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Editorial

Editorial Note

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Editorial Note

On 18–19 May 2018, a symposium was held in the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the death of Ronald W. Hepburn. The speakers of this event – Arnar Árnason, Guy Bennett-Hunter, Pauline von Bonsdorff, Isis Brook, David E. Cooper, Cairns Craig, Douglas Hedley, James MacAllister, Michael McGhee, Fran Speed and Endre Szécsényi – discussed Hepburn’s *oeuvre* from several perspectives.¹ For the current enterprise, the collection of the revised versions of their papers has been supplemented by the contributions of other scholars who had been unable to attend the symposium. These papers together with a bibliography of Hepburn’s published works amount to two journal volumes: the current issue (vol. 11) contains the second part of our collection, the first has come to light in the previous one (vol. 10).²

Ronald William Hepburn was born in Aberdeen on 16 March 1927, he went to Aberdeen Grammar School, then he graduated M.A. in Philosophy (1951) and obtained his doctorate from Aberdeen (1955), his tutor was Donald MacKinnon. He taught as Lecturer at the Department of Moral Philosophy at Aberdeen (1956–60), and he was also Visiting Associate Professor of Philosophy at New York University (1959–60). He returned from the United States as Professor of Philosophy at Nottingham University. In 1964, he was appointed as a Chair in Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, between 1965 and 1968 he was also Stanton Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Cambridge. From 1975 until his retirement in 1996, he held the Professorship of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh. He died in Edinburgh on 23 December 2008.

His philosophical interests ranged from theology and the philosophy of religion through moral philosophy and the philosophy of education to art theory and aesthetics. ‘Taken over his career – as Stephen Watt writes –,

1 On the occasion of this anniversary, there was another academic event organized also by Endre Szécsényi: a three-paper panel ‘The Roots of Environmental Aesthetics in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: in Memory of Ronald W. Hepburn’ presented by Emily Brady, Cairns Craig and the organizer, chaired by Alexander Broadie, in the 31st annual conference of the *Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society* at the University of Glasgow on 21 July 2018.

2 I am grateful to Peter Cheyne and Cairns Craig for their help and support.

Hepburn's work represents an impressive exploration of what remains after the abandonment of a theistic worldview. His work has been seminal in the development of environmental philosophy and in extending the understanding of aesthetics beyond the experience of the art object.³ Indeed, he has consensually been considered 'the founder of the discipline'⁴ of the environmental and everyday aesthetics, based on his papers of the 1960s in which he pioneered these aesthetic approaches. In the most recent historical narrative of modern aesthetics, Paul Guyer devotes a sub-chapter to Hepburn; this one-and-a-half-page long article in his monumental enterprise undoubtedly expresses the historian's appreciation (especially, if we consider how many significant theoreticians of the twentieth-century history of modern aesthetics are disregarded). Guyer discusses Hepburn's contribution to modern aesthetics in the chapter 'Aesthetics and Knowledge of Nature' together with Allen Carlson's and Malcolm Budd's theoretical achievements. Guyer almost exclusively relies on Hepburn's most-cited paper 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty' of 1966, and concludes that Hepburn's 'account of the aesthetic experience of nature seems to draw upon Kant's analysis of aesthetic experience in general while supplementing it with emphasis upon the possibility of emotional response as part of such experience.'⁵ Beside Immanuel Kant, of course, Hepburn too exploited insights and ideas that have been presented by Friedrich Schiller, Arthur Schopenhauer, Rudolf Otto, Iris Murdoch, John Niemeyer Findlay, Mikel Dufrenne, or the early Romantic poets just to mention a few from amongst the authors who had significant impact on his aesthetico-theological or aesthetico-mystical thinking.

Hepburn never dealt with these various fields separately, instead, he was deeply interested in their overlaps and mutual impregnations which led to the formation of a characteristic philosophical language and vocabulary. In Emily Brady's words: 'In his exploration of the links and boundaries between the aesthetic, moral, and religious, he was drawn to a particular set of ideas: wonder, imagination, the sublime, freedom, life's meaning, mystery, respect for nature, and the sacred.'⁶ He was not an expert of a certain philosophical

3 Stephen Watt, 'Hepburn, Ronald William' in Stuart Brown (ed.), *Dictionary of Twentieth Century British Philosophers* (2 vols, Bristol, 2005), I, 404–6, 405.

4 Allen Carlson, 'Ten Steps in the Development of Western Environmental Aesthetics' in Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz (eds), *Environmental Aesthetics: Crossing Divides and Breaking Ground* (New York, 2014), 13–24, 23.

5 Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics* (3 vols, Cambridge, 2014), III, 587.

6 Emily Brady, 'Ronald W. Hepburn: In Memoriam', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 49 (2009), 199–202, 200.

area, rather he was a *philosophos* in the ancient Greek sense of the word, his ‘philosophical and personal lives [were] intimately connected, shaping each other significantly.’⁷

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December 2018

Cover: Ronald W. Hepburn. A detail of a photograph taken by his younger son on the celebration of his 80th birthday in York in March 2007. By courtesy of Mrs Agnes Hepburn.

7 Ibid.