
*The Publick Good, and the Reader's Benefit: the
text of the Select Discourses*

Though some there are that in publishing the posthumous works of others, make too much hast, as consulting with their own ease, and because they would decline any labours that may seem tedious to them: yet I dare not be so slight and superficial in what I undertake for the publick good; I think, I can never do too much, nor do it too well.

John Worthington.¹

John Worthington's first edition of the *Select Discourses* appeared in London some eight years after their author's death. It contained, besides the ten discourses, a prefatory address by Worthington and the funeral sermon preached by Simon Patrick for Smith. As the only edition to be prepared from Smith's manuscripts, the first edition has an obvious claim to be the most authoritative text of everything that has survived of Smith's work.² The claim is only enhanced by Worthington's reputation for careful editorship, also evinced by his edition of Mede's *Works*³. However, the precise extent of the authority of the 1660 edition deserves examination, particularly since this new edition presents a text which differs significantly from all the previous editions.

¹Letter to Dr. Ingelo, dated 4th June, 1670 in Crossley, *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, pp. 388-9.

²That "Latine Discourse, shortly to be printed", *Pietati studere ex intuitu mercedis non est illicitum*, mentioned by Worthington John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.411 has vanished without trace.

³Mede, *Works*.

After his death, Smith's papers passed into the hands of his executor, Samuel Cradock, who entrusted John Worthington with the task of preparing them for publication. It is worth quoting extensively from Worthington's account of the process, about which he was remarkably frank in his address "To the Reader". In the first instance, he had to review the "loose and scattered" papers, "not being written by the Author in any Book", in order to "collect such as were Homogeneous and related to the same Discourse."⁴ Clearly, Worthington received an almost chaotic mass of papers, which needed to be re-ordered. His intervention was not, however, limited to rediscovering the correct order of the papers, as he makes clear. It also required him, as he saw it, "to observe where any additional Matter was to be inserted":

for the Author, whose Mind was a rich & fruitful soil, a bountiful & ever-bubbling Fountain, sometimes would superadde upon further thoughts some other Considerations to what he had formerly delivered in publick; and this he would doe sometimes after he had gone off from that Argument, and though Matter of a different nature had come between.⁵

It is clear, therefore, that Worthington re-organised at least some of the discourses internally, incorporating material not included in the original text as "formerly delivered in publick".⁶ Precisely what form these additions took is we can only conjecture, though some may be represented by Worthington's "appendices", but Worthington's editorial responsibility for the final text is certainly very wide-ranging, and included deciding whether or not to add later, possibly quite separate, material to the original discourses.

Having established to his own satisfaction that he had "brought" both the "severed Parts" and the "additional Considerations" to "their due and proper places where the Author himself would have disposed them, if he had transcribed his Papers",⁷ Worthington then set about the "fair transcribing of the Papers", a very substantial task for which he needed "more Hands and Eyes" than his own. With the "assistance of some Friends to

⁴ John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.iii

⁵ John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.iii.

⁶ John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.iii.

⁷ John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.iv.

whom the memory of the Author was very pretious”, including Ralph Cudworth, Worthington also looked to the “material Quotations” in the text. These, he says, were “examin’d”, presumably to confirm the accuracy, at least, of the “many and weighty testimonies”.⁸ Although he saw “less need of being sollicitous” about the “short Allusions and Expressions borrowed out of ancient Authors”, the “wearisome” labour of Worthington and his team in checking the substantial quotations was, he thought, “not unnecessary or in vain”. The work involved in identifying quotations “where the Authors, or the places in the Authors, were not mention’d” must have been time-consuming. Samuel Hartlib, writing to Worthington on 13th February 1659/60, described his labours as “Herculean” when he congratulated him on their completion.⁹

Worthington’s concern with the quotations was not, however, limited to their accuracy. The original audience of most of the discourses, “in the College-Chappel”, did not require the “Condescensions” which he thought were “requisite in the publishing of these Papers for the benefit of some Readers.” The “condescensions” involved providing English translations of the Latin, Hebrew and Greek quotations in the text, except where “the substance and main importance of the Quotations” was “insinuated in the neighbouring words”.¹⁰ Smith, himself, Worthington says, “seldom translated the Hebrew, and more seldom the Greek, but into Latine”, a language with which the original audience was familiar. Worthington, it would seem, felt obliged to insert his own translations, or perhaps those of his team, into Smith’s original text, sometimes, apparently, in place of Smith’s Latin versions, but elsewhere also.

Worthington also made another very radical revision to the text he received. The papers were “written in the Author’s own Copy without any Distinction or Sections”: they were, he says, “*uno tenore & continua serie*”.¹¹ This was the case, he tells us, “especially” for “those that contain’d the Six first Discourses”. Worthington deemed it “expedient for the Reader’s accommodation” to “distinguish them into several Discourses or Treatises”, each with its own title page, and to divide the longer discourses into “Chapters and Sections”. He also felt that it was neces-

⁸ John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p. iv.

⁹ Letter dated 13th February 1659/60 in Crossley, *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, p. 181.

¹⁰ John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p. v.

¹¹ John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p. v

sary to provide accounts of the “Chief matters therein contained”, so that the reader “might have a clearer and fuller view ... of the Contexture of the whole, and the Coherence of the several Parts of the respective Discourses”.¹² In short, he provided the fundamental structure of the text as it has been published ever since, with its title pages, divisions and synopses.

Worthington’s first edition appeared in February 1659-60, printed by James Flesher. Hartlib congratulated him on “the most accurate & elegant publishing of so excellent a work”; those to whom he showed it, he wrote, admired the “publisher” as much as the “author”.¹³ Crossley saw the creation of the text as Worthington published it, from “a mere chaos of dissevered fragments”, as a “model of editorial care and skill”.¹⁴ To fully understand the status of the text, however, we must recognise that Worthington’s interventions amounted to a very substantial recreation of Smith’s discourses.

The second edition, “corrected”, was printed in 1673 by John Hayes.¹⁵ Substantially, it is the text of 1660 with minor emendations, including the errata noted at the end of the volume.

The structure which Worthington provided was retained in the other three editions which have appeared since 1673. In 1756 Lord Hailes published an “abridgement” of the original text, omitting Worthington’s Sixth Discourse and the eighth chapter of his Fourth Discourse on the grounds that they do “not properly relate to Christian practice”. Hailes also chose to move the “original passages” of Smith’s quotations to the footnotes, to “correct” what seemed to him “various inaccuracies of style”, and to “soften” what he regarded as harsh expressions.¹⁶ The “inaccuracies of style” which he amended included replacing language which he thought obscure (so, “prolepses” became “pre-established opinions”, “pandects” became “systems”, for example), and removing many of Smith’s doublets (so, “Art & Science” became “science”, “*Prolepsis* and Fundamental principle” became “fundamental principle”, and so on). By doing so, he set a

¹²John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.v

¹³Letter dated 22nd February 1659/60 in Crossley, *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, pp.188-9

¹⁴Crossley, *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, p.iv.

¹⁵John Smith, *Select Discourses*

¹⁶John Smith, *Select Discourses, Preface*, v

precedent which Smith's other editors have felt licensed to follow.¹⁷

The edition of 1821 advertised itself as the "Third Edition, carefully corrected" and claimed that "no alterations whatever have been made, farther than correcting the typographical errors with which [Worthington's editions] both abounded, and which were too palpable to be passed over."¹⁸ In actuality, the editor felt at liberty, like Lord Hailes, to move quotations into footnotes, to edit Smith's phrasing for smoothness and familiarity, to remove capitalisations and italics, to modernise spellings and abbreviations, and to impose a much heavier punctuation on the text. Indeed, the unacknowledged source of many of his verbal substitutions is Lord Hailes' 1756 abridgement. so, "tumble it down" is emended to "precipitate", and "flat and dull" to "inanimated". "Pacate", an important epithet for Smith, is rendered by "composed", and "inscribe them one in another" becomes "blend them together". "Worser" becomes "baser", "more large" is replaced by "more extensive", and "pressly" by "expressly". The text is better described as one that is loosely based on the 1673 edition.

In 1859 appeared the fourth edition by H. G. Williams, often regarded as the best edition to date. Williams claimed to have based his text on the 1660 edition, compared with that of 1821, and explained that "the first edition of the Discourses abounds in errors, and of these scarcely one had been corrected by subsequent editors".¹⁹ Smith's references were, he says, "carefully examined and in several instances assigned to the right authors in place of others to whom they had been incorrectly attributed".²⁰ The considerable labour of "tracing and correcting" quotations was performed by J.B.S. Williams.²¹ However, the heavy hand of Victorian editorial practice lies upon this text, too. Williams almost always prefers the "corrections" (in both wording and punctuation) of the 1821

¹⁷The excerpts which appeared in Volume 11 of John Wesley's influential *A Christian Library: Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity in the English Tongue* (1749-55) are not of textual significance (Wesley, *A Christian Library: Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgments of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity*: Wesley also felt entitled to adapt Smith's text freely. (For a survey of his practice with regard to the Cambridge Platonists, see English, "The Cambridge Platonists in Wesley's 'Christian Library'".) Nor is the abridgement made by John King, published by Hatchard in 1820. John Smith, *Select Discourses*.

¹⁸John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.5.

¹⁹John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.iii.

²⁰John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.iii

²¹John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.iii

edition to Worthington's text, as well as introducing more of his own, and punctuates even more heavily. He also feels at liberty to re-write sentences which offend his sense of propriety and to excise vocabulary of which he disapproves. He regularly edits sentences to avoid final prepositions, replaces obscure and unusual words, and eliminates wording or constructions which he perhaps regarded as insufficiently formal. So, for example, "wight" is emended to "being" (from 1821), "embases" is changed to "debases" (as in 1821), "ansa" becomes "method", "degurgitate" becomes "pour out" (as in 1821), "Sophies" becomes "philosophers", and "niggardise" is simply written out (as it was in 1821). "Quitting himself" is re-written as "getting rid". "Catching after" becomes "aspiring after" (from 1821), "pursues" becomes "proposes" (from 1821), "minding of" becomes "attention to", "insinuated" is replaced by "implied". Williams tends also to prefer the abstract to the specific: where Smith speaks of "the crack'd glasses of our Reasons", Williams emends it to "our distorted reasons"; "spending upon their own stock" becomes "acting of themselves". "Ingenuous" is regularly changed to "ingenious", regardless of meaning. "And therefore" is almost always "And, therefore,". The frequent use of a dash to introduce quotations, in particular, has even more unfortunate consequences for the rhythm of Smith's prose than the intrusive punctuation of 1821. It almost always sacrifices the spoken rhythm to a crude visual sign. Williams also silently amends Smith's quotations to conform to Victorian editions of the texts, regardless of seventeenth century readings.

For the modern reader, then, no edition of the *Select Discourses* comes closer to Smith's prose than those of John Worthington. His later editors have all imposed upon Smith's writing their own ideas of "correctness" and "smoothness", to the detriment of the sense and rhythm of his words. H.G. Williams, in particular, seems not to have appreciated that a seventeenth century oral discourse can be harmed by the institutional punctuation and expressions thought appropriate to a formal, written text in the nineteenth century. His edition is a further step away from the original.

This edition provides a text based on that of Worthington's 1673 edition, which incorporates his corrections of the typographical errors in that of 1660.²² However, it takes the view that Smith's text is best represen-

²²The differences between the two are, indeed, slight, often only representing the preferences of the typesetters.

ted, so far as is possible, *uno tenore & continua serie*, as he wrote it. The first six of the traditional discourses are therefore presented as a whole, consisting as they do of his addresses as Dean and Catechist in 1650-51. They are followed by a “Chappel-Exercise”²³; a part of an “Account of the *False Grounds* upon which Men are apt vainly to *conceit* themselves to be *Righteous*”, perhaps also a chapel-exercise; a discourse on “The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion”; and a sermon preached at Huntingdon. For ease of cross-reference to other editions, however, Worthington’s breaks in the text are indicated by numerals in bold. From the other discourses, the chapter divisions imposed by Worthington have been removed. The whole of Worthington’s formal apparatus of title pages, summaries and epigraphs has also been excised. We cannot, of course, even hope to return to anything approaching the original text, whatever that may have been. We can, however, strip the text of the most obtrusive later additions, and retain the orthography, punctuation and emphases of Worthington’s texts, much of which serves to point stylistic elements obscured by later editors.

The annotation identifies, so far as has proved possible, the sources of Smith’s quotations and allusions, building on (and occasionally correcting) previous editions, but without altering Smith’s text. Generally, a translation has been given in the annotation, so that the reader without a knowledge of Greek, Latin or Hebrew is able to follow the text as fully as possible. Where modern texts differ from those cited by Smith, the original has been retained, regardless of errors or divergences. Since few readers to day are as familiar with the 1611 Bible as Smith was, his citations and allusions are accompanied by the relevant text, even at the risk of redundancy. The notes also explain or illustrate the more difficult terminology and provide some contextual references for Smith’s writings. To permit the reader to reconstruct something of Worthington’s elaborate editing, his title pages are reproduced in an appendix.

²³John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p.280.