



2015

Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain: New Case Studies: Book Review

Bob Tennant
Durham University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rae>



Part of the [History Commons](#), [Other English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tennant, Bob (2015) "Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain: New Case Studies: Book Review," *Religion in the Age of Enlightenment*: Vol. 5, Article 19.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rae/vol5/iss1/19>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religion in the Age of Enlightenment by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain: New Case Studies

*A Review by Bob Tennant
Durham University*

This collection of twelve individually strong pieces was published in tribute to M. A. Stewart, the former Gifford Lecturer and, until lately, professor of philosophy at Lancaster University. The editor, Ruth Savage, succeeded in putting together an outstanding list of contributors from across Britain, Europe, and North America. This in itself is a tribute to Stewart's eminence in research and evident excellence as a teacher.

The first seven chapters are a miscellany of studies, the range reflecting Stewart's own breadth of activity. Giovanni Tarantino writes about Martin Clifford, the seventeenth-century English deist. A. D. G. Steers offers a piece about the nonsubscribing Irish Presbyterian Samuel Haliday, who continued his career in Scotland. James Moore studies Scottish Presbyterian nonsubscription in relation to Francis Hutcheson and Hutcheson's relationship with his father—a most interesting extension of our knowledge of someone who tends to be remembered as a moral philosopher tout court. The sole chapter about Locke is by Victor Nuovo, in which Nuovo extends backward his earlier work on the contemporary reception of *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, suggesting that that work is underpinned by a Socinian apologetics. Laurent

Jaffro writes about Toland's atheistic Christology, and Udo Thiel revisits human resurrection and personal identity.

It is notable that the authors of two of the most outstanding chapters can claim Stewart's direct assistance, Stewart having either read drafts or supplied references. Isabel Rivers's subject—the Scottish Episcopalian Henry Scougal, author of *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*—is perhaps a minor figure, but the chapter is a considerable piece of painstaking bibliographical and textual scholarship. Most valuably, the chapter is prefaced by the shrewd and not sufficiently proclaimed fact that works of practical religion were more typical, influential, and—for the historian—more reliably fruitful as evidence than were the opinionated writings of controversialists, whose glamour must always be somewhat at odds with the practical religion of the congregations and wider society. Rivers shows how Scougal's book was, at different times and places, published, prefaced, edited, and redacted from three directions: the mysticism of a strain of largely Scottish Episcopalianism, practical Methodism, and the SPCK. Knut Haakonssen, in another cogent piece, also draws on Stewart in his chapter, "Natural Jurisprudence and the Identity of the Scottish Enlightenment." He analyzes the persistence in the Scottish universities' curricula of natural law and natural jurisprudence, "doggedly maintained" (265) well into the nineteenth century. Unlike Rivers's self-contained chapter, Haakonssen's serves as a preface to forthcoming works, in which the later stages of the Scottish Enlightenment in creating "the civic education of a moderately progressive [Scottish] society" (277) are presumably discussed.

In contrast to the book's overall miscellaneous nature are the four chapters about Hume. Aaron Garrett offers thoughts about the relationship between Joseph Butler and Hume, who admired him. This is a matter of record, but suggestions that Butler reciprocated are anecdotal, although plausible enough: Butler was broad-minded. Garrett discusses some of the correspondence between Samuel Clarke and his intellectually massive but personally humble disciple and examines the Fifteen Sermons' too-little analyzed influence on the Scottish school. It is deeply ironic that the atheist Hume should be attracted by someone

whose sturdy and subtle empiricism was so saturated in dark, Newtonian metaphysics.

Two chapters publish Hume manuscripts, one very early and one very late. John P. Wright presents Hume's early "Essay on Chivalry," the playfulness of which—a sort of anti-Addison—is so characteristic of his mature work. Following Stewart himself in assigning the "Essay" a relatively late date (ca. 1731), Wright attempts to use the essay as a sort of back-bearing to support readings and critiques of Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury in the *Treatise*. Moritz Baumstark's publishes a very late Hume letter—August 1, 1775—in which Hume supports American independence because he professes to dislike "these factious colonists." (Butler bubbles under again—Josiah Tucker, whom Baumstark cites, was his chaplain.) Hume also wishes to see the churches converted to riding schools and other useful functions. But since he also anticipates Englishmen (that is, Britons) being forbidden to round the Cape of Good Hope, under pain of death, and the government being unable to raise bonds at 20 percent, we must acknowledge the risk of taking things too seriously. The letter is surely a piece of playfulness; it is the product of a grumpy old man, certainly, but it echoes the playfulness of the early "Essay on Chivalry"—as well as prominent tendencies in the mature works of this philosophe, belle lettriste, ironist, and practitioner (in Wright's phrase) of "conjectural history" (203).

The fourth Hume chapter is written by James A. Harris and addresses "The Early Reception of Hume's Theory of Justice." This work gives a solid account of critiques—developed mainly by Kames (who corresponded with Butler), Smith, and Reid—of Hume's ethics, again usually with Butler as groundwork. Harris's point is well made: "That Butler was English will disturb those who wish to regard the Scottish Enlightenment as having owed little or nothing to the country that lies to the south of the Tweed . . . [we should have] no regard for the sensibilities of cultural chauvinists on either side of the border" (214).

Taking the volume as a whole, the absence of a critique of Stewart's own body of such remarkable work might be regretted, although it would have been beyond Savage's declared remit. The American

practice of critical tribute, with its dedicatee's "reply to my critics," is much to be admired.

The individual chapters are stimulating, vivacious, and of a generally high standard of scholarship. Some are really outstanding. The reader does, however, need to bear in mind that, as "case studies," the chapters are unconnected with each other, although there is a certain fellow-feeling in those on Hume (with which Haakonssen's sits comfortably). The book's whole is no greater than the sum of its parts, but, to adapt Butler, it is what it is, and not another thing. It is well worth reading.

Savage, Ruth, ed. *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain: New Case Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. x + 289.