



David Hume. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp

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DAVID HUME. *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford Philosophical Texts). Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. vi + 292. ISBN 0-19-875185-0, cloth, \$29.95; ISBN 0-19-875184-2, paper, \$12.95.

Students and professional philosophers alike will surely welcome this new edition of Hume's *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*. The text of this Oxford Philosophical Texts edition is taken from the 1998 Clarendon edition of the *Enquiry*, also edited by Beauchamp; the paperback is nicely printed on what appears to be a good quality of paper. It will provide a pleasant and affordable reading experience for a new generation of students. The special value of this edition, however, lies outside the text. In fact the *Enquiry* only occupies about half the bulk of the volume. Surrounding the text is a substantial body of editorial material.

Before we get to the text, there is a lengthy (46 page) editor's introduction, which provides a good deal of background for reading Hume's moral theory. (The introduction will be discussed below, after we describe the rest of the book.) There follows a short explanation of the editorial basis of this edition. The next section is entitled "Supplementary Reading." It supplies information about Hume's other philosophical works, about early modern works in moral philosophy that influenced Hume, and a selection of books and articles about Hume's moral thought. The list is necessarily selective, but it would suffice to give students a strong foothold on the edifice of contemporary Hume scholarship. Especially valuable is the listing of secondary sources by topic, such as "Passion, Sentiments, and Moral Psychology," "Reason and its Limitations," or "Benevolence, Humanity, and Sympathy." Somewhat advanced students will appreciate this quick guide to engaging topics.

Following the text, we find another extensive body of editorial material. First there is a section of annotations, which are intended to explain particular passages in the text that might otherwise prove impenetrable to the twenty-first-century reader. Tiny daggers are placed in the text to indicate each point where there is a corresponding annotation to be found after the text. The annotations are conveniently divided into sections that follow the divisions of the *Enquiry*. The annotations include translations of all the French, Latin, or Greek quotations and in many instances supply information about relatively obscure works Hume mentions. It is easy to find out who Darius and Xerxes were, or to learn what counts as a cardinal virtue for Cicero.

After the annotations, there is a glossary that explains the numerous terms in the text that had different meanings in Hume's day. In many cases the words explained here have fallen out of use or are no longer used in quite the sense needed for understanding Hume's thought. Words that appear in this glossary are not marked in the text.

Next there is a section of references, which includes works cited by Hume either in the text or its notes, as well as works cited by the editor in the introduction or the annotations. The last section of the book is the index, which covers the entire book (including the editorial material).

There is one other feature of this new text that deserves special mention. The editor has numbered the paragraphs in each section. The number appears in the left margin at the head of each paragraph. The idea is to set up a universal reference system, so that one can make precise references to the text without using page numbers. It is easy to find the sixth paragraph of section 5, for example, even if one has some other edition of the text.

Now we may turn to a more detailed examination of the editor's introduction. Here our main focus will be on the welfare of the students who will make use of this material. Beauchamp's editorial work is designed to assist students (a) by helping to clarify the context in which this *Enquiry* was written and (b) by interpreting some of the main lines of thought. The extensive annotations and the glossary admirably serve the former aim, assuming the student has sufficient enterprise and patience to do the needed looking-up. The first three sections of the introduction are also useful in this regard, providing as they do a narrative sketch of "Life and Early Publishing History," "Hume's General Philosophy," and "Background Controversies in Moral Philosophy." The scope of the latter sections, comprising a dozen pages in all, is breathtaking. We scan empiricism, the science of human nature, the experimental method, the passions, the limits of reason, and skepticism in section 2; section 3 includes natural law theory, rationalism in morals, egoism, moral sense theories, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and the influence of all these on Hume. The editor's professionalism and skill as a writer is displayed in the sheer efficiency of these brief sections.

Here are two critical comments. The editor remarks, "It seems odd today to say that the goal of a philosophy is to generate a science, but this ambition is fundamental in Hume's philosophy" (12). Very well. But having said that, he should remind students of the vastly different sense that word "science" must have had for thinkers in the eighteenth century. What we think of as science nowadays was barely underway then, and it was not sharply distinguished from other endeavors in the pursuit of knowledge. So the bare assertion that Hume sought to develop a *science* of human nature is apt to prove misleading for students today. The other comment is that the discussion under "The Attractions of Scepticism" in section 2 might leave a student with the impression that Hume was a skeptic about morals, or that it is reasonable to think of him as such. We are told, "Hume was widely regarded as a sceptic by his contemporaries, a reputation that persists today." But that mistaken reputation was based largely on the *Treatise*. Any doubts about Hume's opposition to moral skepticism are surely quenched by the opening pages of the *Enquiry*, where Hume pronounces that people who have "denied the reality of moral

distinctions" must be considered *disingenuous*. They cannot seriously believe what they are saying. "Let a man's insensibility be ever so great, he must often be touched with the images of RIGHT and WRONG" (73). The editor would have done well to emphasize Hume's clarity on this vexed topic.

In a few places, the editor makes an observation that seems to call for a footnote reference, such as "many interpreters of Hume have read him as saying . . ." (28). The reader would like to know who these interpreters are and where we can find their work. Other times the editor does supply the desired references.

It is to the editor's credit that he *warns* the reader more than once that Hume's work is being interpreted by him and that commentators do not always agree on the meaning of the text. Such modesty, combined with the editor's eloquence and evident command of the material, is bound to be *immediately agreeable* to his readers.

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