

David Hartley
on
Human Nature



Richard C. Allen

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SUNY series in the
Philosophy of Psychology
Michael Washburn, editor

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*To
Catherine Ann Shoupe*

Those who are not fond of much close thinking . . . will not thank me for endeavouring to introduce into more public notice such a theory of the human mind as that of Dr. Hartley. His is not a book that a man can read over in a few evenings, so as to be ready to give a satisfactory account of it to any of his friends who happen to ask him what there is in it, and expect an answer in a few sentences. In fact, it contains a new and most extensive science, and requires a vast fund of preparatory knowledge to enter upon the study of it with any prospect of success.

But, in return, I will promise any person who shall apply to this work, with proper furniture, that the study of it will abundantly reward his labour. It will be like entering upon a new world, afford inexhaustible matter for curious and useful speculation, and be of unspeakable advantage in almost every pursuit, and even in things to which it seems, at first sight, to bear no sort of relation. For my own part, I can almost say, that I think myself more indebted to this one treatise, than to all the books I ever read beside; the scriptures excepted.

—Joseph Priestley, 1774

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Preface

But when the New Age is at leisure to Pronounce, all will be set right: & those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly Inspired Men will hold their proper rank, & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration.
—William Blake, "Preface" to Milton, 1804

Milton's daughters read to him in his blindness. When they spoke the familiar words from the "Grand Works" their father knew and loved, they served as bearers of memory. In reading Hartley for you, I hope to be faithful to these "daughters of memory": I aim to discover and present what Hartley wrote in a way that accurately depicts the content and contours of his thinking.

In this regard, it is important to remain sensitive to the senses of words as Hartley used them, especially the meanings he gave to his terms of art and technical vocabulary. His use of "idea," for example, differs somewhat from Locke's; and some key words, such as "annihilation," bear a distinctive meaning.

Words are but markers of places and boundaries in the geography of knowledge and imagination; it is the geography itself that situates them and reveals their patterns and interconnections. And here it is essential to remember that the boundaries between realms, their clustered settlements, and their routes of trade and exchange were not then as they are today. This book is one in a series in the philosophy of

psychology. In Hartley's day, "philosophy" commonly meant "natural philosophy"—of which Newton's *Principia Mathematica* was the paradigm—and "psychology" scarcely existed as a "science," although Hartley does use the word to describe his own work. The following account of Hartley's psychology contains discussions of topics whose relevance may not at first sight be apparent. These include the mathematical "doctrines" of "fluxions" (i.e., calculus) and of "chances" (probability), and the issue of the relationship of algebra to geometry; the chemical theory of "the powers of attraction and repulsion" by which material bodies cohere and decompose; the search for a "lithontriptic"—a medicine that would dissolve kidney and bladder stones; and, in religion, the "everlasting gospel" of universal salvation. That Hartley compounded these elements into his psychology is in part owing to the fact that these were the realms of knowledge that interested and inspired him. But, in addition, that Hartley was able to synthesize a psychology out of these elements was also owing to the fact that he *could* do so; in an age in which natural philosophers were, like the rest of the educated population, expected to be theologically literate, the ways between chemistry and religion were not, as they are in the contemporary landscape, impassable.

The Scots tongue today retains a meaning that was once available in English: a "gate" is a road rather than a barrier. The name of the town of Windygates in Fife means "the windy road." Hartley and his contemporaries saw gates where we see—gates. They saw roads rather than barriers, ways to connect farms and fields rather than prohibitions on access. Recovering a sense of the geography of knowledge present to Hartley requires that we follow him through—or better, along—the gates.

A number of works have helped me gain a familiarity with this geography: these include D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (1964); John Yolton, *Thinking Matter* (1983) and *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid* (1984); Daniel N. Robinson, *An Intellectual History of Psychology* (3d ed., 1995) and *The Philosophy of Psychology* (1985); and D. G. C. Allan and Robert E. Schofield, *Stephen Hales* (1980). I have also benefited greatly from reading Robert E. Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism* (1970); Arnold Thackray, *Atoms and Powers* (1970); and I. Bernard Cohen, *Franklin and Newton* (1956). Despite the many contributions to scholarship on Newton and the Newtonians during the past forty years, I would still warmly recommend Cohen's grand work to anyone interested in the world of Newtonian thought. To mix metaphors, these works are part of the "furniture" Joseph

Priestley speaks of in the passage I have chosen for an epigraph. They have aided and guided my attempt to apply myself to Hartley's *Observations*, and I recommend them to readers of this book.

Understanding the geography of knowledge of a past age also requires that we trace the correlations between the named places of the past and those of the present: we must connect Hartley's sense of intellectual geography with our own. To further this task of correlation, it is useful for both author and reader to make comparisons with later philosophers and psychologists. I find, for example, a similarity between Hartley's concept of the verbal transference of emotion and Jung's use of word association in developing his theory of the complex (§7.2). I also, in §4.4, compare Hartley's theory of perception with Gerald M. Edelman's account of the biology of consciousness, and particularly with his concepts of reentrant and global mapping. More importantly, I discern a much more general and profound affinity, indeed a resonance, between the *Observations* and one of the works I esteem most highly—William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890). I studied James before I read Hartley, and the *Principles* was on the shelf before me as I wrote the paragraphs and pages of this book. Although I could be charged with providing a Jamesian interpretation of Hartley, I do not think this is the case. Rather, my study of Hartley has led me to the conviction that there is a deep connection between Hartley and James, that James's *Principles* is in many respects a restatement, in a new idiom, of the psychology of Hartley's *Observations*. And that conviction can be situated within a still more general one: that the "way of ideas" of Locke and Hartley and the "pragmatist" psychologies of James, Dewey, and, more recently, James J. Gibson bear a relationship of continuity and complementarity rather than of opposition—despite the fact the latter often see themselves in opposition to the former. To gain a sense of this issue, the reader may wish to read, along with *David Hartley on Human Nature*, John Yolton's *Perceptual Acquaintance* and Edward S. Reed's *Encountering the World* (1996a). If you do so, please keep in mind that I started reading Gibson and Reed only after I had completed the first six chapters of this book.

In pointing out such affinities, I do not suggest that Hartley only provided a first attempt to articulate what twentieth-century writers have said so much better; rather, I hope that the connections will help us deepen our appreciation and understanding of all the thinkers, and provide a richer resource for our own observations of humanity and understanding of ourselves.

In contemplating the image of Milton's daughters, Blake attained an insight: that partial and distorted reading of the "Grand Works" of the past places a barrier before future understanding; but that memory, when it "sets right" a work, is also inspiration, revealing beneath the barrier the course of an ancient and still serviceable gate. By seeking to set right Hartley's "Grand Work," this book aims to help us find that gate—and to recognize our companions, the daughters of memory, to be the daughters of inspiration.

Thanks to: Michael Washburn, for seeing the relevance of Hartley to our age, and for consistently supporting the writing and publication of this book; Graham Berry, at Dundee University, for our many conversations concerning Hartley's chemistry and physics; W. Hartley Russell, for his hospitality during my stay at Donnington Hospital, and for kindly granting me access to the Hartley family papers; Cecilia Millson, Sheila and David Flower, and Chris Byng, for their hospitality, and for helping me better appreciate the history of Donnington and of the Hartley family; Christine Gascoigne, Keeper of Rare Books, Norman Reid, and Cilia Jackson, at the St. Andrew's University Library, for their expert help during the many hours I spent in the rare book room—back in the eighteenth century; the librarians and archivists at the Calderdale Central Library, Halifax, for their help with the Hartley-Lister correspondence and for permission to quote from Hartley's letters; Paul and Judy Brett, for their hospitality while I was at the British Library; Peter Turvey, at Offton, Suffolk, for his genealogical research; Gail Mandell and Tom Parisi, at Saint Mary's College, for reading chapters of the work; Bob Webb, for helping me understand Hartley's influence on the Unitarians; Alan W. Hewat, for his thorough and intelligent editing; Jane Bunker, Ruth Fisher, and Fran Keneston, at SUNY Press, for their contributions to making this book a reality; and John Yolton and Daniel N. Robinson, the readers for SUNY Press, whose insightful comments and recommendations pointed out those areas in which the work required revision. And my special thanks to my dear wife, Catherine Ann Shoupe, for listening to me on many a rainy night in Fife, as I worked through what I intended to say next, and particularly for her careful and perceptive reading of the work.

Abbreviations

- B* John Byrom. 1854–57. *The Private Journal and Literary Remains of John Byrom*. Edited by Richard Parkinson. Publications of the Chetham Society, vols. 32, 34, 40, and 44. Manchester: The Chetham Society. Citation is to volume, part, and page: *B* 2.1.126 is to volume 2, pt. 1, page 126.
- C* Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Collected Works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Citation is to volume and page.
- HU* John Locke. [1690] 1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Citation is to book, chapter, and section.
- L* The Correspondence of David Hartley and John Lister. Calderdale Archives, Calderdale Central Library, Halifax. Each letter bears the reference SH:7/HL plus a number; Hartley's letter of 15 November 1735 is SH:7/HL/1. Citation is to the number only: *L* 1.
- OM* David Hartley. *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*. Because the text is unchanged throughout the editions, and because readers may wish to consult the edition that is most readily available to them, citation is to part, chapter, section, and proposition: *OM* 1.3.3.89 is to part 1, chapter 3, section 3, proposition 89. The 1791 folio edition numbers all

the propositions consecutively, so that proposition 1 of part 2 is given as proposition 100, proposition 2 as 101, etc.

T W.B. Trigg. 1938. "The Correspondence of Dr. David Hartley and Rev. John Lister." *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society* 10:230–78. Trigg quotes a number of the letters and provides some contextualization for them. Citation is to page.

Chronology

21 June 1705

D.H. baptized at Halifax Saint John. His father was David Hartley, B.A. 1695, Lincoln College, Oxford; a clergyman, he served at Luddenden, 1698–1705, at Illingworth, 1705–17, both villages near Halifax, and at Armley, Leeds. His mother was Evereld (Everilda) Wadsworth, christened 2 February 1676, at Elland, Yorks.; married David Hartley Sr., 12 May 1702. Their daughter Elizabeth was christened 22 Feb 1704. The date of 30 August 1705, given by D.H.'s son David in the biographical note in the 1791 folio edition of the *Observations*, is incorrect.

14 Sept 1705

Evereld Wadsworth Hartley, D.H.'s mother, buried.

25 May 1707

David Hartley Sr., marries Sarah Wilkinson. They have three children: John (m. Mary Holker, Elland), Bernard, Mary (m. Thomas Bradley, Halifax).

1720

David Hartley Sr., dies at Armley.

21 Apr 1722

D.H. admitted sizar, Jesus College, Cambridge, as son of David Hartley, Clerk, deceased, Ovenden, Halifax. — "Title: Dr. Dorson" (Gray 1855).

Michalmas term 1722

D.H. matriculates. His tutor is John Warham.

3 Jan 1723

D.H. awarded Rustat Scholarship.

27 May 1723

John Byrom at Cambridge, promoting proposals for "printing and publishing a new method of shorthand."

1726

D.H. receives B.A.

1727

Isaac Newton dies at age eighty-four (b. 1642).

13 Nov 1727

D.H. is fellow "in the room of Mr. Lucas."

8 Oct 1729

D.H. "received College testimonials" (Gray 1855).

1729

D.H. receives M.A.

Early 1730?

D.H. appointed Master of Magnus Grammar School, Newark. "He was apparently offered, and accepted, the mastership of the grammar school, for, although there is no record of his appointment in the Corporation Minutes, he appears in the Call Book of the Archdeacon of Nottingham as 'ludi magister' at Easter, 1730. He was not in Holy Orders, and is therefore the first master of whom we can definitely say that he was a layman" (Jackson 1964, 92–93).

Feb 1730

Practicing medicine in Newark. "Dr. *Nettleton* . . . in a Letter to Me, dated *February 27, 1730*, when the *Small Pox* was much at *Newark*, he says, where due Care is taken of the Choice of the infectious Matter, Inoculation will very rarely fail of Success."

1730?

According to Arthur Gray (1855), D.H. "published anonymous medical works which attracted the attention of a London physician and removed to a larger practice at Bury St. Edmund's."

21 May 1730

D.H. marries Alice Rowley, at Saffron Walden, Essex.

22 July 1731

Alice Rowley Hartley buried at Bury St. Edmunds St. Mary; died giving birth to David Hartley. "I have heard she was very handsome, and very engaging. He was extremely in love with her, but he did not enjoy his union with her for more than a year, . . . He was extremely afflicted, and remained attached to her memory all his life; notwithstanding that, he had the strongest and most rational friendship for my mother [Elizabeth Packer]. . . . He respected, esteemed, and loved her; but his first wife had had his youthful heart" (Mary Hartley, in Warner 1817, 106).

23 July 1731

David Hartley, son of D.H. and Alice Rowley, baptized in private ceremony. Later an M.P. and Rockingham Whig. As Minister Plenipotentiary for the British government, he signed, along with John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay, the articles ending the American Revolutionary War. Dies 19 Dec 1813.

April 1732

D.H. corresponds with James Jurin regarding smallpox inoculation, from Bury St. Edmunds.

12 Jan 1733

Date given at end of D.H.'s first known publication, *Some Reasons why the Practice of Inoculation ought to be Introduced into the Town of Bury at Present*.

2 Mar 1735

D.H. writes letter from Bury to sister, Elizabeth Booth: "I have lately gained the knowledge of some things in physic, which have been of great use to me; but the chief of my studies are upon religious subjects, and especially upon the true meaning of the Bible. I cannot express to you what inward satisfaction these contemplations afford me. You remember how much I was overcome by superstitious fears, when I was very young. I thank GOD, that He has at last brought me to a lively sense of his infinite goodness and mercy to all his creatures."

13 June 1735

John Byrom writes: "went with Mr. Lloyd to Queen's, saw Mr. Davis, at Mr. D's. chamber, came out and walked into the fields and talked about Dr. Hartley's book" (*B* 1.2.622).

26 June 1735

Byrom: "Mr. Davis sent me his gown and Dr. Hartley's paper on benevolence, never to sacrifice a greater pleasure for a less" (*B* 1.2.634).

1 Aug 1735

Date of marriage settlement between D.H. and Elizabeth Packer.

25 Aug 1735

D.H. marries Elizabeth Packer, at Nowton, Suffolk. Elizabeth Packer (1713–19 Feb 1778) is the fifth child and only daughter of Robert Packer and Mary Winchcombe, of Donnington Castle, and Bucklebury, near Newbury, Berkshire. Elizabeth is living in Bury at time of marriage. According to D.H. and Elizabeth's daughter, Mary Hartley, "Her family were much against the match, and did for some time retard it."

late 1735

D.H. and Elizabeth move to Princes Street, Leicester Fields, London.

15 Nov 1735

D.H. to John Lister: "The chief result of both Reason and Scripture as appears to me is Universal Happiness in the most absolute sense ultimately" (*T* 234).

1736

At "beginning of the year" D.H. experiences the first symptoms of the stone, while drinking the waters at Bath.

9 Mar 1736

D.H. reintroduces himself to John Byrom at Richard's Coffeehouse, London. Byrom comments: "I did not know him; he was so much thinner" (*B* 2.1.10).

13 Mar 1736

D.H. writes to Lister on Universal salvation: "And undoubtedly nothing is so irreconcilable [to] Reason as eternal Punishment, nothing so contrary to all the Intimations God has given us of himself in his Works. Have you read Sir Is. Newtons Commentary upon Daniel & the Apocalypse? It affords great Light to many Passages both of the old and new Testaments."

1 April 1736

D.H. elected Fellow of the Royal Society; sponsors are Benjamin Hoadley and George Edward Wilmot.

26 July 1736

Mary Hartley, daughter of D.H. and Elizabeth Packer, christened at Westminster St. Anne; dies 7 July 1803 in Bath.

2 Dec 1736

D.H. to Lister: "I have wrote two small Treatises abt. a year & half ago, but without any Design of publishing them in their present Form. I call them, The Progress to Happiness deduced from Reason—& from Scripture."

7 May 1737

D.H. begins taking Mrs. Stephens's medicine.

18 July 1737

D.H. begins diary of taking Stephens's medicine.

28 Nov 1737

D.H. writes: "I walk'd abroad as far as the Custom-house, having confined myself for Twenty Weeks, taking the Medicines regularly, without stirring out of Doors."

20 Nov 1737

Queen Caroline dies.

1738

Publication of *Ten Cases of Persons who have taken Mrs. Stephens's Medicines for the Stone*.

27 April 1738

"Mrs. *Stephens* has proposed to make her Medicines for the stone Publick, on Consideration of the Sum of 5000 *l.* to be raised by Contribution, and lodg'd with Mr *Drummond*, Banker. He has receiv'd since the 11th of this Month, about 500 *l.* on that Account" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 8 [April 1738]: 218).

22 June 1738

Byrom notes "I should have gone to Hammersmith once more to Dr. Hartley's, . . . Mrs. Hartley has been very ill, is better, but very weakly" (*B* 2.1.208).

15 July 1738

Anonymous letter attacking D.H., "To the Author of the History of the Works of the Learned," printed in *History of the Works of the Learned*.

19 Aug 1738

D.H. responds to criticisms in the *History of the Works of the Learned*: "To the Author of the History of the Works of

the Learned" and "An Abstract of some Experiments, serving to illustrate the ten foregoing Cases," reprinted from *Ten Cases of Persons who have taken Mrs. Stephens's Medicines for the Stone*.

Oct 1738

D.H. publishes "Account of Persons who have taken Mrs Stephens's Medicines for the Stone" in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 548–50. A continuation appears in the issues for November, p. 606, and December, p. 661.

23 Nov 1738

D.H. sends John Lister part of his "History of Man," described as "An Introduction to the History of Man in Four Parts, . . . considering him in his corporeal, mental, moral, and religious capacities," of which D.H. states he has the third and fourth parts written.

1738

Hermann Boerhaave dies.

29 Jan 1739

John Lister comments upon the two papers Hartley sent him: "I cannot say how proper it would be to trust the public with your 'Observations': I doubt not they would be very enter-training and satisfactory to many thinking persons. . . . Yet the public methinks should rather be taught to have all their hopes and fears engaged in their present conduct, as if an eternity of future happiness or misery depended upon it."

6 Feb 1739

Byrom notes: "and went to Dr. Hartley's, where I dined; the Dr. full of Mrs. Stephens, had five letters about her, four good, one unsuccessful; said that the Duchess of Newcastle had learned shorthand" (B 2.1.212–13).

20 Feb 1739

Date given in *A View of the Present Evidence for and against Mrs. Stephens's Medicines, as a Solvent for the Stone. Containing a Hundred and Fifty-five Cases. With Some Experiments and Observations*. The work includes an account of D.H.'s case.

19 Apr 1739

Nicholas Saunderson dies.

13 May 1739

D.H. writes to Lister concerning resentment and necessity, claiming that resentment is never justifiable: "I wish I cd. bring my own Practice nearer my Theory."

14 June 1739

Parliament passes act conditionally granting Joanna Stephens £5,000 for the formula for her medicine. She presents the Archbishop of Canterbury with the recipe on June 16.