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W. Hume

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ESSAYS.

BY

DAVID HUME.

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ESSAYS,
LITERARY, MORAL,
AND
POLITICAL.

BY
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ADVERTISEMENT.

MOST of the principles and reasonings, contained in this volume, were published in a work in three volumes, called *A Treatise of Human Nature*: a work which the author had projected before he left college, and which he wrote and published not long after. But not finding it successful, he was sensible of his error in going to the press too early, and he cast the whole anew in the following pieces; where some negligences in his former reasoning, and more in the expression, are, he hopes, corrected. Yet several writers, who have honoured the author's philosophy with answers, have taken care to direct all their batteries against that juvenile work, which the author never acknowledged, and have affected to triumph in any advantages which, they imagined, they had obtained over it. Henceforth, the author desires that the following pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGES
<i>Essay. I. Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion</i>	9—11
II. Of the Liberty of the Press	11—13
III. That Politics may be reduced to a Science	13—22
IV. Of the First Principles of Government	23—25
V. Of the Origin of Government	25—28
VI. Of the Independence of Parliament	28—31
VII. Whether the British Government inclines more to absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic	31—35
-VIII. Of Parties in General	35—40
IX. Of the Parties of Great Britain	40—45
X. Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature	45—49
XI. Of Civil Liberty	49—55
XII. Of Eloquence	55—63
XIII. Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences	63—79
XIV. The Epicurean	79—84
XV. The Stoic	84—90
XVI. The Platonist	90—93
XVII. The Sceptic	93—107
XVIII. Of Polygamy and Divorces	107—113
XIX. Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing	113—116
XX. Of National Characters	116—127
XXI. Of Tragedy	127—133
XXII. Of the Standard of Taste	134—149
XXIII. Of Commerce	149—158
XXIV. Of Refinement in the Arts	159—167
XXV. Of Money	167—175
XXVI. Of Interest	176—184
XXVII. Of the Balance of Trade	184—195
XXVIII. Of the Jealousy of Trade	195—198
XXIX. Of the Balance of Power	198—203
XXX. Of Taxes	203—207
XXXI. Of Public Credit	207—217
XXXII. Of some Remarkable Customs	217—222
XXXIII. Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations	222—269
XXXIV. Of the Original Contract	270—283
XXXV. Of Passive Obedience	283—286
XXXVI. Of the Coalition of Parties	286—291
XXXVII. Of the Protestant Succession	291—298
XXXVIII. Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth	298—308
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XXXIX. AN INQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.	
Sect. I. Of the different species of Philosophy	308—316
II. Of the Origin of Ideas	316—320
III. Of the Association of Ideas	320—321

CONTENTS.

PAGES

IV. Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of Understanding	321—331
V. Sceptical Solution of these Doubts	331—341
VI. Of Probability	341—343
VII. Of the Idea of Necessary Connection	343—355
VIII. Of Liberty and Necessity	356—371
IX. Of the Reason of Animals	371—374
X. Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy	374—385
XL. A DISSERTATION ON THE PASSIONS	385—407
XLI. AN INQUIRY CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS.	
Sect. I. Of the general Principles of Morals	407—411
II. Of Benevolence	411—415
III. Of Justice	415—429
IV. Of Political Society	429—433
V. Why Utility pleases	433—446
VI. Of Qualities useful to Ourselves	446—456
VII. Of Qualities immediately agreeable to Ourselves	456—463
VIII. Of Qualities immediately agreeable to Others	463—478
Append. I. Concerning Moral Sentiment	478—484
II. Of Self-love	484—489
III. Some farther considerations with regard to Justice	489—494
IV. Of some Verbal Disputes	494—501
XLII. A DIALOGUE	501—514
XLIII. THE NATURAL HISTORY OF RELIGION. Introduction	514—515
I. Polytheism was the Primary Religion of Men	515—518
II. Origin of Polytheism	518—520
III. The same Subject continued	520—523
IV. Deities not considered as Creators or Formers of the World	523—527
V. Various Forms of Polytheism: Allegory, Hero-Worship	527—530
VI. Origin of Theism from Polytheism	530—533
VII. Confirmation of this doctrine	533—534
VIII. Flux and Reflux of Polytheism and Theism	534—536
IX. Comparison of these Religions with regard to Persecution and Toleration	536—538
X. With regard to Courage or Abasement	538—539
XI. With Regard to Reason or Absurdity	540—541
XII. With Regard to Doubt or Conviction	541—547
XIII. Conceptions of the Divine Nature in Religion	547—549
XIV. Bad Influence of Popular Religions on Morality	549—551
XV. General Corollary	551—552
OF MIRACLES	553—568
OF A PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE AND OF A FUTURE STATE	568—579
OF SUPERSTITION AND ENTHUSIASM	579—583

HUME'S ESSAYS.

I.—OF THE DELICACY OF TASTE AND PASSION.

SOME people are subject to a certain *delicacy* of *passion*, which makes them extremely sensible to all the accidents of life, and gives them a lively joy upon every prosperous event, as well as a piercing grief, when they meet with misfortunes and adversity. Favours and good offices easily engage their friendship; while the smallest injury provokes their resentment. Any honour or mark of distinction elevates them above measure; but they are as sensibly touched with contempt. People of this character have, no doubt, more lively enjoyments, as well as more pungent sorrows, than men of cool and sedate tempers: but, I believe, when everything is balanced, there is no one, who would not rather be of the latter character, were he entirely master of his own disposition. Good or ill fortune is very little at our disposal: and when a person, that has this sensibility of temper, meets with any misfortune, his sorrow or resentment takes entire possession of him, and deprives him of all relish in the common occurrences of life; the right enjoyment of which forms the chief part of our happiness. Great pleasures are much less frequent than great pains; so that a sensible temper must meet with fewer trials in the former way than in the latter. Not to mention, that men of such lively passions are apt to be transported beyond all bounds of prudence and discretion, and to take false steps in the conduct of life, which are often irretrievable.

There is a *delicacy* of *taste* observable in some men, which very much resembles this *delicacy* of *passion*, and produces the same sensibility to beauty and deformity of every kind, as that does to prosperity and adversity, obligations and injuries. When you present a poem or a picture to a man possessed of this talent, the delicacy of his feelings makes him be sensibly touched with every part of it; nor are the masterly strokes perceived with more exquisite relish and satisfaction, than the negligences or absurdities with disgust and uneasiness. A polite and judicious conversation affords him the highest entertainment; rudeness or impertinence is as great a punishment to him. In short, delicacy of taste has the same effect as delicacy of passion: it enlarges the sphere both of our happiness and misery, and makes us