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On the 2007 Clarendon Critical Edition of David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature*

PETER S. FOSL

I. Situating the Clarendon Critical Edition

*The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume*¹ (hereafter the *Clarendon Hume*) was conceived thirty-four years ago in 1975, the year preceding the bicentennial of Hume’s death. General editors of the *Clarendon Hume* are Tom L. Beauchamp, David Fate Norton, and M. A. Stewart. In Beauchamp’s words, “Hume scholars had increasingly begun to appreciate that available editions of Hume’s work were often textually and historically inaccurate, biased in favor of certain textual interpretations, and lacking in basic information essential for scholarly work on the text.”² The project of producing improved editions has since been realized by Stewart, Beauchamp, and the Nortons in the following manner.

Beauchamp published in 1998 an Oxford Philosophical Text (hereafter “OPT”) edition of Hume’s second *Enquiry*—the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (originally 1751)—together with Volume 4 of the *Clarendon Hume*, Beauchamp’s Clarendon edition of that work. This new Clarendon EPM, of course, succeeds Selby-Bigge and Nidditch’s 1975 Clarendon edition. Beauchamp’s two editions of the EPM, like the two series of which they are a part, differ principally with regard to audience. The OPT editions—in their introductions, their annotations, and so on—are designed primarily to serve students, while the Clarendon editions

Peter S. Fosl is Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, Transylvania University, 300 North Broadway, Lexington, KY 40508, USA. Website: www.peterfosl.us. E-mail: pfosl@transy.edu.

aim primarily to serve more advanced scholars. So, the Clarendon edition of the EPM, like Clarendon's other critical editions, includes elements proper to critical, but not to student editions. In addition to the critical texts themselves, then, the Clarendon critical editions include histories of each text, complete records of the emendations made by the editors, and accounts of variant readings, as well as a selection of copy texts used in the production of the new editions.³

In 1999, the year following the appearance of Beauchamp's editions of the EPM, his OPT edition of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (originally 1748), Hume's first *Enquiry*, was published. A short while later, in 2000, Clarendon released Beauchamp's critical edition of the EHU (which is numbered Volume 3 of the *Clarendon Hume*), offering a replacement for Clarendon's 1975 Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition. Beauchamp's Clarendon edition of *A Dissertation on the Passions* and *The Natural History of Religion* (originally 1757), Volume 5 in the new edition, was released with a 2007 copyright. Volumes 6 and 7 will comprise Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, replacing in all likelihood Eugene Miller's Liberty Classics 1985 edition as the standard. Volume 8, when it appears, is to contain the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779) together with other posthumous materials; it will almost certainly supplant as the scholarly benchmark Norman Kemp Smith's 1935 Clarendon publication.

The year 2000 also saw the release of David and Mary Norton's OPT edition of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), four years after their *David Hume Library*.⁴ Like Beauchamp's OPT editions, the Nortons' 744-page volume begins with introductory material comprising 93 pages aimed at a target audience of students, with 179 pages of annotations following along similar lines. The Nortons' OPT *Treatise* includes the *Abstract of a Book lately Published*, which Hume issued in 1740 as a pamphlet to promote his *Treatise*, as well as the "Appendix" Hume attached to the third Book of the *Treatise*. In 2007 the Nortons published what is the subject of this essay—the Clarendon critical edition of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, an edition that will supplant Selby-Bigge/Nidditch's 1978 Clarendon edition. What then characterizes this new edition of the *Treatise*, and what distinguishes it?

II. The Contents of the Volumes

The Clarendon edition of the *Treatise* is divided into two volumes. Volume 1 (447 pages) contains the critical text of the *Treatise* itself, as well as of the 1740 *Abstract*. The Clarendon edition, unlike its OPT predecessor, however, also contains the 1745 epistle Hume wrote in defense of his work as opponents solidified their case against his candidacy for the Professorship in Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, a post about to be vacated by John Pringle. The epistle, perhaps not intended for publication, was published by Hume's friend and kinsman—Henry

Home, later Lord Kames—along with a list of charges that had been compiled and distributed by the Rev. William Wishart (the younger), Principal of the University, who regarded Hume's candidacy as posing "a great danger."⁵ Kames published the letter and charges as a pamphlet under the title by which it is known today, *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*. The *Letter* in the Nortons' edition has been altered little from its original. The new edition's *Abstract* has been revised slightly, in light of a few subsequent alterations Hume had penned. It is the *Treatise* itself that shows the most extensive modification.

The new *Treatise* is the product of two editorial purposes. First, the Nortons have undertaken the ambitious and remarkable project of realizing for the first time—so far as it is currently possible to do so—the revised edition of the *Treatise* Hume himself had envisioned. That Hume did hope to produce a revised edition of the *Treatise* may be inferred from epistolary comments, from alterations prescribed in the "Appendix" he attached to *Treatise* 3, from three sets of Errata included in the first-edition housed by the David Hume Collection at McGill University, and from Hume's hand-written corrections that survive in a number of first-edition copies of the work. Accordingly, the Nortons have updated or, rather, more perfectly realized the *Treatise*, incorporating (as they did in the OPT volume) corrections that seem to have been clearly intended by Hume from these sources as well as the corrections called for by the "Appendix."

A tantalizing indication that Hume had planned much more extensive alterations of the *Treatise* appears in an 1840 catalogue compiled by Thomas G. Stevenson, a well-known Edinburgh bookseller, upon the death of Hume's nephew, Baron David Hume. Entry number 647 of Stevenson's catalogue records a copy of volumes 1 and 2 of the *Treatise* together with this gripping annotation: "***This Copy has got a Vast of Corrections and Additions in the handwriting of the Author."⁶ The prospect that these copies may someday be discovered sustains the possibility of a still more substantial reconstruction of Hume's intended second edition, an edition perhaps different in important ways from the volume the Nortons have produced. Time will tell.

The second editorial purpose the Nortons pursued was to achieve, by the highest contemporary standards, a better-edited text. And they have done so by revising the text in regards to matters of formal consistency, presentation, punctuation, spelling, and simple error. In this the Nortons were guided by the following principle: "to follow the form of the copy-text unless the grounds for making a change appear to be better than the grounds for following exactly the forms of that text" (2:619, 623). Here the "copy-text" was the first edition of the *Treatise* housed at McGill University. But what is to count as "better" grounds for altering than not altering the text?⁷ The section of Volume 2 entitled, "Editing the Texts," details each of their editorial decisions. So far as I can tell from a limited selection, the Nortons have executed their editorial authority in a reasonable and

well-informed way. But, of course, there are sure to be differences of judgment by other scholars, and some additional refinement of Hume's text is to be expected over time.

Whatever future controversies may, in any case, lie in store for this critical text of the *Treatise*, all will I think agree that the historical essay and the 295 pages of textual annotations in Volume 2 of the 2007 Clarendon *Treatise* present a marvelous resource for scholars immersed in work on Hume's thought. The four-part bibliography also exhibits an extensive and solid command of the literature, providing what will become an indispensable resource for readers. The first three parts of the bibliography compile primary, historical sources in this way: The first part lists editions of primary sources consulted by Hume or by the editors that do not appear in parts two or three. The second part lists works cited that were held in the "Physiological Library" organized by Robert Steuart,⁸ Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. (Hume joined this library in 1724 and may well have consulted books it contained.) Part three of the bibliography lists texts cited by Hume or the editors that appear in the Nortons' reconstruction of Hume's personal collection; like the second part it also sometimes includes alternative editions to those included in part one. The first three parts of the bibliography, then, having assembled and organized primary sources, the fourth part of the bibliography is devoted to presenting a wide-ranging and helpful list of secondary sources the editors employed in their work.

Indeed, it was with some personal satisfaction, as a member of the community of Hume scholars, that I read through the Norton's annotations, bibliography, and "Historical Account" of the *Treatise*; for the new Clarendon volumes not only array the erudition amassed by a remarkable couple. They exhibit the distillate of the work of a community of hundreds of scholars toiling carefully, in good will, and with shared purpose over the course of more than a century to collect and interpret ideas and information about Hume and his texts.

In addition, the Clarendon edition of the *Treatise* displays another virtue, besides the excellences of theoretical wisdom and editorial prudence—namely, patience. To bring consistency to the text proper, as well as to eliminate errors and the many inconsistencies of form introduced by the printer (whom David Norton has determined to have been John Wilson), the editors collated and painstakingly compared, line-by-line, twelve first-edition copies of *Treatise* 1 and 2 (inspecting sixteen others) and ten first-edition copies of *Treatise* 3 (inspecting ten others). Copies they comparatively collated or inspected were held at McGill, Toronto, Edinburgh, Los Angeles, Aberdeen, Oxford, London, Cambridge, and elsewhere. The copies of the *Treatise* they consulted included those once owned by Adam Smith, Lord Kames, and Alexander Pope, a previously unreported three-volume set in the Rosenwald Collection at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, and Hume's own copies of Volume 3 and the *Abstract*.

This extensive comparative collation was aided by a technological innovation, the “McLeod Collator.” The device, developed by Randall McLeod, “uses mirrors to superimpose the visual image of one copy of text onto the visual image of what is presumed to be another copy of that same text in such a way that any difference between the two texts, even minor differences of spacing, become apparent to the operator” (2:590n6). The McLeod Collator made it possible to superimpose different copies—or perhaps we should call them different “impressions” and “copies” of impressions—of the first edition on top of one another visually in order to discern differences between the copy-text and other copies of the first edition. The comparisons enabled the Nortons to scrutinize cancels and detect differences between cancellans and cancellanda, even where the stub is no longer visible. In one case, the collations also made it possible to correct a mistake in previous accounts of the footnote regarding the imagination usually found at the end of *Treatise* 2.2.7 (2:594). Additional matters relevant to producing a critical text—such as variations in predominant forms, preferred word choice, alterations likely introduced by the typesetters, and corrections completed and not completed—were identified with the assistance of other technological innovations not available to editors of the past, including computerized word lists and a computer-generated concordance.

The Nortons’ detective work seems to have determined that “the great majority of the inconsistencies found in the first edition of the *Treatise* were introduced by the compositors, and not by Hume” (2:610); and on the basis of their conclusions the Nortons have undertaken to eliminate so far as possible those inconsistencies that “cannot be traced to Hume’s practice” (2:624). The result of this prodigious investigation appears to be a cleaner, more consistent, and more felicitous *Treatise*, one in which the choices made by the typesetters of the first edition will less frequently obscure details that may well have mattered to Hume. Engaging a project like this is of particular importance since, while the *Treatise* seems to have had one printer, it was published by two different booksellers—*Treatise* 1 and 2 by John Noon and *Treatise* 3 by Thomas Longman.

Regarding the material qualities of the text, the volumes are printed on brilliant white, acid-free paper of a weight sufficient to sustain the sort of workout to which scholars regularly subject their texts (annotations, dog ears, underlines, etc.). The binding is, alas, merely glued and therefore likely to prove less durable than proper for a publication of this stature. More positively, pages have been cut at 6 x 9 inches, which makes for a much more pleasant surface on which to work than the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch (SBN) edition. Pages also preserve at the top the helpful Book, part, and section numbers used by SBN (though I must confess that I find myself longing for the Roman numerals SBN used to signify the three books of the *Treatise*). Thankfully, for those of us whose notes and underlines keep them close to familiar SBN editions, the Nortons have inserted SBN page numbers in the right-hand margins together with other helpful marginalia. The left-hand margins

contain now-familiar paragraph numbers and the right-hand margins line numbers in order to facilitate all the more the process of locating specific passages.

With regard to the business of locating passages, the new Clarendon edition helpfully divides the index in two. Index 1 refers to the “Historical Account” and to material concerned with “Editing the Texts,” while Index 2 reports on Hume’s texts proper together with the “Editors’ Annotations.” These indexes expand on those of the OPT by (among other things) providing significantly more references to the text itself, as well as including references to the *Letter from a Gentleman* and to the *Abstract*. The Nortons’ indexes are thorough and replace SBN’s resplendent but thick collocations with economical topic headings. As a small matter of editorial preference, I think it would have been better to have included Index Number 2, the index to Hume’s texts, in the volume that includes Hume’s texts, both for the sake of those whose financial limitations prevent them from purchasing both volumes, or anyway both volumes at once, and for the sake of those who wish to travel with only the text of the *Treatise*.

Volume 2 of the Clarendon critical edition also contains a pleasing manuscript facsimile of *Treatise* 3.3.6, the only manuscript of the *Treatise* known to exist, as well as copies of the title pages of the first editions in order to illustrate the similarity of the title page of *Treatise* 3 to those of *Treatise* 1 and 2. The jacket of the new edition happily displays a close cropping of Allan Ramsay’s 1754 portrait of Hume, rather than the more ostentatious portrait of 1766. The Clarendon selection of Hume the thoughtful civilian is well chosen.

III. Critical Questions

But what is the historical significance of this edition? To understand this, the new Clarendon edition might have been situated, in these volumes or elsewhere, more clearly among the editions of the *Treatise* that preceded it. How might one, for example, distinguish the new Clarendon edition produced by the Nortons from the 1817 edition of Thomas and Joseph Allman in London? How might one contrast the purposes of the current volumes with those of the earlier publication, the extent to which that earlier volume aimed to serve different purposes, antiquarian (not to mention commercial) aspirations, as well as the way it played into then-contemporary philosophical and academic controversies? And how does the new edition compare with the *Treatise* produced by Archibald Constable of Edinburgh in 1825, as well as the Little, Brown of Boston’s 1854 collected *Philosophical Works of David Hume*, which included the *Treatise*?

T. H. Green and T. H. Grose’s 1874–1875 four-volume collection for Longmans in London, especially in its highly charged introductions to the *Treatise*, served to focus philosophical attention on Hume’s thought after the chilly indifference of the early nineteenth century. But the Green and Grose edition did so chiefly as

a foil in advancing the editors' own philosophical agenda and in showcasing the achievements of British idealism. Green and Grose saw in Hume an able predecessor but something of a has-been, a milestone in time against which the progress of idealism could be measured.⁹ It is no surprise, of course, that the Green and Grose edition reflected the philosophical movement of its times, not to mention its presumption. Does the Nortons' edition do the same? The Selby-Bigge 1888 Clarendon edition of the *Treatise*, together with Peter Nidditch's 1978 revisions to it, manifests a more historically-driven approach to the *Treatise*, a desire to get the text right. Is the Norton text another specimen of this tendency? Perhaps David Norton's extensive 155-page "Historical Account" of the *Treatise* might have included a section assessing the history of prior editions of the *Treatise*—their accomplishments, their significance—and comparing them with the present edition.

Although the Norton text lives up to the highest contemporary standards of critical editing, the new *Clarendon Hume* also realizes in a magnificent way the historico-antiquarian animus that has stretched back more than a century through preceding editions. The new Clarendon edition's place in the world will be marked by its significantly surpassing its forerunners on those terms, if for nothing else. Moreover, as we have seen, the text realizes a remarkable project of historical recovery, bringing to material existence for the first time some semblance of the second edition to which Hume himself aspired.

Of course, the new *Clarendon Hume* does reflect the now-contemporary order of things by marshaling the accomplishments of recent Hume scholarship and contemporary technology. The editorial precision of the text together with the intellectual architecture that guided it exhibit the best qualities of twentieth-century Anglo-American scholarship in its quest for order, definition, and clarity. It is perhaps an unfortunate shortcoming, however, that The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume has not so far been able to produce, or even plan to produce, critical editions of what were in his own time Hume's most successful works—his histories. Still, this shortcoming, like the few others one might find with the *Clarendon Hume*, pales in the face of the dazzling product present now to us after years of determined labor by two distinguished scholars. The Clarendon critical edition of David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* must certainly be counted one of the most important advances in Hume scholarship in decades and in all likelihood the most perfect edition of the *Treatise* ever to have come to press.

NOTES

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1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, 2 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2007).

2 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2000), v.

3 The numbering of the volumes of Hume's principal philosophical treatises seems to follow the chronological order in which Hume released them: first the 1739–1740 *Treatise* (Volumes 1 and 2), then the 1748 EHU (Volume 3), followed by the 1751 EPM (Volume 4) and the 1779 *Dialogues* (Volume 8). While fifteen of Hume's essays did appear in 1741 and twelve more in 1742—well before the 1757 *A Dissertation on the Passions* and *The Natural History of Religion* of Volume 5—it seems reasonable to place them in Volumes 6 and 7 of the *Clarendon Hume*, both because they are generally regarded as subordinate philosophical texts and because Hume revised his editions of his essays throughout his life. Hume's *Essays* included varying editions in 1752, 1753, 1754, 1758, 1760, 1764, 1767, 1768, 1772, and 1777—the last generally accepted as the definitive edition. Miller claims that Hume worked on his essays “continually from about 1740 until his death” in 1776. *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene Miller, (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), xiv.

4 *The David Hume Library*, by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society & The National Library of Scotland, 1996); see my review in *Eighteenth-Century Scotland: Book Review Supplement* (Spring 1997): 35–6.

5 M. A. Stewart, *The Kirk and the Infidel* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 1994), 13.

6 *The David Hume Library*, 102–3.

7 In their article, “Substantive Differences between Two Texts of Hume's *Treatise*,” which recounts the differences between their OPT edition of the *Treatise* and the Selby-Bigge edition, the Nortons write about the grounds of their editorial decisions as follows: “These ‘good reasons’ may be many and varied, but they include such things as the evidence provided by any holograph corrections or amendments in the hand of the author, the recognition of misprints of several kinds, and changes in printing style (the discontinuance of the use of small caps at the beginning of each paragraph, for example). Clearly, then, the critical text of an early modern author such as Hume will be decidedly different from a facsimile of the copytext and also in many ways different from what is sometimes called a *diplomatic edition* of that text”; *Hume Studies* 26.2 (2000): 246.

8 Sometimes written as “Stewart.”

9 David Hume, *David Hume: The Philosophical Works*, 4 vols., ed. Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose (London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1874–1875).