

【書 評】

Ryu Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015, xii + 348 pp.

The purpose of this book is to provide a systematic interpretation of Hume's multi-faceted thought within the framework of "Sceptical Enlightenment," and to reassess his status as an Enlightenment thinker. In order to construct this framework, Susato first redefines the idea of Enlightenment as a new form of historical awareness of an emerging, civilized society in early modern Europe, with all its related issues. Then he identifies the overarching feature of Hume's thinking as an anti-dogmatic endorsement of modern Epicureanism and self-skeptical advocacy of a civilized society.

Subsequently, Susato delineates Hume's "Sceptical Enlightenment" by examining the substantive issues he discussed, thoroughly embedding his writings in both historical context and in our present-day scholarship. Susato's enquiry begins with Hume's uniquely balanced adoption of the association of ideas compared to other thinkers within that tradition (ch. 2). On this epistemological basis, he develops a historical reading of Hume's use of "opinion" as a guiding principle of his moral, political, and historical writings (ch. 3). Susato next examines some of the more specific issues Hume discusses in relation to a civilized society: the moral and political effects of luxury (ch. 4), religion

and its relation with a political society (ch. 5), the best constitutional and electoral system to curb factious disorders (ch. 6), and the potential of progress and decline of human society (ch. 7). Throughout, the author illustrates how Hume delivers self-consciously balanced discussions on these issues by rigorously comparing Hume with his predecessors and contemporaries. Chapter 8 explores the greatly divided posthumous reception of Hume as a philosopher and a historian through to the mid-nineteenth century, especially from the Radicals, Whigs, and Romantics. The concluding chapter draws further implications of Hume's "Sceptical Enlightenment" mainly through comparisons with Voltaire.

This is an exhaustively historical work. Susato's interpretations are meticulously contextualized in the discourses of Hume's forerunners, contemporaries, critics, and advocates. In addition, Susato's close attention to Hume's revision of *Essays* and *History* is a compelling feature of this volume. Thus, this book abounds in stimulating textual and contextual findings.

Further, Susato's reading of Hume scrutinizes his writings on epistemology, morals, politics, economy, religion, and history. This work can claim to have successfully combined historical depth with inter-disciplinary breadth in exploring the

almost limitless expansion and complication of Hume's thought. Placed within the trajectory of such similar works beginning with Duncan Forbes's monumental book, one of Susato's significant contributions is to incorporate Hume's economic thinking into a historical and inter-disciplinary framework.

The framework, "Sceptical Enlightenment," is thought provoking. It persuasively unites the allegedly inconsistent strands of Hume's thinking into a reasonable position of self-skeptical advocacy of a civilized society. This reading is not only a persuasive route in conquering "the terrible campaign country" (24), but also a successful depiction of Hume's outstanding characteristic as an Enlightenment thinker, a depiction which is firmly supported by the detailed historical comparisons with other Enlightenment thinkers in this book.

The remaining space affords the opportunity to make just a few passing comments. In chapter 4, Susato contrasts Hume's silence on the issues of hypocrisy and the negative effects of the division of labor with the more serious consideration offered by other contemporary thinkers (e.g., Adam Smith). Susato explains this silence by juxtaposing a Stoic "spectator" understanding of morals as Hume's background intellectual tradition, compared to Epicurean/Augustinian pessimism in others (105–25). Nonetheless, the fact remains that Hume was indifferent to these issues, which likely posed counter-principles to his own advocacy of a civilized society, in spite of the more serious concerns his close intellectual acquaintances ex-

pressed. It is worth considering to what extent Hume was a "Sceptical" Enlightenment thinker regarding this issue.

In chapter 5, while legitimately emphasizing Hume's continual criticism of the clergy, the author describes Hume's favorable comments on the Church of England as "flattering" (136) and "complimentary" (146), and as an "occasional excuse" (151) influenced by the fact that the church was the national church in England. This may be true, but would seem to warrant a closer examination. If the *status quo* thus exerts significant influence over Hume's texts, one would suspect a similar possibility that his favorable comments on mixed constitutions and his "Perfect Commonwealth" essay itself would be mere flattery influenced by the form of government in Britain, although the author stresses Hume's seriousness on both regards (ch. 6). In addition, this practical disguise (if such) would lead to another reconsideration of the extent of his "Sceptical Enlightenment" thinking, and possibly provide a little justification for later criticism of Hume as a hypocrite (ch. 8).

Throughout the book, the author carefully analyses the uniqueness of Hume's thinking by comparing him with several of his predecessors, and by exploring his tangible contributions. While I do accept that Susato's approach is effective and valuable in most parts of the book, especially in chapters 2, 3, and 7, it seems to me that he is sometimes too systematic in his analysis of Hume's contributions. I find myself wondering if such comparisons, when drawn too flatly, might lead to a reduction of Hume's complex worldviews to its bare

components, something interchangeable with, and therefore indistinguishable from, those of other thinkers' views.

These viewpoints are not outright objections. Rather, the intention here is to

contribute toward what is indisputably a continuing and fruitful discussion resulting from this seminal work.

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