

**ADVICE CONCERNING NOTES ON TEXTS, WITH AN EXAMPLE**

**Christoph Fehige**  
**christoph.fehige@gmx.de**

**Revised version, from 10 October 2015**

**1. GENERAL REMARKS ABOUT NOTES ON TEXTS**

**2. EXAMPLE OF NOTES ON A TEXT**

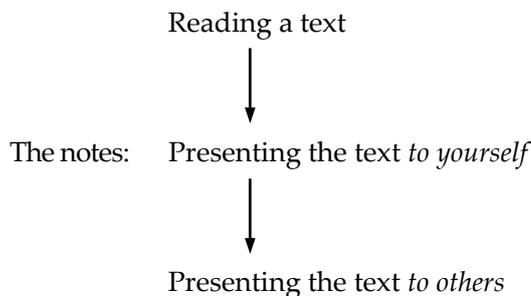
## 1. GENERAL REMARKS ABOUT NOTES ON TEXTS

### Why Make Notes on a Text?

Often you have to turn a text you read into something *for other people's eyes or ears*: an account (and perhaps also a critique) of the text on a hand-out or in a classroom discussion, classroom presentation, term paper, or thesis.

In most cases, that task is too complex to be performed competently in a single step. Many presentations suffer from the fact that the presenters have jumped from reading the text all the way to the attempt to »sell« the text to their audience, with too little effort in between to fix the text (its goals, structure, arguments) before their own mind's eye.

Notes on a text are the ideal intermediate step, which can make an immense difference. Here is the idea in a diagram:



It takes some time to make notes, but remember that most of it is simply the time it takes to genuinely *understand* the moves in the text. That is time you need to find anyway if you want to (appear to) know what you're talking about. The extra time spent on *writing down* for your own use what you understood is not that long. That small extra investment pays off amply in the next step (when you will consult your notes more often than the original text and will be much faster than you would be without those notes) and in the quality of the final product. Notes make the process easier and the result better. Notes help for all kinds of texts: old and new, historic and systematic.

### What Are Notes on a Text?

Your notes on a text are for your eyes only. They help you understand and remember important things in and about the text. They capture those things and arrange them ergonomically. The important things include: structure, arguments, key phrases *from the text*, as well as queries, objections, connections, examples, comparisons, ideas, ... *that are not in the text but come to your mind when reading it*.

## Some Advice on Producing Useful Notes

### The Content of the Notes

- ◆ Reproduce every kind of structure that you find in the text:
  - headings of all levels
  - numbering of paragraphs or sections or chapters or list entries
  - numbering of points in continuous prose  
(»a second objection runs as follows«, »there are three readings of this claim«, etc.)
  - dialectical levels  
(claim, objection to claim, response to objection to claim, etc.)
  - arguments  
(where does one argument end and another one start?)
  - parts of arguments or inferences  
(premiss 1 vs. premiss 2 vs. ... vs. conclusion)
- ◆ Reproduce the text's page numbers or paragraph numbers so that they meet the eye. That way, when you start using the notes and find something in them, it will only be a matter of seconds for you to find the corresponding passage in the text itself.
- ◆ Identify in your notes the version of the text (the edition) that you are using. If you are too lazy to do so in full bibliographical splendour, do it at least carefully enough for yourself to still understand it in a few years' time.
- ◆ It can sometimes be helpful to include material by other people. For example, if the editor of a classic text provides helpful summaries of the chapters, it may be helpful to include them.
- ◆ Permit yourself to put in extra headlines, preferably marked in some way – with square brackets [ ], for instance – that reminds you that they are yours and not the original author's.
- ◆ Jot down freely your own comments and ideas and questions. Put them in there as they come, raw and unfiltered. You can always ignore or improve them later.
- ◆ It is normally helpful to go the extra mile and add, after having produced the notes, some »larger« remarks to yourself: the objective of the text; the role of the text in a larger context; the main points, strengths, or weaknesses.

### The Form of the Notes

- ◆ Choose a lay-out that will make it easy and pleasant for you to scan the notes with your eyes. Mirror some of the structure of the text (a division into sections, for instance) in your lay-out.
- ◆ Use a salient way to distinguish things that come to your mind from things that are in the text; you could, for example, put your own stuff in comment balloons.
- ◆ Quote the author verbatim every now and then. There may be very good reasons to do so. You may run into sentences (or parts of sentences) that you already

suspect you might want to quote in your presentation or discussion. Or you may run into sentences that are so clear and succinct or sum up a point so well that paraphrasing them would only cost time without making things any clearer or shorter. Use quotation marks in your notes when you quote from the text. However, the notes won't be a helpful intermediate step to your own presentation if quoting is all (or most) of what it does; the notes should make some headway condensing and paraphrasing the text.

- ◆ Be a little more relaxed about some things (style, for instance) than you would be in a document that you produce for others. You are making those notes for yourself. They are backstage.

**1. GENERAL REMARKS ABOUT NOTES ON TEXTS**

**2. EXAMPLE OF NOTES ON A TEXT**

## NOTES ON DAVID HUME, *AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS*, APPENDIX 1

Edition of the *Enquiry*: Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp, Oxford 1998 (O.U.P.). The edition has its own numbering of paragraphs, starting anew from 1 in each »section«; numbers in the left column of this excerpt are those paragraph numbers (and not page numbers). *Enquiry* first publ. in 1751. Beauchamp's edition follows the editions from 1772 (last one supervised by Hume) and 1777 (posthumous, but with late changes by Hume).

### Appendix 1: Concerning Moral Sentiment

*Beauchamp's summary* (p. 239)

In Appendix 1 Hume returns to some themes he initiated in Section 1. He associates his views with the sentimentalists in opposition to the rationalists. He argues that reason (or the understanding) collects facts about a situation, investigates matters of truth, and points to the utilities that might be achieved, whereas sentiment sets our goals, moves us to action, and confers value. Moral approbation and blame are functions of sentiment. Hume offers five arguments (›considerations‹) against the rationalist view that reason is the source or foundation of morals. He is particularly concerned to criticize the thesis that the moral and immoral are to be found in moral relations that reason discovers.

During this analysis, Hume offers a formal definition of virtue: *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation*. He also proposes an aesthetic analogy: Moral beauty is discovered much in the way natural beauty is, namely, through a sentiment created in us by objects. It is true that beauty depends on proportions and relations in objects, but mere apprehension of proportions and relations by reason does not account for the perception of beauty.

The final paragraph contains a summary of the theses in this appendix: *Reason* conveys knowledge of truth and falsehood; *taste* imparts the sentiments associated with beauty, deformity, vice, and virtue. Taste is also a productive faculty; it gilds the objects we evaluate with ›colours‹ (properties such as virtue) that are taken from internal sentiment and projected onto the objects.

CF

My own preliminary assessment of this appendix: Certainly a clear *statement* of Hume's view of the roles of reason and sentiment. To what extent the text gives good *arguments* for that view is a separate question. Seems rich in premisses that might be questioned: reason concerned with beliefs only; beliefs can't trigger actions without desires; the desires that are required are or involve sentiments / affects. And Hume's claim that the genuinely moral process only begins when *all* the facts are on the table seems to exclude some versions of moral realism right from the start.

The role of this appendix in the *Enquiry*: a little ambiguous. On the one hand, it really is an appendix. Most of the *Enquiry* is about the connection between morality and utility, and not about »reason vs. sentiment«. On the other hand, the »reason vs. sentiment« issue dominates the introduction (= sect. 1) of the *Enquiry*, and the belief is expressed in that intro (§ 10) and in the appendix itself (§ 1) that the official main topic will enable us to solve the »reason vs. sentiment« controversy, which is (sect. 1, § 3) »worth examination«.

**[Introducing the Topic: The Role of Reason and Sentiment in Morals]**

- 1 Returning to the question raised in sect. 1: »how far either reason or sentiment enters into all decisions of praise or censure«. Should »now be easy«, given »the foregoing hypothesis«.

Commented [CF1]: Ask students: where in sect. 1?

Commented [CF2]: Why? What's the helpful impact of the »foregoing hypothesis« (which one?) on the issue »reasons vs. sentiments«? Notice § 4: clear from..., but even if false...

**[The Picture That Results from the »Preceding Hypothesis«]**

- 2 If moral praise is rooted, to some extent, in the usefulness of a quality or action, reason must enter in the sense that it instructs us about the (beneficial) tendencies of qualities and actions. Particularly difficult in the case of justice, where the consequences of the *general* rule have to be ascertained.
- 3 But reason not sufficient to produce moral blame or approbation. »It is requisite a *sentiment* should here display itself, in order to give a preference to the useful above the pernicious tendencies. This sentiment can be no other than a feeling for the happiness of mankind [...] [because that's what virtue promotes]. Here, therefore, *reason* instructs us in the several

Commented [CF3]: Link to sect. 3 («On Justice«): what is it about justice and generality that Hume refers to here and that was said there?

Commented [CF4]: Link to § 1

tendencies of actions, and *humanity* makes a distinction in favour of those, which are useful and beneficial.«

**[Independently of the »Preceding Hypothesis«: Five Arguments for the Claim that Reason Alone Won't Do]**

4 Even if the »preceding hypothesis« is false, there will be no satisfactory theory of morality »so long as we suppose reason to be the sole source of morality«. Five considerations will »prove« this.

5 **[Consideration 1: The claim that reason suffices cannot be spelt out (the example of ingratitude)]**

Claim about the monopoly of reason may have some appearance of truth as long as it is kept general and imprecise (and »employs comparisons, instead of instances«). But how about an example, like *ingratitude*? Anatomize all the facts that constitute ingratitude, and you will never find, by reason alone, in what consists the demerit or blame.

6 [Hume's premiss:] »Reason judges either of *matter of fact* or of *relations*.«

◆ Let's try facts first.

The fact here is *x's ill will or indifference*, but ill will or indifference are not always a crime, only in certain circumstances. Hume's story: a combinations of facts, being presented to the spectator, excites the *sentiment* of blame.

7 ◆ **Objection against Hume:** indeed, no particular fact does the work, but »*moral relations*«, discovered by reason (just like truths in geometry and algebra), do.

Hume: But which ones in the example? The relation of contrariety between the benefactor's good will and the ungrateful person's ill will? Can't be, because often contrariety is a good thing. (E.g., when I'm good to a guy who has not been good to me.)

8 The relation of equality in » $2 + 3 = 10/2$ « etc. is intelligible, but try to spell out the decisive »relations« in morals, and you'll see the falsehood of the relational theory for that domain.

9 Objector: We are talking about the relation of actions to the rule of right. Hume: But whence that rule? (The danger of circularity or a regress.)

Commented [CF5]: Ask students to come up with another such »argument« in no matter which area: one that employs comparisons instead of instances. It's hard to think of a case in which, although the comparison sounds plausible, no instance can be given. (Easier to find: overgeneralization; not *all* instances match.)

Commented [CF6]: Also discussed by Balguy, see *British Moralists*, §§ 456f.

Commented [CF7]: Discuss briefly the »either ... or...« structure here; cf. Hume's example of facts coming up in this para.

Commented [CF8]: Hume a bit fast here. Possibility of a non-feeling »seeing« of a fact of the form »this is bad« not even discussed.

Commented [CF9]: a »two steps in one« reproach, so to speak: Hume went not just from single facts to combos, but on to sentiments about combos.

10 Is all this metaphysics? Possibly, but all the *abstruseness* (and uninstantiability) lies on the opponent's side, not on Hume's. Hume's view very simple. Virtue defined as »whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation«.

The moral sciences try to find out general truths about such actions.

11 **[Consideration 2: The analogy to geometry is misleading: discovering an unknown fact (geometry) vs. judging when all the facts are on the table (morals)]**

The »extreme difference« between contemplating an action in order to assess it and contemplating a triangle in order to determine the proportion of its lines. In the second case, some unknown relation/fact is determined; in the first case, not. In moral deliberation, we assess when all the info about facts is in.

At that point, understanding and judgment are over, and the heart must take over: »active feeling or sentiment«.

12 That is also why a »mistake of *fact*« is usually not criminal, whereas a mistake »of *right*« is. When we detest Nero for killing Agrippina, »it is not, that we see any relations, of which he was ignorant«. Rather: »we feel sentiments, against which he was hardened«. »Nothing remains but to feel«.

13 **[Consideration 3: Analogy between moral and natural beauty]**

Compare the case of moral beauty to that of natural beauty, where things stand as follows: beauty *depends* on relations among the parts, but does not *consist* [either in them or] in perceiving them. Unlike in the sciences, in matters of taste, »all the relations are before-hand obvious to the eye; and we thence proceed to feel a sentiment of complacency or disgust«.

14 Euclid has explained all the qualities of the circle, but has not mentioned its beauty – because the beauty is not a quality of the circle. It is the effect of the circle on the mind (of a certain kind).

15 When Palladio et al. explain the parts of the pillar: beauty enters the stage only when the entire pillar is presented to a sensitive spectator. »From his sentiments alone arise its elegance and beauty.«

16 Similarly in morals, when Cicero paints the crimes of Verres or Catiline: without indignation or empathy, at what time does

**Commented [CF10]:** General definition of virtue. Very important. Compare to that of Hutcheson through the successive editions of his *Inquiry*. Hume's very similar to (one version of) Hutcheson's. Point out problems. (i) »a« spectator? (What if reactions differ: whose count, or how is the differing excluded? Cf. comment on § 14, 16) (ii) Suppose the action is artistic: couldn't the approbation be aesthetic rather than moral? (iii) approbation = ? And: a specifically *moral* approb.? (In which case the def. presupposes some notion of morality?)

**Commented [CF11]:** Examples of comparisons morality / geometry: Clarke, §§ 226, 233, 235, 238, 242, 247 in *British Moralists*; Balguy, § 451f. in *BM*, Locke § 189 in *BM* (but Locke is a somewhat different case).

**Commented [CF12]:** But is this an argument for Hume's position or just a restatement of it? His opponent might say that not all the facts are in, but only all the *natural* facts, and then there is an extra (»non-natural«?) fact to be seen, intuited, or whatever.

**Commented [CF13]:** meaning what? Cf. example in § 15.

**Commented [CF14]:** elaborate on that distinction: supervenience vs. identity vs. »analytical identity«

**Commented [CF15]:** Cf. § 10.

**Commented [CF16]:** Same two steps here as in § 6:(i) the whole, (ii) sentiments.

moral badness (the villainy) begin or cease to exist? It is »no particular fact or relation, which can be the object of the understanding: But arises entirely from the sentiment of disapprobation, which, by the structure of human nature, we unavoidably feel on the apprehension of barbarity or treachery.«

17 **[Consideration 4: If relations were all that matters, inanimate things could be objects of moral judgment]**

Since inanimate objects can stand to each other in the same relations as people (young tree over-topping and destroying the parent tree ~ Nero murdering Agrippina): if morality consisted merely in relations, inanimate objects could be as criminal as people.

18 **[Consideration 5: Since the ultimate ends of action can never be accounted for by reason, neither can virtue (which is such an end)]**

The ultimate ends of human actions can never »be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections [...], without any dependence on the intellectual faculties«. One example: exercise ⇨ health ⇨ avoiding pain; but no reason can be given why pain is hated.

19 Another example: exercise ⇨ health ⇨ profession ⇨ money ⇨ pleasure – at which point a further question would be absurd. Infinite regress impossible, and so: »Something must be desirable on its own account, and because of its immediate accord or agreement with human sentiment and affection.«

20 »Now as virtue is an end, and is desirable on its own account [...], merely for the immediate satisfaction which it conveys; it is requisite that there should be some sentiment, which it touches; some internal taste or feeling [...], which distinguishes good and evil, and which embraces the one and rejects the other.«

**[Summary]**

21 Reason: »conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood«: »discovers objects, as they really stand in nature«. Taste: gives the sentiment of beauty and virtue; »has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation. Reason, being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and

Commented [CF17]: Implies: (i) other entities might feel different; (ii) all humans feel the same; cf. comment on § 10.

Commented [CF18]: Remember the role this plays in Hutcheson's characterization of the moral sense (i.e., in his general def. of »sense«); also in Butler, *Dissertation* and elsewhere.

Commented [CF19]: What a bizarre argument. Does the younger tree *want* to kill the older? Does it have a *choice*? Mental facts and relations, too, are facts and relations. (If they are excluded from the realm of relations, the point against Hume can be made in terms of facts.)

Commented [CF20]: Ask students where cons. 5 ends.

Commented [CF21]: Okay, somehow the will must get going, but whence the premisses that (i) beliefs, by themselves, can't do it, and (ii) if something other than a belief does it, that other item has to be a sentiment or affection?

Commented [CF22]: Again, »desire« comes up quite fast, and so does the link to sentiment and affection.

Commented [CF23]: Is this an uncontroversial premiss?

Commented [CF24]: This is, by modern lights, a peculiar notion of »desirable on its own account«.

Commented [CF25]: Exercise: find for each statement in this summary a § in the text (of this appendix) that anticipates the statement fairly directly.

Commented [CF26]: famous wording; projection etc.

Commented [CF27]: notice contrast discovering (a few lines earlier) / creating.

directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of happiness and attaining happiness«. »Taste [...] becomes a motive to action«. »After all circumstances and relations are laid before us, the latter makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation.«