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Hume and the Nortons on the Passions and Morality in Hume's *Treatise*

JACQUELINE TAYLOR

In his introduction to the Green and Grose edition of Hume's *Treatise* (first appearing in 1874, with several subsequent editions), T. H. Green characterized the aim of history as that of distilling "from the chaos of events a connected series of ruling actions and beliefs—the achievements of great men and great epochs"; history is thus properly concerned with a "reach of the hopes and institutions which make history a progress instead of a cycle." Similarly, the history of philosophy properly done shows that metaphysical enquiry "is really progressive and has a real history, but it is history represented by a few great names," one of them that of David Hume.¹ Green's critical introduction is an example of that genre of the history of philosophy that Richard Rorty called "Geistesgeschichte."² This genre allows the historian to reconstruct the past according to the story he wishes to tell. Green himself emphasizes that the history of philosophy charts a progress "towards a fully articulated conception of the world as rational," a progress charted by delineating the failures of the great philosophers; Hume brings to an end the philosophical system of empiricism. This historiographical method required assessing Hume, not as a man, but as the vehicle "of a system of thought." His arguments are to be followed "without divergence into . . . history, without remarks . . . on any of the secondary influences which affected" his writings, or on the works influenced by his writings.³ With respect to Hume's moral philosophy, Green's analysis began a trend of viewing Hume as an advocate of hedonism. As Norman Kemp Smith

reminds us (in *The Philosophy of David Hume*), this trend only began to reverse in the twentieth century, with E. B. McGilvary's important 1903 article, "Altruism in Hume's *Treatise*."⁴

The Norton and Norton critical edition of the *Treatise* exhibits nothing of the narrow and singleminded interpretive stance taken by Green. The editors' annotations provide a veritable treasure trove of historical influences, ranging from the ancient sources Hume read to the moderns, and including many names not remembered as among the greats. As the Nortons tell us, they held as a "useful ideal" the intention to illuminate rather than to interpret. For example, they identify the various authors to whom Hume alludes. They also helpfully fill out the intellectual background, especially the debates and developments with which Hume would have been familiar, and they quote from, rather than paraphrase, the relevant works, in order to preserve "their semantic and conceptual character" (2:687). These identifications and quotations allow us to read these materials more as Hume himself might have done. With these valuable annotations, scholars can now reconstruct more fully the debates that Hume assumed or participated in, and thus have a clearer appreciation of what may be distinctive in his thought. In this brief comment, I mention just a few of the annotations, to highlight the range of scholarship relevant to Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*. I will then discuss part of David Norton's "Historical Account" combined with a comment on the lack of annotation on some sections in Book 2, sections I find important for understanding the extent to which Hume is challenging the philosophical commitments of Francis Hutcheson and John Locke.

The Annotations

The annotations provided on Hume's discussions of animals in Book 2 of the *Treatise* should prove useful to scholars who are devoting increasing attention to this area of Hume's thought. At T 2.1.12, Hume argues that animals experience pride and that the passion originates in them as it does in the human mind, by a double association of ideas and impressions. The Nortons helpfully list several anatomists who draw analogies with animals, including Willis, Douglas, Gassendi, Borelli, Perrault, and Monro. Among those attributing passions to animals we find listed Addison, Watts, Shaftesbury, and Bougeant (2:840–2). More specifically, on the evidence that animals feel love (T 2.2.12), the Nortons cite Montaigne, Hutcheson, Cumberland, Philips, and Shaftesbury (2:857–8).

On Hume's discussion of the will at 2.3.1–3, the Nortons give us a particularly rich set of Annotations, citing sources for views on the will that include Hobbes, Cumberland, Watts, Locke, Descartes, Malebranche, Hooker, and Burton; they helpfully cite Chambers's *Cyclopædia* on "Necessity," "Will," and "Liberty," as well as on the distinction between "moral" and "physical" evidence. We learn of

a diverse set of views of those who held that reason should govern the passions, as well as of discussions by Malebranche, Bayle, and Mandeville on reason as the slave of the passions (2:858–71). While many scholars have puzzled over Hume's argument at 3.1.1.27 about deriving an "ought" claim from preceding "is" claims, the Nortons helpfully fill out the historical context, referring us to works by Malebranche, Locke, Clarke, as well as the less familiar views of Balguy, Wilkins, and Chubb. With respect to Hume's point that the ought is a new relation that requires explanation, we learn of a similar argument against Balguy, likely made by one James, Lord D'Arcy of Bromshall, Yorkshire (2:892–3).⁵

We also learn of common analogies and metaphors, such as the resemblance of the mind's passions and sympathy to a stringed instrument, or the different circumstances that render the behavior of different passions similar to alkali and acid, or to oil and vinegar (T 2.3.9.17). With respect to Hume's comparison of the mind, at T 2.3.9.12, to "a string-instrument," the Nortons underscore the importance of the discourse of sympathy by quoting Knightly Chetwood who wrote, "Nature has endu'd us with the tenderest Passions: We are all counterparts one of another: The Instruments tun'd Unison: the doleful Cry of one in extreme Distress, makes the Strings tremble at our very Hearts" (*Sermon*, as quoted by R. S. Crane in "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" 208) (2:878–9).

The Nortons are perhaps too modest when they suggest that the annotations might be the more "expendable" the more familiar one is with the history of the period (2:685). No doubt everyone can profit from these annotations, and scholars with a more historical sense are likely to come up with yet other sources even as they learn from ones previously unfamiliar to them. The Nortons also note that the annotations are neither complete nor definitive, and they welcome suggestions from readers.

Hume on Powers and Utility

I now turn to David Norton's "Historical Account" of the *Treatise*; my purpose is to suggest some additions for the annotations in light of Hume's targeting of both Locke and Hutcheson on the issue of powers and perception. In Section 5 of that account, Norton examines Hume's revising and publishing of Book 3, focusing on three letters that Hume sent to Francis Hutcheson in 1739 and 1740. Norton's aim here is to reconstruct how Hume did or may have revised portions of Book 3 in response to comments or objections from Hutcheson.

In the second letter, that of 4 March 1740, in which Hume asks Hutcheson for help with a bookseller, he writes that "the Book is pretty much alter'd since you saw it," and is "improv'd . . . in point of Prudence & Philosophy." He enclosed in this letter a copy of the revised Conclusion to *Treatise* 3. The Nortons include a facsimile of this manuscript (and a list of the ways in which it differs from the first-edition

text) in Volume 2 of the Clarendon Edition (Editorial Appendix 1). Hume's conclusion describes the difference between the anatomist and the painter of morals, and he expresses his commitment to doing anatomy, at least in part in order to be of service to the moralist. He had included a similar description in the 1739 letter to Hutcheson. Norton observes that Hume thus resists acceding to Hutcheson's complaint, to which Hume replies in the 1739 letter, that Hume showed insufficient "Warmth in the Cause of Virtue" (2:480–1). But Norton does not comment on a phrase that Hume struck out in the manuscript sent to Hutcheson. Hume has just described the extra advantage that a morality founded on extensive sympathy has over an instinctive moral sense, insofar as the former can reflect on and approve the principles of our nature that have engendered its "Rise & Origin." He then turns to the issue of the happiness of virtue, and had originally written: "The same System may help us to form a just Notion of the *Happiness*, as well as of the *Dignity* of Virtue, & may interest every Principle of our Nature, ~~both our Selfishness and our Pride~~, in the embracing & cherishing that noble Quality."⁶

As we know, the phrase "both our selfishness and pride" did not appear in the published version of the Conclusion. Perhaps the phrase was struck out to gain favor with Hutcheson.⁷ Nevertheless, Hume's ensuing remarks about the "alacrity" with which we can carry out our pursuits when we consider that virtue gives us a "new lustre in the eyes" of approving others, as well as the reward of "peace and inward satisfaction," suggest the importance to him of self-regard and pride, though he likely means here the virtue comprised of "a due degree of pride" (T 3.3.6.6, 3.3.2.8; SBN 620, 596). His insistence throughout the *Treatise* on the importance of pride and self-regard also suggests the influence of Mandeville (whose point about anatomy in the Preface to *The Fable of the Bees* was perhaps also important to Hume as he developed his experimental method). While Hume gives a decidedly different characterization of pride, regarding "a due degree of pride" as a genuine virtue, the centrality of pride in Mandeville's work is surely not lost on him. Indeed, it is Hume's account of sympathy as the source of the moral sentiments, rather than the kind of instinctive moral sense favored in the accounts of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, that allows him to argue in 3.3.1 that we naturally approve of a number of self-regarding virtues in addition to appropriate pride, as well as the artificial virtues of justice. The key point for Hume, which puts him yet further at odds with Hutcheson, is that the most important virtues are those approved of because they are useful (above all, the artificial or convention-based virtues of justice), and hence give pleasure to those benefiting from them or those possessed of them.

In the second letter of 1740, written just 12 days after the March 4 letter, and in which Hume makes a second request for assistance with securing a bookseller, Hume consults Hutcheson "in a Point of Prudence," asking his opinion on a comparison between virtue and vice on the one hand and sensible qualities such

as "sounds, colours, heat and & cold," on the other, which "are not qualities in objects but perceptions in the mind." Now Norton does not suggest, as some commentators have done, that Hume here hopes to gain favor with Hutcheson, especially in light of this second request for help with a bookseller.⁸ As Norton notes, a passage similar to the one in the letter to Hutcheson appears at T 3.1.1.26; SBN 469 (2:487). Norton does not, in the "Historical Account," comment on the Hutchesonian character of the *Treatise* passage, although the Nortons' annotations for 3.1.1.26 refer us both to Addison, who in turn references Locke's *Essay* 2.8, and to Hutcheson, writing about approbation as the perception of a sense, but not an image of anything external to the mind (2:891–2). Whatever Hume's intentions were with regard to that passage (and Hume scholars are divided about his intention), I would like to emphasize that in the *Treatise*, Hume more often appeals to the other side of the analogy with secondary qualities.⁹ He appeals, that is, not only to the mind-dependence of beauty and virtue, but to the "powers" that various objects have to produce in us the sentiments of pleasure or approbation, pain or disapprobation.¹⁰

For example, Hume refers to the power of wit (2.1.7.7; SBN 297), the powers of both natural and moral beauty (2.1.8.3; SBN 300), the power of surprise or novelty (2.1.8.6; SBN 301), and the power of virtue (3.3.1.3; SBN 575), as powers that produce in us pleasure, approbation, love, or pride. Harmful qualities, or those with disutility, such as vice, deformity and poverty are powers of producing pains such as hatred, humility, or blame. Hume extends the point at 3.3.1.3, writing that "these two particulars are to be consider'd as equivalent, with regard to our mental qualities, *virtue* and the power of producing love or pride, *vice* and the power of procuring humility or hatred" (SBN 575). Somewhat surprisingly, the Nortons do not provide annotations citing Locke on powers for the passages I have mentioned, although I think Hume, particularly in the passages from Book 2, has both Locke and Hutcheson in mind. Locke introduces the relevant notion of powers in Book 2, chapter 8 of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (with subsequent significant discussions in 2.23, 2.30, and 4.3). Locke distinguishes between primary and secondary qualities, arguing that the former "are utterly inseparable from the body," and that an idea we have of a primary quality is a "resemblance" of the quality.¹¹ Secondary qualities, in contrast, "are nothing in the objects themselves, but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities," sensations such as "colours, sounds, tastes, etc."¹² Although the content of a given sensible idea does not resemble the secondary quality that is the power to produce the ideas in us, Locke insists that such ideas are, in his technical sense, "real," that is, ideas "whereby we distinguish the qualities, that are really in things themselves."¹³ Crucially, Hutcheson follows Locke's strategy of postulating a connection between primary and secondary qualities to explain certain perceptions that arise from our internal senses, such as those of beauty or

virtue. Hutcheson urges that our ideas of beauty, for example, are “excited upon our Perception of some primary Quality” in the object, and later argues that it is “uniformity amidst variety” that, along with our sense of beauty, grounds our perception of beauty as a kind of pleasure.¹⁴ Benevolence is the analogous quality that produces in us the sentiment of moral approbation for virtue.

In contrast, Hume argues with respect to his own discussion of powers that they arise not from any primary quality, but from (typically) the utility of beautiful objects or virtuous characters, and our sympathy with the pleasures of those benefited by them.¹⁵ Hume thus keeps the language of the comparison drawn by Hutcheson between secondary qualities and the qualities of beauty and virtue, but cuts the knot tying the latter sort of quality to something akin to a primary quality that grounds the power of producing the relevant approbation or blame. On Hume’s view, the causes of the indirect passions are not original, not only because so many different sorts of thing might cause a passion such as pride, but also because our recognition of something as an appropriate cause, as having the relevant utility that we find pleasing, will be influenced by the particular circumstances of a society. Although human nature imposes some constraints on how we will understand utility, the relativity of utility to social context, rather than a Hutchesonian benevolence perceived independently of “custom, education, example, or study,”¹⁶ demonstrates Hume’s commitment to undermining Hutcheson’s account of our internal senses of beauty and virtue, which must ultimately make an appeal to final causes (as does Locke in his account of the relation between primary and secondary qualities in *Essay* 2.23.11–3), to explain the relation between the sentiments we have, for example of beauty, and what he has identified as the primary quality of uniformity amidst variety.¹⁷

Hume’s point that we naturally sympathize with the pleasures of those who benefit from useful traits or qualities is a key point in his defense of natural abilities. David Norton suggests the possibility that Hume may have written 3.3.4, “Of natural abilities,” in response to Hutcheson’s objection that Hume conflates moral virtues with such abilities, since Hume invokes sources demonstrating the ancient views on mixed characters and the range of traits making up what in EPM he will call “personal merit” (2:484–5). In this section of the *Treatise*, Hume discusses certain qualities to which we respond not so much because we find them useful as from “a certain sense, which acts without reflection, and regards not the tendencies of qualities and characters.” He goes on to suggest that “some moralists account for all the sentiments of virtue by this sense,” and in the Annotations, the Nortons suggest that Hume may have Shaftesbury and Hutcheson in mind. Hume observes that such a “hypothesis [as that held by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson] is very plausible” (3.3.4.11; SBN 612) (2:957). Nevertheless, Hume’s emphasis in this section is on the useful tendencies of many of the natural abilities, a utility that pleases us when we sympathize with its effects, so that sympathy in

turn produces a sentiment of approbation towards such abilities, whether useful to the possessor or to others, even if we refuse these abilities "the title of virtues" (3.3.4.2; SBN 607). Hume's emphasis on utility, rather than moral goodness, again suggests the influence of Mandeville, as well as that of John Gay, influences perhaps worth an annotation.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize two points. I have suggested that Mandeville as well as Hutcheson has a notable influence on Hume's thought, although Hume departs from both in his appeal to sympathy as the source of both a "due degree of pride" and the moral sentiments (3.3.2.8; SBN 596). As I said earlier, Mandeville's focus on pride surely inspired Hume, although Hume restores the dignity of pride as a virtue in a way Mandeville clearly does not. More positively, there is no doubt that the Nortons' Annotations along with David Norton's Historical Account, which includes two sections of reviews of, and responses to, the *Treatise*, open up new vistas for Hume scholars. We shall profit for many years to come from this authoritative new edition of Hume's *Treatise*, and the energy, work, and evident care that the Nortons have invested deserve our utmost admiration.

NOTES

A version of this paper was presented at the symposium on the Clarendon Edition of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, held at the 34th International Hume Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, August 2007. I would like to thank David Norton and Mary Norton for helpful comments on this essay. Thanks also to Peter Loftson for editorial guidance.

1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited with Preliminary Dissertations and Notes, by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898), 1:1.

2 See Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres," in *Philosophy in History*, ed. R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 49–75.

3 Green and Grose, 1:4.

4 Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1941), 140. E. B. McGilvary's article, "Altruism in Hume's *Treatise*," was published in *The Philosophical Review* 12 (1903), 272–98.

5 David Norton and Mary Norton inform me that they have made this identification with the help of the late John Stephens.

6 "Editorial Appendix 1," 2:665–6. See T 3.3.6.3, 6 (SBN 619–20) for the printed text of this material.

7 See R. W. Connon, "The Textual and Philosophical Significance of Hume's MS Alterations to *Treatise III*," in *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, ed. G. P. Morice (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 186–204, 195–6.

8 See Connon, "Textual and Philosophical Significance," 195.

9 See for example, Simon Blackburn, "Hume on the Mezzanine Level," *Hume Studies* 19.2 (1993); Michael B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), part 4; and Kenneth P. Winkler, "Hutcheson and Hume on the Color of Virtue," *Hume Studies* 22.1 (1996): 3–22.

10 In a recent article, Nicholas Sturgeon has looked more closely at Hume's attention to both sides of what is often referred to as "the comparison" between moral qualities and secondary qualities. In contrast to Blackburn, Gill and Winkler, Sturgeon examines Hume's discussion of the powers of things to produce passions or sentiments in us, as well as the mind-dependence of the qualities, such as virtues or beauty, that these particular perceptions represent. See "Moral Skepticism and Moral Naturalism in Hume's *Treatise*," in *Hume Studies* 27.1 (2001): 3–83. I disagree with Sturgeon's assertion that in these passages Hume endorses the Lockean model of primary and secondary qualities.

11 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2.8.9 and 2.8.15.

12 Locke, *Essay*, 2.8.10.

13 Locke, *Essay*, 2.30.2.

14 See Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises*, ed. W. Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2004), Treatise I, I.xvii, 27, and II.iii, 28.

15 I discuss these differences between Hume and Hutcheson in more detail in "Hume on Beauty and Virtue," in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth Radcliffe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 273–92.

16 Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, Treatise II, I.vii, 99.

17 Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, I.VIII.ii.4, 80.