

International Phenomenological Society

Review

Reviewed Work(s): A Critique of British Empiricism by Fraser Cowley

Review by: Walter H. Capps

Source: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Jun., 1969), pp. 605-606

Published by: International Phenomenological Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2105545>

Accessed: 29-04-2024 20:50 +00:00

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

International Phenomenological Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*

A Critique of British Empiricism. FRASER COWLEY. New York: St. Martin's Press, and London: Macmillan, 1968. Pp. xiv, 214.

Fraser Cowley, Edinburgh-trained and currently Associate Professor of Philosophy in Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, has presented in *A Critique of British Empiricism* a type of study touted as having "never previously been attempted in English." After reading it one can see why. It does not run according to one's expectations. In the first place, as the author acknowledges, one of the five empiricists whose thought figures in the critique, i.e., Nelson Goodman, is not British. Secondly, the book is not a "critique" in the reflexive sense usually intended in phenomenological parlance, but rather a demonstration of faults and mistakes. Thirdly, the book is mostly about David Hume; in fact, eleven chapters out of twenty-two deal with Hume's philosophy, whereas Goodman and A. J. Ayer are given but one short chapter apiece. Through all of it Cowley seeks to show that empiricist philosophers — Hume, Russell, Goodman, Ayer, and Ryle — have been operating on the mistaken notion that the thesis "there is a world" is a matter to be investigated rather than, as phenomenologists know, a presupposition of all inquiry and discovery. In Cowley's words, "the world is not an object and not determinable as an object; what is known or what is determined or determinable is in the world." And, more forcefully, "what we believe to be the case or not to be the case, what we believe to exist or not to exist, presupposes the world and our own bodily being in it." In short, the empiricists are criticized because of their perennial attempt to secure some other starting point from which to construct or reconstruct the world. Cowley's technique is straightforward: in discussing each of the above-named empiricists he isolates particular points on which they founder because of their lack of subscription to the presupposition of the world.

Throughout the book Cowley displays a clear use of language, an ability to keep the subject within bounds, and a particular sensitivity to Hume's philosophy. As presentation, his book falters however because of its lack of smooth transitions between chapters and the absence of a carefully projected climax. The last chapter finds the book virtually trailing off; in fact, the conclusion is more forcefully stated at the beginning than at the end. In terms of content the questions are more serious, primarily by virtue of the fact that the author must build his case on the basis of an *absence*, or by pitting a presupposition against a matter-to-be-further-investigated. Certainly the empiricists know that they do not presuppose what Cowley says is a presupposition. Yet, they could not do that and still be what they are. Because they have been

assessed on this basis, however, and not on grounds of their own choosing, it seems that they have only been challenged and not really refuted. It would seem that a good piece of comparative philosophy must circumscribe the range of commonality between two different positions before it can confront and evaluate one of them by a contention central to the other. Because Cowley concentrates on a presupposition which is not shared, his product testifies to the reality of a cleavage but not to how it is that those on the other side manage to get along. Yet, because the cleavage is not due finally to a conflict between the absence and the presence of a particular presupposition, but, more fundamentally, to the question whether presuppositions themselves are a methodological necessity, it becomes all the more evident why this type of study has not been attempted before.

WALTER H. CAPPS.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA.

Science and Man: The Philosophy of Scientific Humanism. TAD S. CLEMENTS. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1968. Pp. xiii, 152.

This book by a professor of philosophy at State University of New York College at Brockport constitutes a volume of the *American Lectures in Philosophy* edited by Marvin Farber. It aims at a conception of scientific humanism which emphasizes the following factors: a synoptic approach to "the universe and man's place and future possibilities within it"; the exclusion of everything that "tries to transcend the methods of science"; and the expansion of the scientific outreach enough to include "the long-range, rationally defensible interests of human beings." (ix) By its inclusion of the latter, it hopes to go beyond the narrow bounds of "the logical linguistic analysis of the language of science."

This little book contains much that is commendable. In a time when certain philosophers and theologians tend to disparage both science and reason, it is good to see a defense of both. Closely related to this is the author's conception of the good life and the relation of science and reason to it. Indeed, in his concept of the good life, after the manner of most humanistic naturalists, he advances beyond hedonism toward a socially orientated self-realization ethics. Moreover, there is much that is wholesome in his stress on the place of science in the life of civilized man. Without science, civilized man would be utterly defenseless at the hands of a "stepmotherly nature."

Another excellent aspect of the book is his social awareness and his effort to bring the vast resources of science to bear on our pressing social