³ He might smile when he read of Hume's tutelage of the insane Marquess of Annandale--"the Friends and Family...were desirous of putting him under my Care and Direction: For the State of his Mind and Health required it"--for he would notice not only the understatement but also remember the vexations of that whole experience for Hume, and except for netting Hume a profit (of which part was disputed for years), its lack of intended success. The insider would surely recognize the wag in Hume when Hume magnifies his disgust with the world:

...had not the War been at that time breaking out between France and England, I had certainly retired to some provincial Town of the former Kingdom, have changed my Name, and never more have returned to my native Country. But as this Scheme was not now practicable, and the subsequent Volume was considerably advanced, I resolved to pick up Courage and to persevere.

The seriousness of the threat is considerably undercut by the *practical* impossibility, and of no little importance to Hume the man, the attraction of completing and publishing another work, as well as his genuine love of Scotland. But the real drollery is in the resolve to change his name: Hume had done that long since, altering his name from "Home" to "Hume," somewhat to the disapproval of several relatives and friends.¹⁴

Another joke Hume's friends would be certain to appreciate is the remark on the reception of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*: "On my return from Italy, I had the Mortification to find all England in a Ferment on account of Dr. Mid-

dletons Free Enquiry; while my Performance was entirely overlooked and neglected." What is not stated is that Conyers Middleton had created an uproar by questioning the authenticity of miracles since the time of the apostles--boldly latitudinarian, perhaps, but not likely to shake the Church, even as it was not intended to. In outrageous contrast, Hume, who had suppressed his iconoclastic essay "Of Miracles" for ten years, had at last brought it out in the *Enquiry*, only to find it ignored! Whereas Middleton had questioned some miracles, not necessary to support Christianity, Hume had undermined a belief in *all* miracles and accordingly done, one would think, considerable damage to the Christian system. Could anyone have predicted such a strange turn of events, Hume might have said (and probably did say) to his friends? And they would have laughed with him at the folly of the world, as indeed Hume invites them to at this moment as he reminisces on his life.

One final dimension of *My Own Life* needs to be considered. It is a vindication of Hume's character and a revelation of his engaging personality, to be sure. It is also Hume's parting shot at the narrow-minded religionists who had been his chosen adversaries throughout life. We have seen them disappointed in their efforts to discredit or vanquish Hume. If they looked in the *Life* for anything to support their prejudices, they would be utterly frustrated. Realizing that the zealots, as Hume calls them, would be looking so hard, Hume has gone out of his way to bait them. He would remember the fondness of the pious for deathbed conversions of the wicked; it was a staple, after all, of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious literature. In this light, James Boswell's delightful "deathbed" interview of Hume can be read as if Hume were deliberately toying with his interviewer, who like a good reporter was angling for a sensational story, fully as significant as Burnet's conversion of the dissolute Rochester. And in this case it is the "pious" Boswell, not the infidel, who has his philosophy shaken. As Hume sketched out his *Life*, so it would be with others concerned for his immortal soul.

In what manner is divine providence or judgment manifest in Hume's *Life*? There is of course no direct reference to this order of reality which the pious would consider *sine qua non*; the course of Hume's life seems not only devoid of providential order but indeed anti-providential. That Hume's life is a success story might ordinarily suggest some providential interpretation. In Hume's case, on the contrary, the ending is wrong, for the infidel should be punished, not rewarded. Hume was probably happy to tease the self-righteous with this unpoetic justice, but the major emphasis in the *Life* is on the

One might think Hume were speaking of taking a stroll. "It is difficult to be more detached from Life than I am at present." Hume has demonstrated ataraxia with consummate skill. Philosophers make poor tragic heroes.

The character sketch of the final paragraph brings into sharp focus those personal traits which have informed the entire narrative:

To conclude historically with my own Character--I am, or rather was (for that is the Style, I must now use in speaking of myself; which emboldens me the more to speak my Sentiments) I was, I say, a man of mild Dispositions, of Command of Temper, of an open, social, and cheerful Humour, capable of Attachment, but little susceptible of Enmity, and of great Moderation in all my Passions. Even my Love of literary Fame, my ruling Passion, never soured my humour, notwithstanding my frequent Disappointments. My Company was not unacceptable to the young and careless, as well as to the Studious and literary: And as I took a particular Pleasure in the Company of modest women, I had no Reason to be displeas'd with the Reception I met with from them. In a word, though most men any wise eminent, have found reason to complain of Calumny, I never was touch'd, or even attack'd by her baleful Tooth: And though I wantonly expos'd myself to the Rage of both civil and religious Factions, they seem'd to be disarm'd in my behalf of their wonted Fury: My Friends never had occasion to vindicate any one Circumstance of my Character and Conduct: Not but that the Zealots, we may well suppose, wou'd have been glad to invent and propagate any Story to my Disadvantage, but they cou'd never find any which, they thought, wou'd wear the Face of Probability. I cannot say, there is no Vanity in making this funeral Oration of myself; but I hope it is not a misplac'd one; and this is a Matter of Fact which is easily clear'd and ascertain'd.

It is a fitting portrait of a man who was successful in every way Hume would have valued; he claims no more than is strictly called for--but it is enough. One almost detects, in the sense of modest sufficiency, a faint echo of the Epitaph in Gray's *Elegy*, except that the role of Heaven is nowhere appropriate:

*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
Heav'n did a recompence as largely send:
He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,
He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.*

I would not mention Gray's *Elegy* at all, for I do not pretend Hume was alluding to it, were it not for the way in which Hume's character sketch resembles in its function the Epitaph in Gray. They both extrude from the body of the work which has occasioned them to serve as a final earthly memorial and account of an individual life whose significance is now bound up with the significance of all human life. The implication in Gray is that man's standards no longer apply, inasmuch as the final judgment now rests with God. For Hume, in marked contrast, the human assessment is all that can matter, and the individual himself pronounces his own "funeral Oration" from the grave. Hume calls our attention to the immediacy of death, perhaps even the instant of death, by shifting tenses with an unmistakable flourish: "I am, or rather was (for that is the Style, I must now use in speaking of myself...) I was, I say...." Hume has stepped, as he himself would say, into Charon's boat at this very moment. He now speaks beyond the grave. In a farewell jeu d'esprit, Hume has granted himself a kind of immortality, after all.

Hume regarded himself preeminently as a man of letters, and *My own Life* is quintessentially such a man's last words. It is in every way commensurate with the remarkable life it presents. Though far different from the autobiographies of Rousseau, Franklin, and Gibbon, most obviously in its dearth of anecdote and intimate detail, it is no less artful, and finally, no less revealing. It is surely the man, as much as we would say those other famous memoirs embody their subjects. As we have seen, Hume must have intended for the zealots to read *My own Life* with disappointment, and yet some more friendly to Hume have probably read it with disappointment, too, sorry that it did not at least tell more. When we read it, however, fully aware of Hume's thought, the details of his life, and his reputation, perceived so differently among so many people of his day, then his purpose in writing his *Own Life* becomes clearer, and its pervasive art and good humor that much more evident. Writing of "this small piece" to Adam Smith (May 3, 1776), Hume once again speaks of more than might first meet the eye: "You will find among my Papers a very inoffensive Piece, called *My own Life*, which I composed a few days before I left Edinburgh, when I thought, as did all my Friends, that my Life was despaired of. There can be no Objection, that this small piece should be sent to Messrs Strahan

and Cadell and the Proprietors of my other Works to be prefixed to any future Edition of them." Unlike the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*--or the suppressed essays on suicide and the immortality of the soul--there need be no solicitude on Smith's or any other friend's account about publishing this little work.¹⁶ That it would be "very inoffensive" Hume may have had other thoughts. The zealots could surely not take comfort in its lessons. To Hume's friends, though, and to all generous men, *My own Life* would prove "very inoffensive" only by the most extravagant understatement. It would delight.

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NOTES

¹"The Misunderstood Hume," in *Hume and the Enlightenment*, ed. William B. Todd (Edinburgh, 1974), p. 9.

²*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree, et al. (New Haven, 1964), p. 160.

³Citations to *My own Life* throughout are from the text given by Ernest Campbell Mossner, in *The Forgotten Hume: Le bon David* (New York, 1943), pp. 3-10, which appears also as Appendix A in Mossner's *The Life of David Hume*. Because Hume's autobiography is so brief, citations will not include page numbers.

⁴See Hume's letters to Adam Smith and William Strahan, in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford, 1932), II, 317-8, 323.

⁵*A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (1888; rpt. Oxford, 1967), pp. 596-8.

⁶*The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose (London, 1875), III, 156.

⁷See Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1980), pp. 187-204, 249-51, 163-76.

⁸See the text in *The Letters of David Hume*, I, 6n.

⁹In his *Dictionary* Samuel Johnson defines "generous" in this special sense: "noble of mind; magnanimous; open of heart."

¹⁰See the interesting treatment of Hume by J.C. Hilson, "Hume: the Historian as Man of Feeling," in *Augustan Worlds*, ed. J.C. Hilson, et al. (Bristol, 1978), pp. 205-22.

¹¹Mossner expresses surprise over this passage: "In view of the tumult occasioned by *Four Dissertations*, it is not easy to interpret the remark of Hume in his autobiography concerning the 'indifferent Reception of my Performance.' Certainly he could not have meant that it went unnoticed...." And Mossner goes on to document the angry attention Hume got on this occasion (*The Life of David Hume*, pp. 331-2). When we consider the overall impression of personal serenity which Hume has endeavored to create, then his remark is not hard to interpret.

¹²*The Letters of David Hume*, II, 310.

¹³Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, pp. 253-5, 382.

¹⁴Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, pp. 6-7, 276. See also the deathbed letter to Hume's favorite nephew David Home or Hume, with its avuncular banter: "I doubt not but my Name woud have procured you Friends and Credit, in the Course of your Life, especially if my Brother had allowd you to carry it: For who will know it, in the present Disguise?"--*The Letters of David Hume*, II, 333.

¹⁵It is revealing that Hume praised *Candide* as a sprightly and impious "Satyre upon Providence, under Pretext of criticizing the Leibnitian System"--*New Letters of David Hume*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford, 1954), p. 53.

¹⁶*The Letters of David Hume*, II, 318; Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, pp. 328-32.

The reception of *My own Life* turned out to be exactly as Hume might have expected and intended, delighting his friends and confounding his enemies. For a survey of the negative reaction, see *Philosophical Works*, III, 80-84.

I am indebted to Professor Ernest Mossner for reading this paper and offering suggestions for its improvement, and in particular for calling my attention to this revealing observation by Adam Smith, in a letter to Alexander Wedderburn (14 August 1776): "Poor David Hume is dying very fast, but with great chearfulness and good humour and with more real resignation to the necessary course of things, than any Whining Christian ever dyed with pretended resignation to the will of God"--*The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross (Oxford, 1977), p. 203.