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## DAVID HUME, CRITICAL EDITIONS, COMMENTARIES, AND BIOGRAPHIES: IMPARTIALITY AND ITS RISKS

**Abstract.** Since the time of Socrates, there has been no shortage of important philosophers who have not written anything. Only Hume, however, left us a story of his life, before publishing anything. The intellectual bibliography of James Harris is a remarkable feat and A.M. Stewart is the author of essays of exceptional value. However, the author of this paper disagrees with both on the genesis of his *Treatise of human nature*. In his critical edition, David Fate Norton has left us 300 pages of references to texts that may have inspired the *Treatise*. The author discovers some serious gaps. Similar is the case of a note by Beauchamp on sympathy in Hume's *Inquiry concerning the Principle of Morals*.

**Keywords.** History of Philosophy, Hume, Critical Editions, Biographies, Hume's philosophical Beginnings, 'A Kind of History of my Life'.

Since the 1950s, the production of texts and studies on David Hume has undergone a huge, rapid growth. Until the 70s, the epistemological and metaphysical topics of the first book of the *Treatise on Human Nature* dominated the scene; the attention of scholars then shifted to topics on morality, on politics, and on religion. In both cases, Hume's texts were principally used as a pretext for proposing or supporting their own ideas, as analytic tradition dictated. However, over the last twenty years, and especially in the last decade, there

was instead a massive increase in studies that on one hand aimed to place Hume's texts in the historical context of his century, and on the other to offer new critical editions, which were rich and reliable.

For this reason, I intend to focus on *Hume. An Intellectual Biography* by James Harris, published in 2015 (Cambridge University Press), on the critical edition (2000) and the comments (2007) of the *Treatise of Human Nature* by David Fate Norton and, only marginally, on the *Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* by Tom Beauchamp (1998, 2006), both published by Oxford University Press.

Since my contribution will be limited to picking up on a few criticisms, I will start by saying that these are absolutely worthy and remarkable undertakings. The biography of Hume is over 600 pages long, and the critical edition combined with the commentary of David Norton is almost twice this length. Harris' biography probably supersedes, or is at least equal to that of Ernest Campbell Mossner (1954, 1980), which was until now the text of reference for scholars of Hume. Mossner declares that he writes «for a reader less interested in the ideas than in the man»<sup>1</sup>. Harris mentions this to state the contrary «This book, by contrast, is written for the reader less interested in the man than in the ideas, the arguments made in defence of the ideas, and the language in which the arguments were couched»<sup>2</sup>. His text does not limit itself to describing Hume's works with clarity and lucidity, but above all places them in the context from which they emerge, and that in which they are placed. At the heart of this biography is a demanding, comprehensive thesis, in which the idea that Hume aimed especially to be welcomed amongst the ranks of the Enlightenment intellectuals is particularly dominant. Therefore, the attention given to the *Treatise of Human Nature* by the majority of scholars must be corrected, and the entirety of his works must to be taken into consideration. So, the scientist of human nature is opposed to the historian and the essayist. In the biography, equal attention is dedicated to each of Hume's works, following a criterion of impartiality. According to Harris, to consider Hume as first and foremost a man of letters, and to understand that for him philosophy is «understood not as a body of doctrine or a subject matter, but rather as a habit of mind, a style of

<sup>1</sup> E.C. MOSSNER, *The Life of David Hume*, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1980, p. XI.

<sup>2</sup> J.A. HARRIS, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, New York, Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2015, p. IX.

thinking, and of writing, such as could in principle be applied to any subject whatsoever»<sup>3</sup> allows one to avoid both the nineteenth-century theory that scolded Hume for abandoning philosophy for fame, and the twentieth-century theory that insists upon the unitary character of his philosophy and considers all of his subsequent writings as a continuation or development of the very same *Treatise*. This characterisation of Hume as a man of letters is also fitting with the way of putting together the volume, following the content of his works chronologically, from the *Treatise* to the *History of England*. Ultimately, it seems to me that John Wright's review - that this is a Masterwork and that he would not hesitate to put it into the hands of his students - is one to be shared<sup>4</sup>.

Having introduced the above, I will put forward my prejudices as a scholar. I will not be able to share some important aspects of the first chapter on the formation and the beginnings of the *Treatise*. Harris states that he is particularly indebted to the long essay of M.A. Stewart *Hume's Intellectual Development: 1711-1752* (2005), and to the essays of Reinhardt Brandt (1976) and John Wright (2003) for his own reconstruction<sup>5</sup>.

The material we have on Hume's life before the publication of the *Treatise of Human Nature* in 1738 and 1740 is very scarce, among which is a letter of July 1727 to his friend Michael Ramsay, and a long letter written to a Scottish physician in March or April of 1734 – prior, therefore, to his stay in Bristol and his subsequent journey to France. In the letter to the Scottish physician, he presents a sort of story of his life with respect to his physical and mental condition in the course of the depression he had fallen into, according to a practice that due to purposes of brevity I will be unable to go into.

In the letter, we can identify two phases: that which precedes, and that which follows, the greatest intensity of his neurosis. This lasted for nine months, from September 1729 to May 1730. Both are introduced by harsh judgements on philosophy.

The letter is very well-known to scholars of Hume, but I will cite the essential parts of it here, for those who are not familiar with his works.

Phase 1:

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> See HARRIS, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, reviewed by J.P. WRIGHT in «British Journal for the History of Philosophy», XXV, 2017, pp. 823-832: p. 832.

<sup>5</sup> See HARRIS, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, cit., pp. 38 and 481 n. 12.

I was after that [*i.e.* College education] left to my own Choice in my Reading, & found it encline me almost equally to Books of Reasoning & Philosophy, & to Poetry & the polite Authors. *Every one, who is acquainted either with the Philosophers or Critics, knows that there is nothing yet establisht in either of these two Sciences, & that they contain little more than endless Disputes, even in the most fundamental Articles.* Upon Examination of these, I found a certain Boldness of Temper, growing in me, which was not enclin'd to submit to any Authority in these Subjects, *but led me to seek out some new Medium, by which Truth might be establisht*<sup>6</sup>.

After much Study, & Reflection on this, at last, when I was about 18 Years of Age, *there seem'd to be open'd up to me a new Scene of Thought, which transport'd me beyond Measure, & made me, with an Ardor natural to young men, throw up every other Pleasure or Business to apply entirely to it. The Law, which was the Business I design'd to follow, appear'd nauseous to me, & I cou'd think of no other way of pushing my Fortune in the World, but that of a Scholar & Philosopher. I was infinitely happy in this Course of Life for some Months; till at last, about the beginning of Sept' 1729 my Ardor seem'd in a moment to be extinguisht, & I cou'd no longer raise my Mind to that pitch, which formerly gave me such excessive Pleasure*<sup>7</sup>.

Hume felt no uneasiness or want of spirits, and therefore never imagin'd there was any bodily distemper; so he attributed his coldness to an indolence of his character and doubled his commitment, thus putting his life at risk. He adds that having read many books on morality such as those of Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch, with their pleasant representations of virtue and of philosophy, he tried to regain his strength by reflecting on death, poverty, shame and pain, and all the other calamities of life.

## Phase 2:

*Having now Time & Leizure to cool my inflam'd Imaginations,* I began to consider seriously, how I shou'd proceed in my Philosophical Enquiries. I found that the *moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity,* labor'd under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy, *of being entirely Hypothetical,* & depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every one consulted his Fancy in

<sup>6</sup> See Letter 3 to [Dr George Cheyne] (Mar. or Apr. 1734) in *The letters of David Hume*, ed. by J.Y.T. Greig, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1932, p. 13 (my emphasis).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem* (my emphasis).

erecting Schemes of Virtue & of Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend. This therefore I resolved to make my principal Study, & the Source from which I wou'd derive every Truth in Criticism as well as Morality<sup>8</sup>.

Having established this for those unfamiliar with Hume's works, I will turn first of all to Reinhardt Brandt's essay, which is, in Stewart's opinion, one of the best analyses dedicated to the letter to the Scottish physician. The essay proposes two principal theses. The first is that scholars have identified the new scene with whichever of Hume's discoveries was more advantageous and more coherent with their own interpretation of Hume's ideas. The second, and perhaps more important, is that in reality "the new scene of thought" is a false beginning, from the moment that Hume states «there seem'd to be open'd up to me» and later introduces a critical judgement of ancient philosophers with the phrase «Having now Time & Leisure to cool my inflam'd Imaginations». Indeed, this contrasts with the enthusiasm suggested by the new scene of thought<sup>9</sup>.

I will therefore move on to Stewart's text. Now, it is very frustrating for me to find myself disagreeing with Stewart. Because I have always admired his works: they are innovative, extremely well-finished, in terms of both expression and research. He demolished many clichés about Hume's thought, and about its historical context, and, in particular, he established the correct dating of some manuscripts. The early essay *An Historical Essay on Chivalry on Modern Honour* does not date back to the university years (1720-25), as Mossner claims, but rather to the very early 1730s, whereas the manuscript that goes by the name *Early Memoranda* does not precede, but follows the *Treatise on Human Nature*, once again contradicting Mossner's claims<sup>10</sup>. He also provided an excellent dating and introduction to the manuscript known as *Fragment on Evil*. Furthermore, his expertise on the history of religion in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain is unique.

Stewart considers these letters crucial, but does not use them to understand the planning of the *Treatise*; rather, he uses them to

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, p. 16 (my emphasis).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. BRANDT, *The Beginning of Hume's Philosophy*, in *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, ed. by G.P. Morice, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Univ. Pr., 1977, pp. 117-127: pp. 118-119.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E.C. MOSSNER, *The Life of David Hume*, cit., pp. 48, 68.

clarify the progression of Hume's development between 1727 and 1734, when he moves to Bristol and then to France.

After two paragraphs mainly dedicated to the University of Edinburgh, to its teachers and the quality of education Hume received, Stewart goes on to examine these letters with the following premise:

But historical recollection is not a constant: it changes as memories merge and the motives for recollection change, so that the further one moves from the events, the greater the likelihood of rationalization and reinvention. Even the letter to the physician is likely to be influenced by Hume's beliefs about the intended recipient's expectations. Hume's testimony is the best we have, but is not exempt from that kind of scrutiny that he himself applied to historical sources<sup>11</sup>.

Now, apart from the fact that Hume's examination of his sources are lightyears away from that of Stewart in terms of reliability, the reader understands this strict premise only towards the end of the essay. On page 53, Stewart mentions that in a letter to Elliot of Minto<sup>12</sup> Hume claims to have *planned* the *Treatise* before he turned twenty-one, and in the same letter, as in that written to Robert Stewart<sup>13</sup>, to have *composed* it before he turned twenty-five. Whereas Stewart confirms the first of these claims, he contests the second, because if this were the case, Hume would only have dedicated two of the three years he spent in France to the *Treatise*. Furthermore, Hume worked on the first volume for another year, and worked for almost two more before publishing the second. But Stewart's judgement is particularly harsh on the *advertisement* that Hume wanted published before his works in 1775 – Exasperated by the criticism of Reid and Beattie directed primarily at the pages of the *Treatise*, Hume declares: «A work which the author has projected before he left College, and which he wrote and published «not long after»<sup>14</sup>. Stewart judges the second declaration to be «creative

<sup>11</sup> M.A. STEWART, *Hume's intellectual Development 1711-1752*, in *Impressions of Hume*, ed. by M. Frasca-Spada, P.J.E. Kail, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 2005, pp. 11-58: p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> See *Letter 73* to [Gilbert Elliot of Minto] (Mar. or Apr. 1751) in *The letters of David Hume*, cit., p. 158.

<sup>13</sup> See *Letter 91* to [John Stewart] (Feb. 1754), ivi, pp. 185-188: p. 187.

<sup>14</sup> *Advertisement*, prefixed to II vol. of HUME's *Essays and Treatises on several subjects*, London, Printed for T. Cadell in the Strand & A. Donaldson and W. Creech at Edinburgh, 1777. Cf. HUME, *Enquiries concerning Human Under-*

imagination», «misrepresentation», «clear falsification». Fifteen years later are not «not long after». But is «misplaced ingenuity to try to salvage the suggestion that Hume had projected» the *Treatise* «before he left the college» «since there is no reason to think that Hume had yet adopted the Stoic model or repudiated the religious framework that were likely factors in his nervous crisis, or that he had learnt to adjust his sights to the proper regard to ‘human nature’ that the crisis forced upon him»<sup>15</sup>.

At this point, I could try to attenuate these criticisms, observing for example that at the age of sixty-four and after the quantity and, sometimes, the bulk of the subsequent publications, fifteen years (which ought perhaps to be reduced to ten or eleven<sup>16</sup>) can be deemed not long after», that *projecting* is less than *planning*, that «writing and publishing» instead of *composing* can indicate a continued dedication in one’s memory.

However, I prefer to focus on the «crucial» documents. At first glance, Stewart seems to reserve the third part of his essay for these. But this is a mistake, because Stewart’s reconstruction includes both the end of the second part, and the beginning of the fourth part, and in quite a strategic fashion. According to Stewart, three aspects of the young Hume are striking: his reading of Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, all characterised by their stoicism; his tendency for introspective analysis; and at times his solitude<sup>17</sup>. Stewart cites and comments on long passages from the letter of July 1727 to Michael Ramsay. He cites the passage which to me has always seemed noteworthy:

Would you have me send in my loose, uncorrect thought? Were such worth the transcribing? All the progress that I made is but drawing the outlines, in loose bits of paper; here a hint of a passion, there a Phenomenon in the mind accounted for, in another the alteration of these

*standing and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. by S. Bigge, P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1975.

<sup>15</sup> STEWART, *Hume’s intellectual Development*, cit., p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> If one believes that Hume completed at least the first two books of the *Treatise* in France. The years may even drop to seven, as Hume continued to attend college for law lessons until 1729 and may have composed the book on *Understanding* – the only object of Reid’s criticism – by 1736.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 29.

accounts; sometimes a remark upon an Author I have been reading. And none of them worth to any Body & I believe scarce to my self<sup>18</sup>.

In this way, Hume refuses to reveal to Ramsay what is writing. Here, one reading Hume already sees a project take shape, a project that as such distinguishes phenomena of the mind and the passions, explanations of these phenomena and subsequent modifications.

Stewart's comment precedes the quotation: «It shows him already interested in two related topics that he would never abandon – the 'Phenomena' of the mind and the passions- although he has written anything coherent on them. He is keeping loose notes». I found Stewart's comment admirable. First: augmentation, not just the topics of Book 1 and 2 of the *Treatise*, but the topics of his whole life<sup>19</sup>; second: diminution, Hume has not written anything coherent in them<sup>20</sup>; third: new diminution, he is keeping loose notes<sup>21</sup>.

Harris, too, discusses this, and observes that it would be «tantalizing» to see some aspects of the future *Treatise* foreshadowed here. Later on, he states that it would be «tempting» to find some affinity between the discomfort described in the letter to the Scottish physician and the concluding pages of the first book on understanding<sup>22</sup>. Now, *tantalizing* – in Italian tempting or temptress – is described as follows in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: «to annoy or torment a man or animal with the vision of something that can be desired but never reached». In other words, like the apple that Eve offered to Adam. One could think about it, but it is forbidden. So, Harris prevents himself from being able to do what he does, in fact, do in the subsequent chapters in relation to political essays or the history of England: to see here and there the signs of future ideas. In the meantime, I will note that it is not the first time that Ramsay asks this of Hume: in fact, Hume himself suggested this in the past with a few hints, to discover whether his friend is writing about the same topics. Nor will it be the last time that Hume, having returned from France, refuses to reveal his plans for his work even to Ramsay

<sup>18</sup> *Letter 1* [to Michael Ramsay] (Jul. 4, 1727) in *The letters of David Hume*, cit., pp. 9-11: p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> So, nobody could say that he is neglecting the relevance of the topics.

<sup>20</sup> So, what Hume is writing is not important.

<sup>21</sup> So, Hume's accounts and alterations are reduced to loose notes.

<sup>22</sup> See HARRIS, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, cit., pp. 44, 100.

and Kames, that is to his closest friends<sup>23</sup>. It would however be interesting to know *when* Hume began dealing with the topics of the mind and the passions, and if by chance Hume deliberately discredited his reflections in his letter. The letter, on the other hand, is very witty: in the face of the search for solitude, Hume declares that he prefers conversation with a friend to any entertainment. «For a mortification»<sup>24</sup> he detaches himself from the heights of philosophy and begins talking about the horse his brother bought, or about the requests that «Mamma» made to his friend Ramsay<sup>25</sup>. And even the beginning is, shall we say, a bit “Ancient Greek”, since he scolds his friend for depriving himself of his beloved Milton to send this to Hume. But even in the future, this is the way to understand friendship on Hume’s part. Crying frequently is a sign of sensitivity and nobility of spirit for the eighteenth-century gentleman<sup>26</sup>. Hume is happy, above all, because, having spent a winter reading obligatory texts on law, now he can choose his own books: at times Cicero’s third *Tusculan disputation*, that discusses affliction and calamities of life, at others an eclogue by Virgil. But he adds that due to his nature, he is more inclined to escape from fate like the country poet, rather than challenging it like Cicero’s stoics.

On the contrary, Stewart sees continuity between the young Hume’s practice of self-examination about the catalogue of vices and virtues of a successful, devout little handbook, *The Whole Duty of Man*, and the introspective character that accompanies the new scene of thought. Stewart notes that Hume attributes his voluntary reaction to his nervous crisis to his many readings of stoics, which I have already mentioned, before suggesting that «Hume describes» the new scene of thought «in terms of Shaftesburian rhapsody»<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> See *Letter 6* [to Henry Home] (London, Dec. 1737) in *The letters of David Hume*, cit. pp. 23-25: pp. 23-24; and *Letter* [to Michael Ramsay] (Tours, Aug. 26, 1737) in MOSSNER, *The life of D. Hume*, cit., pp. 626-627. I completely agree with Stewart’s comment on Hume’s almost offensive attitude toward his friend in this letter. However, Hume also in his own *Abstract* of the *Treatise* says that «it will be impossible to give the reader a just notion of the whole» and confines himself «to his explication of our reasonings from cause and effect» in HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, cit., p. 647.

<sup>24</sup> *Letter 1* [to Michael Ramsay], cit., p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ivi*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> See, for an example, *Letter 341* [to Jean-Jacques Rousseau] (Jul. 22, 1766), in *Letters*, cit., II vol., pp. 66-68: p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> STEWART, *Hume’s intellectual Development*, cit., p. 29.

Stewart observes very coherently that Hume had not yet abandoned «the ancient's conception of the philosophical enterprise». But why is there this inversion of tenses with respect to the narrative of Hume? Stewart is right: first comes the reading of stoics, then philosophical enthusiasm; the denouncement of the useless remedies that the stoics recommend against the calamities of life came much later. But in this way, the new scene of thought remains constricted between two references to ancient stoicism. Similarly – in Stewart's comment on the letter of 1727 to Ramsay – the passage on phenomena of the mind and the passions was left submerged between two such references.

I am left perplexed, too, because I cannot fathom how anyone could be extremely happy sharing the enthusiasms described by Shaftesbury in the dialogue *Moralists. A Moral Rhapsody*. The decision to abandon the legal profession is there, Stewart adds, «but it is unclear whether he yet had a philosophy or a sustainable method»<sup>28</sup>. I would like to add here too that the new medium or new method proposed by Shaftesbury is anything but new, being essentially a return to stoicism. In any case, «everything fell apart» six months later<sup>29</sup>. It is in this frankly scornful way that Stewart remains faithful to Brandt's false start thesis. But here it is necessary to turn back to part II<sup>30</sup>, where he cites the first critical passage on philosophy. Now, the passage's «endless disputes» are attributed to the rather school-like fashion in which moral philosophy was taught at university. This was a strategic move, as this way Hume's broad, radical disapproval of philosophy and criticism is restricted to the perfunctory disputes in university classrooms. But we must also take a step much further forward, to part IV, where Stewart wonders which of the books mentioned in the catalogue of Hume's library

<sup>28</sup> «What he did abandon at this point – around the end of the law session 1728-9 – was the law, believing that his search for a 'new medium' was going somewhere» (*ibidem*). This sentence immediately precedes the phrase I mentioned in the text. I intend to emphasise the tension between the two parts of the proposition: on the one hand there is only the search for the new medium and the hope that it will lead him somewhere, on the other hand, it is unclear. But is not excluded, whether Hume already has a philosophy and a new method. It is to be assumed that the sentence I quoted in the text is a correction later added by Stewart to attenuate the meaning (at worst ironic or sarcastic) of the sentence here reproduced.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, p. 25.

could have contributed to his formation. First, he goes back to Shaftesbury, and dedicates more than an entire page to him<sup>31</sup>. The purchase of *Characteristicks* by Hume in 1726 has been documented, it was the progressive text fashionable amongst the young generations; this time Stewart turns to the future *Treatise*: Hume mentions Shaftesbury as one of those who had recently contributed to the science of man, and «some of his discussion of moral character as well of moral appraisal no doubt left its impression on Hume's later work»<sup>32</sup>. This influence, although not alone, endured in Hume's work «as a professional essayist; in particular he has a direct bearing on Hume's new Medium»<sup>33</sup>. Shaftesbury's work is «a difficult test» that intends «to engage the reader in the study and practice of virtue», «to go back to the ancient moralists and rediscover in human nature the spring of personal and civic virtue»<sup>34</sup>. I will not continue with Stewart's pleasant analysis, but will focus instead on a quote from a good book by Isabel Rivers, because «the essential first step to this knowledge is self-examination, meditation, or soliloquy»<sup>35</sup>. In this way the vague rhapsody of the new scene of thought becomes precisely Shaftesburian doctrine, and this a certainty.

I will not concentrate on the rest of the letter to the Scottish physician, because I do not have much to object to on Stewart's comments on the religious crisis, the harsh judgement of the ancients' morality, and John Wright and Ticco Tolonen's remarks on the decisive shift to Mandevillian thought. At the core, we are not dealing with Stewart, but with Harris. Still, when Hume weighs up the exceptional work completed in the three-year period between 1731 and 1734, despite his illness, he claims to have read «Most of the celebrated Books in Latin, French & English», Stewart comments that this «may be hyperbole», and besides, Hume does not tell us the titles of the books he has read<sup>36</sup>. Hume adds «I find I have scribbled many a Quire of paper, in which there is nothing contain'd but my own inventions» and, again, «I have collected the rude Ma-

<sup>31</sup> Ivi, pp. 37-38.

<sup>32</sup> Ivi, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, p. 33.

terials for many Volumes»<sup>37</sup>. Stewart cites the entirety of a long paragraph in which Hume explains that he cannot translate his ideas into words, and comments that «the ‘many volumes’ are at this point a dream». Stewart remarks with interest that Hume is already familiar with «the image of mental ‘anatomy’ that he would reuse in his debate with Hutcheson in the 1740s», but does not realize that the image derives from Mandeville’s texts, just as – if I am not mistaken – he, as well as Wright and Tolonen, does not realize that the impossibility of «keep[ing] steddily the idea in his eye so as to contemplate its minutest part» is explained by Philopirio, the physician of Mandeville’s *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Histerick Diseases*. Stewart cannot resist naming many references and readings of Hume from this period, that I will not list here, but their incoherence is further proof that Hume does not yet have of a philosophy of his own. He is so intent on demonstrating that Hume had not written anything before his stay in France that he even forgets to complete Hume’s own sentence on “many a quire of papers” with: «in which there is nothing contain’d but my own Inventions». Fortunately, he later adds that Hume was not a tabula rasa, and that he brings «at least a selection of his books and papers» to France<sup>38</sup>.

It is obvious from Harris’ titles that he follows Stewart closely. The first paragraph on Hume’s formation has the title *Shaftesbury as an Antidote to University*, and the second *Mandeville and Bayle as an Antidote to Shaftesbury*. A new strategic move is to anticipate Shaftesbury’s influence on Hume to 1727. Harris’s use of Hume’s letter to Ramsay is uncertain: at page 43 the rules cited in the letter are those laid down by Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputations* to teach contempt of death, notwithstanding a few lines after Harris says «it would perhaps be unwise to take Hume completely serious in this letter», but at page 46 says «the high-flown language used in his letter to Ramsay» is connected with Shaftesbury’s *Soliloquy or advice to an Author*, and «the ‘papers’ he was writing may have been the requisite essays in self-understanding».

If, on the contrary, I say that there is no need to bring Shaftesbury into this, because the Longino quoted in the letter is enough

<sup>37</sup> Hume’s quotations are from the *Letter* [to dr. Cheyne], cit., p. 16, commented by STEWART, *ivi*, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> *ivi*, p. 36.

(and his first requirement to be sublime writers<sup>39</sup>), and that it would be difficult to use Shaftesbury's introspective and high language, to explain the phenomena of the mind and passions and if I add that the rules that Hume has been referring to have nothing to do with Cicero, but are the same rules that Hume has just imposed to himself (not to speak of philosophy) and ends up breaking to talk about Longino, and that the letter to Ramsay is as full of witticism and humour as much as the letters Hume usually sends to his friends are, I think I "leave texts talking" in a way less fanciful and conjectural than Harris, without the intention of destroying the only clue that Hume at least from 27, and perhaps earlier, is about to draft a treatise. On the other hand, why should Hume open a new scene of thought only in the spring of 1729 under the influence of Shaftesbury, as Harris imagines, or that of Longino, as Brandt imagines, when he had bought Shaftesbury's text three years earlier and read Longino two years before? Would this be the result of "much study and reflection"?

Only the third and final paragraph of Harris's chapter has the title *Hutcheson and the Scottish Scene of thought*. Here, before discussing Hutcheson, Harris discusses Kames, Baxter and Dudgeon, as much as to say the young Hume's next-door neighbors, to recognize the excellent historiographic work of Paul Russell, but also to put it to one side<sup>40</sup>. And since Hume taught me in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* that to refute a habitual thought, such as that which from invention (contrive) immediately passes to the inventor (contriver) it is necessary to propose many alternative hypotheses (parts VI, VII, VIII), I want to mention that Russell's genesis of the *Treatise* is just as valid, and the fact that I criticized this undertaking of his in Rome years ago does not deny that Hume's *Treatise* is intrinsically opposed to religion. If anything, I do not share the opinion that each part of the first book is written with the intention of refuting Clarke and Baxter's arguments a priori. Hume's philosophical ambition is far greater. I agree that the *Treatise* is inspired by Hobbes, and that right from the beginning the distinction between impression and idea is very close to Hobbes' *Human Na-*

<sup>39</sup> «The first and most excellent of these is a boldness and grandeur in the Thoughts» (LONGINUS, *On the Sublime*, Ch. VIII).

<sup>40</sup> See HARRIS, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, cit., pp. 65-77 and p. 487 n. 126.

ture<sup>41</sup>, but why obscure Malebranche's contribution? There is an obvious strategy in all of Hume's philosophical works: to upturn Malebranche's theories on imagination, which Malebranche needs in order to refute Montaigne and the libertines as well as the followers of Aristotle. On this topic, Hume possesses and is inspired by the third edition of the *Search after Truth*, and the idea that Hume reads Malebranche only after going to La Flèche is, in my opinion, a serious error. I will not focus on this, but I have already called it the Sabbatical's fallacy, since if anything, Hume cuts, rather than adds, parts to the *Treatise* when he returns from France, except perhaps the section on personal identity.

Again, may we not suppose that the "new method" was the association of ideas and his first application to the laws of property, or any speculative topic connected with Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*<sup>42</sup>? Why do we have to confine to moralists (repeating the mistake of Kemp Smith and of Mossner who follows him) like Shaftesbury and Mandeville and forbid to Hume what was permitted to Hutcheson or Reid?<sup>43</sup> In this case we can justify the dangerous stoical reaction to Hume's crisis, just because he has not reflected enough to the ethics of the ancient.

But I will persevere, and I intend to introduce another point of view. Have we forgotten something on the topic of introspection and of pages written in the first person? Did Hume not tell his friend Ramsay that to understand the *Treatise* he must read Cartesian *Meditations*? I take my hat off to Paul Russell, who recognizes that the famous shade of blue that Hume discusses is mentioned in the

<sup>41</sup> See P. RUSSELL, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise. Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*, Oxford, Oxford Univ. Pr., 2008, pp. 61-69.

<sup>42</sup> See Hume's Letter [to Michael Ramsay] (Sept 29, 1734), in MOSSNER, *The Life of D. Hume*, cit. p. 626: «It is my pleasure to read over again today Locke's *Essays* and the *Principles of Human Knowledge* by Dr. Berkeley, which are printed in their original state and in French copy» says Hume while visiting the fine library of the Abbé Noel-Antoine Pluche at Rheims.

<sup>43</sup> See Th. REID, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. by W. Hamilton, Edinburgh, Maclachlan and Stewart, London, Longman and Green, 1863, *Essay II*, Ch. x, p. 283: «I once believed the doctrine of ideas so firmly as to embrace the whole of Berkeley's system in consequence of it»; F. HUTCHESON, *Letter [to Hume]* (Apr. 1739), «*Journal of the History of Philosophy*», IV, 1966, pp. 69-72: p. 71: «I have for many years been [...] more and more [...] running into the Old Academy, despairing of Certainty in the most important subjects...». The basic influence of Hutcheson on Hume was the main thesis of N. KEMP SMITH, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, London, Macmillan, 1941.

ninth proposition of the *Regulae*, and that Hume has therefore also read others of Descartes' texts. But where is Descartes in the *Treatise*? Here again, I share Russell's idea about what he calls dynamic skepticism, and I call diachronic skepticism. Russell means that radical skepticism is not cast aside in favour of a mitigated skepticism, but, as Hume states more clearly in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, it is preliminary and is always present in philosophical work<sup>44</sup>.

But there's more. How many of those who study Hume are familiar with the enigma that Hume quotes in full in the section on abstract ideas? «Whatever objects are different are distinguishable and whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by the thought and imagination». Hume also quotes this in reverse here<sup>45</sup>. How many times is it used again in the first book of the *Treatise*<sup>46</sup>? This allows me to move on – although I will come back to Harris' text – to the critical edition, and to Norton's 300 pages of comments.

Norton informs us that «These annotations provide materials intended to illuminate, but not interpret, Hume's text, a distinction which, however difficult to maintain in practice, provides a useful ideal. The annotations have been prepared for readers with diverse scholarly interests and competence»<sup>47</sup>.

A manifesto of impartiality, therefore, and amongst the objectives of the annotations I find «identification of authors or works to which Hume alludes» and «information about aspects of the intellectual background of views expressed in the *Treatise*»<sup>48</sup>. Now, I have gone looking for an annotation of Norton's on Hume's enigma, but I only found a reference to the previous note IV. But even in this case, Norton says nothing, nor does he point out the cross-references to subsequent uses of this. But what is the source, if not Descartes' sixth meditation? We are almost at the end of the *Meditations*. Descartes, having confirmed the existence of matter, uses this argument to demonstrate that matter and soul are two different substances. Perhaps this

<sup>44</sup> See RUSSELL, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, cit., pp. 215-221.

<sup>45</sup> HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>46</sup> 19 times in 13 different pages.

<sup>47</sup> HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature: A critical edition*, vol. 2. *Editorial Material including*, ed. by D.F. Norton, M.J. Norton, Oxford-New York, Clarendon Pr., 2007, Editors' Annotations, p. 685.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, p. 686.

reference would allow us to clarify Hume's reasoning throughout the course of the *Treatise*. But it is not there.

I will move on to the third book on morals, and I will go to see the very famous passage on the is/ought question. However, here there is a note, and it links back to John Balguy and one of his supporters. Not a word is written on Hutcheson, and I find this comment rather ridiculous, since both Stephen Buckle and I believe that the father of the is/ought question is indeed Hutcheson, who asks his rivals to justify the term "ought" at least five times in his works. However, I will abstain from commenting on a few notes of the edition for students which are coherent with Norton's interpretation of the relationship between Hutcheson and Hume. I will briefly address the edition of the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* by Tom Beauchamp. In the fifth section, in which Hume must explain «Why utility pleases», Hume finally deals with the topic of sympathy, at the end of the first part, in three paragraphs<sup>49</sup>. However, Beauchamp comments on the first, saying that the argument criticized here by Hume was used by Archibald Campbell and that Hutcheson had used similar arguments and examples to those of Hume. Personally, this makes me flinch, first because he mentions Campbell, who was ignored in the various critical editions of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* by Adam Smith<sup>50</sup>. I flinch again, because he exchanges the identical for similar, instead of the similar for identical, as Hume would want. For purposes of brevity, I will not discuss the second paragraph. But I am even more confused, because he does not warn the poor student that the third paragraph puts forward Hume's response to the objections of the first paragraph<sup>51</sup>. So, if Hume is not a madman, it was necessary to state that the objections in the first paragraph are Hutcheson's, not Hume's, and that in the third paragraph Hume's response is presented.

And if Beauchamp or the reader of this paper is not convinced, we go to the two paragraphs preceding the three mentioned. The first of these is an example of generosity towards the enemy

<sup>49</sup> HUME, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge, P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1975, pp. 217-218.

<sup>50</sup> Cf., for example, A. SMITH, *The Theory of Moral sentiments*, ed. by D. Raphael, A.L. Macfie in *The Glasgow Edition of the Works ... of Adam Smith*, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1976, vol. I, p. 14, note.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. first and third paragraph.

«passed at Athens, about two thousand years ago». The next one begins with a question in italics «*What is that to me?* There are few occasions when this question is not pertinent»<sup>52</sup>. Hume is literally summoning a passage of Hutcheson's *Inquiry on Virtue*: «What's HECUBA to us, or we to HECUBA?»<sup>53</sup>. So, in five paragraphs Hume's sympathy replaces Hutcheson's moral sense.

But the alleged impartiality of these texts is also present in the discussion by James Harris of Book III of the *Treatise*. Again, here the title is revealing of an interpretation: «Between Mandeville and Hutcheson: Artificial and Natural Virtues». If Mandeville remains an antidote to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, the account of morality is loose or at least disjointed. On page 124 it is suggested as a mere possibility that Hume's text contained initially only two parts, with the exception of the first part; only the title of the first section «Moral Distinction Not derived from Reason» is mentioned, but not the much more demanding one of the second «Moral distinction derived from a Moral Sense». However, Harris attributes to Hutcheson and not to Hume central claims of the section such as that quoted at page 124: «To have the sense of virtue, it is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind, from the contemplation of a character». And Harris even recognizes that Hume has “used Hutcheson's thesis as a way of organizing his thoughts on the question of the relationship between morals and human nature”.

Only on page 133 it is affirmed against Norton that Hume has never believed like Hutcheson that there is a faculty called moral sense, but Harris does not clarify the nature of moral sentiments. Hume's ethics through sympathy, which is a “morally neutral” principle, is capable of justifying moral judgments and behaviour without resorting to a moral sense, or even to peculiar moral sentiments. Yet at page 132 Harris argues that there are moral sentiments that are natural, “in the sense that they arise in us as a matter of untutored instinct”. Also, the idea that Hume adopted Hutchesonian-

<sup>52</sup> HUME, *Enquiries*, cit., p. 217.

<sup>53</sup> F. HUTCHESON, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises*, T. II, Sect. I (On Moral sense) art. II, London, Printed for Darby *et al.*, 1726, p. 122. It should be noted that Hutcheson also modified the text of the *Hamlet* («what's Hecuba to him and he to Hecuba» Act II, scene 2, v. 562). The quotation is significant, Hamlet wondered why, shortly before, the actor was so moved by Hecuba's pain, despite not having any connection of time or kinship with her.

ism to make the Mandevilleanism of Part II palatable for his audience is not convincing. Hutcheson was no doubt «an acute enough reader» to understand that he was used and then dismissed by Hume, a good reason to cultivate a deep resentment against Hume's candidature to the chair of moral philosophy and the idea that Hume could deny in Edinburgh what Hutcheson teaches at the University of Glasgow. Likewise, Harris claims that Hume does not change anything of his moral doctrine in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, but does not discuss the first appendix of the text and premises the *Dialogue with Palamedes* so as to render Hume's skeptical doubts inoffensive

Before concluding, I would like to mention what I think is Harris' intellectual biography greatest flaw: Hume's religious thought receives an entirely secondary attention. *The Natural History of Religion* and the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, almost relegated to the end of the biography, are illustrated with an eye to the number of their pages, not to their relevance. On the subject of Hume's candidature for the teaching post on morals at Edinburgh, and the *Letter from a Gentleman* to his friend in Edinburgh, I find Harris's theories completely paradoxical: «Hume was sincerely interested in the success of the moderating, rationalizing project that Leechman, Hutcheson and others were engaged in» but «His concern appeared too cerebral, too dispassionate, too philosophical»<sup>54</sup>. Wishart, too, «along with Hutcheson and Leechman» «did not have confidence in Hume's commitment to the ongoing struggle against the Calvinists»<sup>55</sup>. The paradox of the thesis is that Wishart (perhaps with Baxter) is allowed not only to put forward his own candidature, but also to draw as much antireligious poison as possible from the *Treatise*, distorting the text, that is committing the dirtiest trick possible for a religious person, all in the name of a sound rational and even Shaftesburian morality. But I will stop here, and will limit myself to directing the audience to Paul Russell's review of this volume<sup>56</sup>.

(Traduzione inglese di Isobel Tilley)

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<sup>54</sup> HARRIS, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, cit., pp. 205-206.

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> See HARRIS, *Hume: An intellectual Biography*, reviewed by P. Russell, Notre Dame electronical review (2016-06-26).