

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas – Fafich
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia

PEDRO VIANNA DA COSTA E FARIA

**THE RELATION BETWEEN DAVID HUME’S *ENQUIRY*
CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS AND THE POLITICAL
DISCOURSES**

Dissertação de mestrado apresentada ao Programa de
Pós-Graduação em Filosofia da Universidade Federal de
Minas Gerais.

Orientadora: Prof^ª Dr^ª Livia Mara Guimarães

Belo Horizonte

2017

100

F224r

Faria, Pedro Vianna da Costa e

2017

The relation between David Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and the *Political Discourses* [manuscrito] / Pedro Vianna da Costa e Faria. - 2017.

159f.

Orientadora: Livia Mara Guimarães.

Dissertação (mestrado) - Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas.

Inclui bibliografia.

1. Filosofia – Teses. 2. Hume, David, 1711-1776. 3. Ética - Teses. 4. Economia – Teses. 5. História – Teses. I. Guimarães, Livia Mara. II. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas. III. Título.



UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS

PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM FILOSOFIA



FOLHA DE APROVAÇÃO

The relation between David Hume's Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals and the Political Discourses

PEDRO VIANNA DA COSTA E FARIA

Dissertação submetida à Banca Examinadora designada pelo Colegiado do Programa de Pós-Graduação em FILOSOFIA, como requisito para obtenção do grau de Mestre em FILOSOFIA, área de concentração FILOSOFIA, linha de pesquisa Filosofia Moderna.

Aprovada em 23 de junho de 2017, pela banca constituída pelos membros:

Prof. Livia Mara Guimaraes - Orientadora
UFMG

Prof. Helton Machado Adverse
UFMG

Prof. Hugo Eduardo Araujo da Gama Cerqueira
UFMG

Belo Horizonte, 23 de junho de 2017.

Para a Bandorgânica

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Agradeço aos meus pais, por todo o suporte emocional e financeiro sem o qual essa dissertação não existiria. Nesses tempos bárbaros em que perseguir uma vida acadêmica está cada vez mais longe daquilo que os escoceses diriam ser meu “interesse”, o apoio incondicional que recebo deles é tão essencial quanto é, nesse sentido, imprudente.

Agradeço à Professora Livia e a todos os membros do Grupo Hume, pelo papel que têm e tiveram na minha formação como pesquisador do Iluminismo Escocês, pelas críticas e comentários aos meus textos, pelas discussões e pela companhia nos quase quatro anos desde que entrei numa palestra da Hume Society segurando a segunda *Investigação* e vestindo uma camisa do Atlético.

Agradeço a Henrique Viana, Hugo Arruda, Ana Paula Londe, Marina Costa Val, Marcos Gustavo e a muitas outras pessoas que ouviram e discutiram pacientemente as minhas ideias – sobre método, Ernst Bloch, história do pensamento econômico, MacIntyre, risotos de feijão, Hegel (quem nunca?) – que, por motivos mais ou menos óbvios, não estão escritas na dissertação, mas que são tão importantes quanto as que acabaram no texto.

Agradeço à Bandorgânica pelos sentimentos – cantados, recitados, imaginados – que também não estão escritos na dissertação, mas que são tão ou mais importantes quanto (e fundamentais para) o que acabou escrito aqui. Parafraseando Drika Barbosa, se os outros são de tirar o chapéu, vocês são de arrancar a cabeça.

Agradeço aos professores Helton Adverse e Hugo Cerqueira por aceitarem participar da banca examinadora dessa dissertação.

Agradeço aos funcionários e professores do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia, em especial ao Secretário do Programa, André Carneiro, pelo apoio administrativo, pela convivência e por tudo o que aprendi sobre a vida universitária nesse período.

This thesis was funded by a M.A. scholarship from the National Research Council (CNPq). I received further support from the Graduate Program of Philosophy at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (PPG-Fil, UFMG), the Fleishacker Foundation (San Francisco-CA) and my parents for presentations of the partial results of the thesis at academic events during the last two and a half years. Besides those whose support I acknowledge in Portuguese above, I would also like to thank Profs. Jacqueline Taylor and Maria Pia Paganelli for all the support they have given me.

“History, they supposed, very much in the modern view, must be taken as it comes.”

John Dunn, *Wealth and Virtue*, ch. 5.

RESUMO

A presente dissertação analisa a relação entre a *Investigação sobre os Princípios da Moral* (1751) e os *Discursos Políticos* (1752) de David Hume (1711-1776). Em seus três capítulos, argumento que a relação entre essas duas obras reflete uma preocupação com a necessidade de se explicar a diversidade de formas históricas de organização social – suas práticas e instituições econômicas, políticas e sociais entendidas como parte dos “costumes” (*manners*) ou do “espírito da época” – e suas consequências sobre a prática moral. Mais precisamente, a dissertação propõe uma leitura da *Investigação* como um trabalho aberto, isto é, que investiga os fundamentos da moralidade, ou o que é o sentimento moral, por meio do estudo das práticas morais históricas, mas que admite que nem todas elas permitem que o sentimento moral prospere igualmente; as práticas e instituições econômicas, políticas e sociais de cada sociedade conformam sua prática moral, o sentimento que prevalece nela e as qualidades que são valorizadas ou desvalorizadas. Nesse sentido, a preferência por uma ou outra prática moral histórica – ou, em termos de suas consequências práticas presentes, a decisão entre emular práticas passadas ou defender a prática presente – depende do estudo das práticas e instituições que são parte dos costumes de cada sociedade, pois só assim o filósofo moral poderá concluir se o sentimento moral prosperará ou não nas circunstâncias existentes. Argumento também que os *Discursos Políticos* proveem o tipo de abordagem histórica da relação entre práticas e instituições econômicas, políticas e sociais e as práticas morais que complementam a filosofia moral da *Investigação*, discutindo como se estabeleceu essa relação em sociedades agrárias (clássicas e feudais) e em sociedades comerciais modernas, dessa forma respondendo em que circunstâncias históricas o sentimento moral prosperou. Concluo afirmando que a abordagem histórica da *Investigação* e dos *Discursos Políticos* formam a base da defesa das sociedades comerciais modernas feita por Hume contra as críticas de pensadores que buscavam um retorno à forma clássica de organização moral, social, política e econômica.

Palavras-chave: David Hume, filosofia moral, economia política, história

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the relation between David Hume's (1711-1776) *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) and the *Political Discourses* (1752). In its three chapters, I argue that the relation between these works reflect a concern with the necessity of understanding the diversity of historical forms of social organization – their economic, political and social institutions and practices, understood as part of the “manners” or “spirit of the age” – and their consequences on moral practice. More precisely, this thesis provides an interpretation of the *Enquiry* as an “open-ended” work, that is, as a work that discovers the foundations of morality (*i.e.* what the moral sentiment is) through the study of historical moral practices, but that admits that different moral practices do not make this sentiment flourish equally; each society's economic, political and social practices and institutions shape its moral practice, the sentiment that predominates in its moral distinctions, and the personal qualities that are approved or disapproved of. In this sense, the preference for one or another historical moral practice – or in terms of its present practical consequences, the decision to emulate a past moral practice or to defend one's present practice – depends on the study of the practices and institutions that are part of the manners of each society, so that the moral philosopher can discover whether the moral sentiment can flourish or not under those circumstances. I argue that the *Political Discourses* provide the kind of historical approach to the relation between political, economic and social practices and institutions and the moral practices that the moral philosophy of the *Enquiry* calls for, discussing how that relation existed in agrarian (feudal and ancient) and modern commercial societies, thus answering in what historical circumstances the moral sentiment flourished. I conclude that the historical approach of the *Enquiry* and *Political Discourses* forms the basis for Hume's defense of modern commercial societies against the critiques made by thinkers who wished to return to a classical form of moral, social, political and economic organization.

Keywords: David Hume, moral philosophy, political economy, history

SUMMARY

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 – The sentiment of humanity and History in the second <i>Enquiry</i>	6
1.1 – The establishment and approbation of justice in the <i>Treatise</i>	10
1.2 – Benevolence and justice in the second <i>Enquiry</i>	16
1.3 – The sentiment of humanity and moral discourse.....	30
1.4 – History and cultural diversity in the second <i>Enquiry</i>	50
1.5 – Conclusion.....	60
Chapter 2 – The <i>Political Discourses</i> and the rise of humanity.....	64
2.1 – Ahistoricity and the economic content of the <i>Treatise</i>	67
2.2 – Luxury and productivity: the transition from agrarian to commercial societies.....	76
2.3 – The mechanics of the transition to commercial society: love of gain and desire for action.....	85
2.4 – The moral and political consequences of the transition.....	95
2.5 – Conclusion.....	108
Chapter 3 – History, commerce and the sentiment of humanity.....	112
3.1 – Commerce and the sentiment of humanity in a historical perspective.....	113
3.2 – The limits of Hume’s historicity.....	124
3.3 – Conclusion.....	137
Final remarks.....	142
References.....	145

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A Treatise on Human Nature (Hume, 2007)

Citations from the *Treatise* are noted by “T Book.Part.Section.Paragraph” according to the Oxford Clarendon edition.

Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (Hume, 1998)

Citations from the second *Enquiry* will be noted by “EPM Section.Paragraph” according to the Oxford Clarendon edition.

Essays Moral, Political, and Literary (Hume, 1985)

Citations from the *Essays* are noted by “E” followed by the page number according to the Liberty Fund edition. Essay titles may be shortened according to the following acronyms:

E-MOL	“My Own Life”
E-RPAS	“Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences”
E-Co	“Of Commerce”
E-RA	“Of Refinement in the Arts”
E-PAN	“Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations”

The Letters of David Hume (Hume, 1932)

Citations from the *Letters* are noted by HL followed by volume and letter number.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyzes the relation between David Hume's (1711-1776) *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) and the *Political Discourses* (1752). In its three chapters, I argue that the relation between these works reflect a concern with the necessity of understanding the diversity of forms of social organization – their economic, political and social institutions and practices, understood as part of the “manners” or “spirit” of the age – and their consequences on moral practice. More precisely, this thesis provides an interpretation of the EPM as an “open-ended” work, that is, as a work that discovers the foundations of morality, *i.e.* what the moral sentiment is, through the study of historical moral practices, but admits that different moral practices do not make this sentiment flourish equally; each society's economic, political and social practices and institutions shape its moral practice, the sentiment that predominates in its moral distinctions, and the personal qualities that are approved or disapproved of. In this sense, the preference for one or another historical moral practice – or in terms of its present practical consequences, the decision to emulate a past moral practice or to defend one's present practice – depends on the study of the practices and institutions that are part of the manners of each society, so that the moral philosopher can discover whether the moral sentiment can flourish or not under those circumstances. The *Political Discourses*, written in the same period of the EPM, contain an extensive comparison of agrarian (ancient and feudal) and modern commercial societies that can be interpreted as providing the kind of historical approach that answers the question left open in the EPM, thus answering the question of whether modern European societies should embrace the changes they were undergoing in the couple of centuries preceding the publication of the two works analyzed here or emulate past, chiefly ancient Greek and Roman, societies.

Although this is not a thesis about David Hume's intellectual biography, recent efforts in this direction can help throw light at the reason the EPM and the *Political Discourses* are works concerned with historical diversity and the necessity of account for it philosophically. Baumstark (2008, ch. 1-3) provides an updated biographical account of the period in which Hume wrote the EPM and the *Political Discourses*. He highlights three developments in Hume's life during the period 1748-1752 that influenced those writings: the trip to Europe in 1748, the publication of Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Loix*, and the reading of classic books he did when he returned to his family home in Ninewells in 1749.

In 1748, Hume received an invitation from Lieutenant-General James St. Clair to join a military embassy to Vienna and Turin. Hume wrote to James Oswald of Dunnikier that the trip would allow him to acquire “some greater experience of the Operations of the Field, & the Intrigues of the Cabinet” which would be requisite for his “intention, in riper years, of composing some History” (HL I:61). While it may have made him more experienced about military operations and court politics, what seems to have caught his attention was the political and natural landscapes he observed. He wrote a “Journal of our Travels” to his brother, John Home of Ninewells, which begins with his arrival in the continent in the Netherlands and ends with his arrival in Turin. The journal provides a variety of observations about the clothing and appearance of the people, the amusements in the courts, the palaces, and political relations. However, the most relevant observations to the present purposes are those made after he left Vienna: in passing through the neighboring regions of Styria and Tyrol, he noticed that the inhabitants of the former were “savage & deform’d & monstrous in their Appearance”, the “general Aspect of the People is the most shocking I ever saw”, “Their Dress is scarce European as their figure is scarce Human” (HL I:64, 130), while in the latter “The Inhabitants are there as remarkably beautiful as the Stirians are ugly. An Air of Humanity, & Spirit & Health & Plenty is seen in every Face[.] Yet their Country is wilder than Stiria” (HL I:64). These regions “wou’d puzzle a Naturalist or Politician to find the Reason of so great and remarkable a Difference”: the naturalist – who, as Hume had put in “Of National Characters”, believed that the air and the climate “work insensibly on the temper, by altering the tone and habit of the body, and [give] a particular complexion” (E 198) – would find it difficult to explain how the wilder Tyrol could afford its inhabitants a better quality of life and appearance than the more abundant Styria; the Politician – who believed the form of government was the most important cause of a people’s manners – would find it hard to explain how those two regions, ruled by the same government, could differ so strongly. As Baumstark (2008, p. 39) puts it, Hume is here rejecting “monocausal” explanations of social phenomena: neither natural causes, as Hume had already argued in “Of National Characters”, published in 1748, but likely written before he left for the continent¹, nor political causes could, by themselves, explain the different characters of each people. The “national character” or the “manners” of a nation had to be studied taking into

¹ Cf. Baumstark (2008, pp. 41-48) for a discussion of the dating of this essay. He argues plausibly that it was not written after Hume’s departure to the continent, even if the *Three Essays, Moral and Political*, which contained the essay, was published after Hume left Britain. If this dating is accurate, this essay was not written in response to the alleged climate determinism of Montesquieu’s book, but rather in response to previous works sponsoring this view.

account the complex interactions among the different institutions and practices of the many spheres of life of a society (politics, economic reproduction, sociability, morality, natural circumstances).

While Hume was still in Europe in 1748, Montesquieu published *De l'Esprit des Lois* in Geneva. Hume managed to find a copy and read the work in Italy (HL I:65), sending a letter with comments in the following year, when he returned to Ninewells (HL I:65, see also I:85). The book would become one of the most influential works among the generation of men of letters that made Scotland one of the intellectual powerhouses of Europe in the following quarter of century (to the point of boosting Montesquieu's wine sales in Scotland²). Its *pièce de résistance* among Scottish writers was the "anthropological-cultural analysis of politics" (Oz-Salzberger, 2003, p. 170), which could be summarized in the centrality of the concepts of "spirit of the laws" and "general spirit", that is, the idea that a society's laws are (and ought to be) related to natural as well as historical circumstances it finds itself in. Hume was not among the most enthusiastic adepts of Montesquieu's doctrines in Scotland, but the latter's "sophisticated historicism" (Harris, 2015, p. 252) seems to have left a mark on his writings of this period onwards, especially when contrasted with the *Treatise*: as I discuss in the first section of chapters one and two, both the EPM and the *Political Discourses* contrast with the *Treatise* in their concern with the study of actual, historical societies, rather than with introspection and reflections on one's mental experience.

Besides Hume's trip to the continent and the publication of *De l'Esprit Des Lois*, Baumstark (2010) draws attention to the extensive reading about the classical period Hume did after his return to Ninewells in 1749. Despite its original intention to be a supply of cultural, political, and economic information about ancient societies needed for the learned essay "Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations", the knowledge he amassed with those readings found its way into all the works Hume wrote in the period. The numerous references to classical history in those works amount to what Baumstark (2010, pp. 72-73) calls "fragments of a coherent whole, a comprehensive survey of classical civilisations encompassing politics, society and culture as well as moral and religious beliefs". This "fragmentary history" of classical antiquity was essential in the EPM to make the reader aware of the otherness of the societies they would most naturally consider as their own historical backgrounds; in the *Political Discourses*, the fragments are woven in an extensive comparison between classical

² Cf Baumstark (2008, p. 49, n. 106).

antiquity (sometimes put together with feudal societies due to their agrarian organization) and modern commercial Europe.

The three aspects of the historical context of the publication of the EPM and the *Political Discourses* highlighted here point to Hume's increased concern with historical diversity and how to make sense of it. Indeed, this thesis aims to be a small part of a yet needed *history* of the use and role of history and historical diversity in Hume's works. As the brief comparisons with the *Treatise* suggest, these aspects of Hume's thought seem to have changed over time in interaction with other historical events happening around him, influencing other thinkers' ideas and being influenced by them and by the political and economic events of his time.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. It provides an interpretation of the EPM that emphasizes how it ends with a call for the support of the historian and the social theorist (or what Hume would most likely call the "politician" or "political writer"). After a brief section discussing moral evaluation in the *Treatise*, the chapter begins with the social virtues of justice and benevolence, showing that Hume's choice of how to approach them emphasizes their relation to their historical context. Then it looks at the moral sentiment and how it emerges from social interaction and conversation among the moral agents of a community. The chapter ends with an account of the openness to history of the EPM. The second chapter is devoted to an analysis of the *Political Discourses* centered on the comparison between agrarian and commercial societies and on the transition from the former to the latter. It also begins with a brief discussion of the economic content of the *Treatise* that serves as a means to highlight the particularities of the *Discourses*. It then presents the account of how the agrarian societies of Europe became commercial societies in the modern period. Afterwards, it looks at the same historical development from the perspective of some key passions in Hume's historical analysis. In the final section, I discuss the moral and political implications of the comparison between agrarian and commercial societies. The third and final chapter puts together the interpretations of the EPM and of the *Political Discourses* provided in the first two chapters. It begins by establishing the relation between the moral sentiment, the sentiment of humanity, to the practices and institutions of modern European commercial societies. In the second section, I discuss historicity and the role of history in the two works analyzed in this thesis, showing its relevance as well as its limits in the path that leads to Hume's conclusion that modern commercial

societies had manners that ought to be defended against attempts to emulate ancient societies in the eighteenth-century.

CHAPTER 1 – THE SENTIMENT OF HUMANITY AND HISTORY IN THE SECOND *ENQUIRY*

INTRODUCTION

Hume concluded the third book of his *Treatise of Human Nature* recognizing it as the work of an anatomist, that is, someone occupied with “accurate dissections and portraitures of the smaller parts of the human body”, whose pictures of the human frame may contain “even something hideous, or at least minute in the views of things” (T 3.3.6.6). The anatomist’s rather ungraceful pictures of the human frame should not, he advises, emulate the painter’s figures’ “graceful and engaging attitude or expression”, since her purpose is not to engage her readers, but to supply the painter with “an exact knowledge of the parts, their situation and connexion, before we can design with any elegance and correctness” (T 3.3.6.6). In the same fashion, Hume’s “abstract speculations concerning human nature” were meant to serve practical morality, making “this latter science more correct in its precepts, and more pervasive in its exhortations”, rather than to do it itself. This was perceived by Francis Hutcheson, who pointed out after reading the manuscript of the third book of the *Treatise* that it lacked “Warmth in the Cause of Virtue”³ (HL 1:32). In his reply to Hutcheson, Hume reaffirms that he intended to be a metaphysician rather than a moralist in the *Treatise* and says that he “cannot easily conceive these two Characters [the moralist and the metaphysician] in the same Work”, but admits that he “intend[s] to make a new Tryal, if it be possible to make the Moralist & Metaphysician agree a little better” (HL 1:33).

Hume never returned to the *Treatise*, but he did “cast anew” (E-MOL xxxv) each of its books. The third book was recast as the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (EPM), published in 1751, which he considered as “incomparably the best” of his writings (E-MOL xxxvi). As Kate Abramson observes (2001, p. 58), Hume scholars usually consider the exchange between Hume and Hutcheson as a matter of style rather than of content, thus holding a position which predominated throughout most of the twentieth-century, that Hume’s most important philosophical arguments are found in the *Treatise* and that the *Enquiries* and the *Dissertation on the Passions* present approximately the same argument, this time recast in a

³ Hutcheson’s comments have been lost , what we can only infer from Hume’s answers what his comments might have been.

literary form adequate for a wider audience⁴. Abramson herself, even though she treats the “warmth of virtue” discussion as a matter of doctrine rather than style (2001, p. 60), that is, as a discussion about the role of the moral philosopher in society, concludes that indeed most changes Hume made in the transition from the *Treatise* to the EPM can be understood as reactions to Hume’s position regarding his role as a philosopher and what this meant to his engagement with readers: the EPM would be a work of “philosophical painting”, an attempt to deliver the minuteness of the anatomist without lacking the warmth of the painter necessary to inspire its readers to live a virtuous life (cf. Abramson, 2001, pp. 78-79).

While the discussion about the relation between the expected readership of the EPM and the changes in style (or of doctrine, if one considers the choice of audience and of a style appropriate to it a matter of doctrine) are certainly relevant, keeping to the painter-anatomist distinction seems to do a disservice to the singularity and complexity of the EPM and to the developments in Hume’s life that led to it. As James Harris (2015, p. 253) writes, the differences between Book III of the *Treatise* and the EPM are obvious “to the point where the question must arise whether the ‘casting anew’ did not involve something rather more substantial than a mere change in mode of presentation”.

This chapter is thus an attempt to offer an interpretation of the EPM which focuses on what it offers as a stand-alone book, published independently and meant to be read as such. It is not an extensive comparison between the *Treatise* and the EPM: the condensed account of the moral approbation of justice in the former work offered below is meant only to highlight some particularities of the latter. The particularities highlighted in this chapter are an attempt to provide an interpretation of the philosophical effects of the developments in Hume’s life that happened in the period immediately antecedent to the publication of the EPM (1748-1751), as I discussed in the introduction of this thesis. As such, the chapter is not a work on intellectual biography, but a philosophical interpretation of the ethics Hume wrote in this stage of his life.

In the EPM, Hume’s experiences and the necessity inspired by Montesquieu of accounting for variety translate into a heavy use of historical examples and a preoccupation of providing an account of the origin of morals that can withstand the weight of history and the variety we observe in it (and also the variety one may have had the opportunity to experience

⁴ This was part of a wider interpretation of Hume’s works in general, which Harris (2015, pp. 9-11) presents as first defended by Norman Kemp Smith’s *The Philosophy of David Hume* (1941) and which saw the *Treatise* as Hume’s main philosophical texts, the two *Enquiries* as repetitions of the same argument, but in a more polished form, and the *Essays* and the *History of England* as Hume’s philosophy “applied” to particular areas of human knowledge.

first-hand). The chapter tries to outline how the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* attempts to do that and, in order to do so, I begin the chapter with a brief overview in section 1.1 of Hume's account of the moral obligation to justice in the *Treatise*, meant, as I said above, to make the particularities of the EPM more explicit. The focus here is to show that the *Treatise*'s account of justice is based in a conjectural history of the transition from the "natural" and "rude" state of humanity to a "civiliz'd" one. This attempt is considered as puzzling by different interpreters of Hume's first work and its abandonment in the EPM is one of the two great changes my interpretation sees in this more mature work on moral philosophy.

Section 1.2 tries to show how Hume's account of the social virtues of justice and benevolence is different in the EPM. I begin with his choice of where to start. As I argue below, even though one can find in the *Treatise* the arguments Hume makes in the EPM concerning benevolence and our capacity to feel benevolent affections, his choice of starting with a discussion of benevolence opens a different path in his argument. In 1.2.1, I show how Hume, instead of trying to begin with humans in their natural condition, simply affirms we are capable of feeling "general benevolence", that is, of being genuinely concerned with others. I then consider, in section 1.2.2, Hume's treatment of justice, emphasizing the replacement of conjectural history: justice, now defined as the rules that keep peace and order in families as well as between nations in a modern commercial society, is discussed in terms of its usefulness to society as a whole and it evolves according to the enlargement of human sociability. In the last part of this section, 1.2.3, I argue that both justice and benevolence are related to the economic, political, and natural contexts of a society and hence that much reasoning, especially in the form of public debate and historical enquiry, is required in the distinctions between vice and virtue in these matters.

In section 1.3, I consider Hume's account of the moral sentiment. I first discuss how he defines the sentiment of humanity, the only one "implied" by the notion of morals. He frames this sentiment as at least a cool approbation of what promotes the well-being of the human species, which every person, even the most selfish one, is capable of feeling. The second part of this section (1.3.2) discusses how this cool approbation becomes the moral sentiment on which a standard of vice and virtue depend. Here I emphasize the role of language and conversation, — the other relevant change in the EPM — which Hume considers as molded from the general preferences of societies. The sentiment of humanity, because it is felt universally and comprehends every person in the judgments made according to it, molds common language and is expressed in a specific register, moral language, which Hume

distinguishes from other registers of common language, such as the “language of self-love”. When we utter a moral judgment, we speak in this moral register of language and, because we use its distinctive appellations, we *expect* agreement from our audience: moral language is molded from the sentiment of humanity and that sentiment is the same in every person. Hence, I read Hume’s sentiment of humanity as that which we expect to touch in others when we judge or act according to we believe it to be. The standard of virtue and vice is what emerges from this conversation where we find out whether our expectation about others’ sentiments is met or not; the good moral judge is the person which is capable of understanding the general preferences of society.

Because the standard of vice and virtue is defined through conversation and intercourse and because this conversation about the two most important virtues — the social virtues of justice and benevolence — takes into consideration the particular political, economic and natural context each community, it seems reasonable to ask whether a single standard of virtue and vice, equal for all societies at all times, is possible. The emphasis on language and the decision to discuss the social virtues in terms of context invites this question about the historical variations of morals and manners.

In section 1.4 I deal with Hume’s own anticipation of that question, presented in “A Dialogue” annexed to the EPM. The Dialogue does not offer a solution to the challenge of accounting for the wide difference in morals and manners observed in history, but he does suggest two ways of doing so: first, he argues we must consider the “natural effects” of custom, that is, in the discussion of the relation of virtues such as justice and benevolence to their social, political, and natural context, we must observe how they fit the natural effects of this contexts and reject artificial proposals such as those advanced by Pascal or Diogenes. Second, the narrator argues that mature persons (or experienced moral judges) usually favors recognize that the very continuance of society depends more on the useful virtues, those which are more strongly related to the sentiment of humanity. If the Dialogue limits itself to these suggestions, section 7 of the EPM gives us some hints about how different societies stand in relations to these suggestions. In the final part of section 1.4, I argue that some societies will promote virtues such as ancient courage and magnanimity, closely related to “sublime” feelings. These feelings can sometimes encroach on the sentiment of humanity and make people neglect the social virtues that depend on it. Not all societies will be equal in their capacity to make the sentiment of humanity flourish and a historical enquiry that show how each society allows (or does not allow) that sentiment to flourish will point out some morals and manners that are better

than others. Although the EPM only hints at the possibility of such a historical enquiry, it does not develop it. The chapter thus concludes saying that the EPM must be supplemented with a historical enquiry about the capacity of different societies to promote the sentiment of humanity.

1.1 - THE ESTABLISHMENT AND APPROBATION OF JUSTICE IN THE *TREATISE*

Before we enter the second *Enquiry*, it may be useful as a means of contrast to briefly go over Hume's account of justice and of why we approve of it in the *Treatise*. There, his account begins with a search for the natural motive to repay a loan. The immediate answer would be "that my regard to justice, and abhorrence of villainy and knavery, are sufficient reasons for me, if I have the least grain of honesty, or sense of duty and obligation". That would be a completely intelligible answer to a "man in his civiliz'd state, and when train'd up according to a certain discipline and education", but it would be "rejected as perfectly unintelligible and sophistical" by a man "in his rude and more *natural* condition" (T 3.2.1.9). Since the motive we, in our civilized state, can offer is not valid in our natural condition, Hume inquires into four other motives — unrestrained self-interest, regard to the public interest, public benevolence and private benevolence —, only to return empty-handed. That unsuccessful inquiry, set about by the question on loan repayment, leads into a "conjectural history"⁵ about how we came to consider "abhorrence of villainy and knavery" an intelligible motive to act justly.

At the core of this conjectural history is the redirection of the interested affection. That history begins with the "cruel" circumstances in which nature placed humans, giving them "slender means" to relieve "numberless wants and necessities" (T 3.2.2.2). Only by gathering together in society can humans free themselves from this cruelty and acquire "additional *force*, *ability*, and *security*" (T 3.2.2.3). Luckily enough, humans don't depend on their uncultivated reflection to perceive the advantage of society: they are led into it by the "natural appetite betwixt the sexes" and, once couples unite and beget children, the natural affection they feel towards their offspring keeps them together (T 3.2.2.4). Yet, some circumstances of our "natural

⁵ Baier (2010, p. 37). Conjectural history refers to a method of historical enquiry common among Scottish Enlightenment thinkers which tries to supply the lack of direct evidence on how human beings lived in the earlier stages of society. In a conjectural history, the historian tries to infer how society evolved from simple and uncultivated states to the more complex states she observes in her own time. This process relies on the assumption of a constant human nature, which coupled with an account of external circumstances, yields an inference on how our ancestors behaved. Cf. Christopher Berry (1997, ch. 3), especially pp. 65-68, for an account of the use of conjectural history in the Scottish Enlightenment.

temper” and “outward circumstances” are obstacles to our gathering in larger societies. By “outward circumstances”, Hume means the fact that external possessions, contrary to the “internal satisfaction of our mind” and the advantages of our bodies, are not safe and may be transferred “without loss or alteration” (T 3.2.2.7). Within a family, the parents’ “superior strength and wisdom” and their natural affection toward their children is sufficient to establish some “rudiments of justice” (T 3.2.2.14), but our naturally selfish temper renders humans incapable of gathering in larger societies. Hume makes the point (which grows in importance in the EPM) that we are not wholly selfish, and usually feel “noble affections” towards our family and acquaintances. This partiality is a direct consequence of the way the principles of association of ideas — causality, resemblance, contiguity — affect our sympathetic responses. It is our resemblance to others (and the resemblance another person’s passions have to ours) that “contribute to make us enter into the sentiments of others” and “The stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition” (T 2.1.11.5) from an idea of the other’s passion to an impression of the passion in ourselves. The relations of blood “produces the strongest tie the mind is capable of in the love of parents to their children, and a lesser degree of the same affection, as the relation lessens” (T 2.2.4.2). Acquaintance may also produce love through custom, because we become “privy to his [our company’s] inmost sentiments and affections” (T 2.2.4.4). It is natural, therefore, that “we cannot forbear preferring him to strangers, of whose superior merit we are fully convinc’d” (T 2.2.4.3).

However, this partiality itself is dangerous to society: first, a parent trying to feed her family may cross the interest of another equally noble parent trying to do the same; second, our natural partiality influences our ideas of vice and virtue so that “our natural uncultivated ideas of morality, instead of providing a remedy for the partiality of our affections, do rather conform themselves to that partiality” (T 3.2.2.8).

The remedy to the instability of external goods caused by the combination of their scarcity and the natural partiality of our temper is an artifice whereby the interested affection controls itself and the possession of such goods is stabilized. Our avidity of acquiring goods for ourselves and friends “is insatiable, perpetual, universal, and directly destructive of society” (T 3.2.2.12) and “[t]here is no passion, therefore, capable of controuling the interested affection, but the very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction” (T 3.2.2.13). Hume represents the artifice as a “general sense of common interest” of leaving another in possession of her goods, which we express to one another and, by mutually expressing it, produce a “suitable resolution

and behaviour” (T 3.2.2.10). Our understanding draws from two sources to inform the interested affection that it is better satisfied by its restraint than by its liberty: the “rudiments of justice” (T 3.3.2.14) we are moulded into by our parents and “our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing” those rules “as society enlarges” (T 3.2.2.10).

Thus, the “natural obligation” to justice, what first led our uncultivated and savage ancestors to its first convention is the interested affection, their experience that that affection was better served by regulating itself. Hume then asks “*Why we annex the idea of virtue to justice, and of vice to injustice?*” (T 3.2.2.23). As society grows, he observes, the direct interest we have in justice becomes more remote and we may not perceive the “disorder and confusion [that] follow upon every breach of these rules, as in a more narrow and contracted society” (T 3.2.2.24). But we still share sympathetically the uneasiness of people who are wronged, even if this doesn’t directly affect our own interest. Because a general rule “reaches beyond those instances, from which it arose” we “fail not to extend it even to our own actions” (T 3.2.2.24). “Thus *self-interest* is the original motive to the *establishment* of justice: But a *sympathy* with *public* interest is the source of the *moral* approbation, which attends that virtue” (T. 3.2.2.24). However, “sympathy with public interest” raises some questions: whom exactly are we sympathizing with? and if, as Hume himself admits, some just acts are harmful both to private and public interest, how can we sympathize with and approve of them? Hume anticipated these questions and referred the reader to the third part of Book III (T 3.2.2.23), where he presents his account of moral evaluation.

We approve of virtues through sympathy with the person who possesses them, but since we cannot perceive directly another person’s character and “we are only sensible of its causes or effects”, “we infer the passion” from its effects, and it is thus the actions we actually observe that “give rise to our sympathy” (T 3.3.1.7). However, as Hume notes, “as sympathy is very variable, it may be thought, that our sentiments of morals must admit of all the same variations” (T 3.3.1.14). Hume offers two corrections in our sympathetic process that makes our judgments, if not our passions, free of the partiality of our limited generosity, thus allowing us to “arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things” (T 3.3.1.15).

The first correction refers to the variability of our sympathetic response caused by our particular position in relation to the person we approve of: we sympathize more with those contiguous to us, with our family and acquaintances, with those belonging to our community (T 3.3.1.14). Each of us stands in a particular position with regards to others and were we to

judge based on that position, “’tis impossible we cou’d ever converse together on any reasonable terms” (T 3.3.1.15). Experience teaches us to correct the variability of our sympathy and to fix on some “*steady* and *general* points of view”. Hume explains how the correction process occurs:

’Tis therefore from the influence of characters and qualities, upon those who have an intercourse with any person, that we blame or praise him. We consider not whether the persons, affected by the qualities, be our acquaintance or strangers, countrymen or foreigners. Nay, we over-look our own interest in those general judgments; and blame not a man for opposing us in any of our pretensions, when his own interest is particularly concern’d. (T 3.3.1.17)⁶

Being thus loosen’d from our first station, we cannot afterwards fix ourselves so commodiously by any means as by a sympathy with those, who have any commerce with the person we consider. (T 3.3.1.18)

Hence, we must fix on the effects of the person’s character on those close to her and sympathize with them. Hume believes the contradictions between the judgments we form based on our private advantage and the sentiments we express “in society and conversation” will lead to an uncomfortable situation of uncertainty, whence we seek a standard admitting of less variation.

The second correction refers to situations where a character trait which “in its natural tendency is beneficial to society” has its effects prevented by “particular accidents” in its operations (T 3.3.1.19). In this situation, we would not sympathize with the person and therefore fail to approve of her virtuous character, since we infer the passions from their effects and these are prevented from happening. To this objection, Hume answers that “[w]here a character is, in every respect, fitted to be beneficial to society, the imagination passes easily from the cause to the effect, without considering that there are still some circumstances wanting to render the cause a compleat one” (T 3.3.1.20). We reason by general rules which, through “a species of probability”, influences the judgment: “Virtue in rags is still virtue”, says Hume (T 3.3.1.19), and even if we do tend to sympathize more lively when virtue expresses its beneficial effects, we still sympathize with virtue in rags.

Thus, these two corrections allow us to “remove any contradiction, which may appear to be betwixt the *extensive sympathy*, on which our sentiments of virtue depend, and that *limited generosity* which I have frequently observed to be natural to men, and which justice and property suppose, according to the precedent reasoning” (T 3.3.1.23). Hume admits that such

⁶ Hume repeats this argument in T 3.3.1.30: “Now, in judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, whose character is examin’d; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him”.

corrections may fail to change our actions and passions, that “I may not be willing to sacrifice any thing of my own interest, or cross any of my passions” (T 3.3.1.23), but they “serve sufficiently to regulate our abstract notions, and are alone regarded, when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue” (T 3.3.1.21).

There are two issues relevant to the present discussion that have been considered in the literature referring to justice and moral evaluation in the *Treatise*. First, there is the problem of why we approve morally of justice and what is the motive being approved. David Gauthier (1992) argues that the moral obligation to justice, as the moral obligation to keep promises, rests on “the *mistaken* apprehension that it is a duty” (p. 402), i. e., that Hume’s account of the moral obligation to justice is an “error theory”. A view such as Gauthier’s rests on a reading of Hume’s account of justice where the natural motive to justice, self-interest, does not cease to exist when we “feign” the moral obligation to it. Feigning is necessary because the natural motive is, as Hume concedes, insufficient to motivate us to act justly in every single instance, since there may be situations where a just act is harmful both to the public and to one of the parties involved (T 3.2.2.22).

Another line of interpretation argues that there is some kind of *transformation* involved in the conventions of justice. Baier (1991, p. 171), for example, argues that “some artifice [...] seems involved in that [general] point of view itself” and that the correction we undergo to attain a more stable moral judgment “exercises those same capacities” involved in the first convention of justice. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why Hume decided to discuss artificial virtues before natural ones. Jacqueline Taylor (1998) further develops this line of argument: she argues that the change in the direction of our interested affection that takes place in the conventions of justice is necessary for the kind of extensive sympathy involved in moral evaluation to work (p. 12). This process is similar to the interaction between reflective and pre-reflective general rules Hume discussed in Book I of the *Treatise* (1.3.13.8-13). Lorraine Besser-Jones (2006) extends Taylor’s argument and tries to show that the transformation also affects the ways we feel and express pride: justice stabilizes property — the relation which “produces most commonly the passion of pride” (T 2.1.11.1) — and constancy and discernibility are two of the limitations Hume sets to his system of indirect passions (T 2.1.6.4-7); without justice, an object’s relation to us may not be constant nor discernible.

Finally, James Harris (2010, p. 39) argues that “Hume himself fails to give an explicit solution to the problem he sets up in *Treatise* 3.2.1”. He places Hume in the tradition of Grotius: for both of them, the specific motive we approve of in just actions is irrelevant: “We will

approve, simply, of whatever kind of motive, and disposition of character, reliably causes actions with consequences beneficial to society at large” (p. 41). Harris seems not to oppose the “transformation” interpretation (he quotes Taylor’s paper favorably) and one could argue that the “transformed” persons would be more likely to approve of just motives, since they would be more likely to recognize the importance of maintaining order and peace in society, but his interpretation doesn’t seem to *require* the sort of transformation Taylor and Besser-Jones propose.

Second, Jacqueline Taylor (2002) questions whether the corrections Hume proposes in part 3 of Book III solve the problems posed by the variability of sympathy. First she asks “If self-interest or prejudice perverts our sentiments when we appraise the characters of those who are distant from us, why might it not pervert the sentiments of those close to the agent?” (pp. 53-54). Those who have commerce with the person we are evaluating also suffer from the same variabilities of sympathy we suffer when we observe them, and there’s no reason to believe we will approach a common point of view sympathizing with other persons who are subject to the same sympathetic limitations as us. Hume’s argument over how we correct the effects of remoteness (either in space or time) also have shortcomings: “particular character traits might not be recognized across cultures and epochs, and even where the same traits are admitted [...] they might be accorded different values” (p. 55). Thus, the corrections Hume proposes may not lead to a stable general point of view.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to meddle in the interpretative disputes concerning the *Treatise*. Rather, my goal here is only to note that howsoever the three interpretations above deal with these apparent puzzles in the *Treatise*, all of them seem to consider the transition from the natural obligation of justice to the moral obligation to it: they try to deal with Hume’s refusal to start with “man in his civiliz’d state”, starting instead from “man in his rude and natural condition” and trying to explain the transition from the latter state to the former. One has either to propose that we undergo some sort of psychological transformation in the conventions of justice; affirm that we remain the same, and that the conventions of justice involve the feigning of duties; or say that how we move from natural obligation to moral obligation is not as important as Hume lead us to believe. In sum, one has to deal with the fact that, in the *Treatise*, Hume tries to provide, in Michael Gill’s (2006, p. 239) terms, both the chronological *and* the foundational origins of justice, that is, Hume tries to answer both how our sense of morals developed in the early moments of human history and what is “the normative source of, or the underlying justification for, our moral judgments”. To the first question, he answers that our

natural instincts (love between the sexes and parental love) and self-interest lead us into the conventions of justice; thus his account does not rely on supposing that those “rude” fellows needed to understand justice before it was invented. To the second question, he answers that we sympathize with public interest. The problem he has to solve is how one account connect to the other and, as we have seen, contemporary commentators struggle to understand what he meant that solution to be.

In the second *Enquiry*, Hume’s choice of where to start is very different. There, as Annette Baier (2010, p. 215) says, his concern “is to understand morality in its own right, and it is not so much moral motivation, as human recognition of human merit”. Instead of looking for the motive to act justly, Hume begins by acknowledging that we are capable of both selfish and benevolent affections. Surely, as I showed above, Hume does not deny in the *Treatise* that we are capable of approving, desiring and sometimes acting to promote other people’s good, but that very capability would perhaps make our choices worse with regard to justice, because it was inscribed within an account of sympathy that made our benevolent affections partial. In the EPM, however, Hume deems the capacity to a minimum of benevolent affections and of expressing it sufficient to found morals without having to offer an account of how we moved from the “rude and natural condition” where it was not sufficient to the “civiliz’d state” where it is.

1.2 - BENEVOLENCE, SELF-LOVE AND JUSTICE IN THE SECOND *ENQUIRY*

1.2.1 - Benevolent affections in the constitution of our minds

In the first two paragraphs of the second *Enquiry* (EPM), Hume says that “[t]hose who have denied the reality of moral distinctions, may be ranked among the disingenuous disputants” (EPM 1.2), “who really do not believe the opinions they defend”, but only engage in debate for the sake of winning it and “showing wit and ingenuity” (EPM 1.1). They cannot truly believe in what they affirm because, however insensitive a person may be, “he must often be touched with the images of RIGHT and WRONG” (EPM 1.2); when presented to two very different and opposite persons, Hume says, no skepticism or prejudice can be so unscrupulous as to make one not feel something towards one and against the other. The only way to deal with those who affirm they are not touched by such images is to leave them to themselves, since

keeping the controversy with them will only elude their inevitable weariness or contact with common sense.

These two paragraphs presents one of the main targets of the second *Enquiry* and how Hume intends to argue against them. Against the skeptics, who deny the reality of moral distinctions, and the selfish theorists, who try to resolve morality into self-love, Hume's line of argument is to show that there is an undeniable capacity of benevolent affections in the human constitution and that this is enough to sustain moral distinctions. The object of this first subsection is to go over Hume's claim that *some* benevolence or humanity is part of human constitution.

In order to do so, we must turn to the second Appendix of the EPM, "Of Self-Love". That appendix used to be, until the edition of 1772, the first part of section 2⁷, that is, the very beginning of the enquiry into the "mental qualities" which constitute "personal merit" (EPM 1.10). The purpose of this appendix is to refute two principles: first, the principle stating

that all *benevolence* is mere hypocrisy, friendship a cheat, public spirit a farce, fidelity a snare to procure trust and confidence; and that, while all of us, at bottom, pursue only our private interest, we wear these fair disguises, in order to put others off their guard, and expose them the more to our wiles and machinations. (EPM A1.1)

Against its proponents⁸, Hume asks what kind of heart they must possess either not to feel in themselves a sentiment that proves them wrong or to regard the human species in such odious colors. Probably they are just "superficial reasoners" drawing hasty general conclusions from some instances of "false pretences among mankind" (EPM A2.1).

The second and most relevant principle which Hume seeks to refute in the Appendix states

that, whatever one may feel, or imagine he feels for others, no passion is, or can be disinterested; that the most generous friendship, however sincere, is a modification of self-love, and that, even unknown to ourselves, we seek only our gratification, while we appear the most deeply engaged in schemes for the liberty and happiness of mankind. (EPM A2.2)

Most proponents of "the selfish system of morals", such as Atticus and Horace among the ancients and Hobbes and Locke among the moderns, lived irreproachable lives. Indeed, the selfish system seems as irrelevant in common practice as it seemed to be in its proponents'

⁷ Cf. the editor's introduction to the EPM, p. xxiv. In the last edition Hume supervised, published a year after his death in 1777, he made this part an Appendix as it stands in current editions such as the one quoted here.

⁸ Likely Bernard de Mandeville, author of the *Fable of the Bees* (cf. editor annotations, EPM p. 176)

personal life: independently of whether, by “a philosophical chymistry”, these theorists can resolve every sentiment into a twist of self-love, we still

esteem the man, whose self-love, by whatever means, is so directed as to give him a concern for others, and render him serviceable to society: As [we] hate or despise him, who has no regard to any thing beyond his own gratifications and enjoyments. (EPM A2.4)

Nevertheless, the selfish system has relevant consequences in the speculative science of human nature, and thus deserves some consideration. The proponents of this system seem to have been led to error because of an excessive “love of simplicity” (EPM A2.6): they attempt to produce in moral philosophy what had been done in physics — a science in which many apparently odd hypotheses were later proved the correct explanation for a variety of seemingly unrelated phenomena — and reduce every human affection, including the benevolent ones, to a single explicative principle, self-love. However, Hume argues, moral philosophy is different from physics and while in the latter a seemingly odd explanation may be true, in moral philosophy “[t]he simplest and most obvious case, which can there be assigned for any phaenomenon, is probably the true one” (EPM A2.7). And there may actually be more simplicity in admitting that humans have many different affections than performing “the highest stretch of philosophy” to convert a mother’s affection to her child or a person’s mourning the death of a friend who depended on his patronage into expressions of self-love. Hume then turns the selfish system upside down⁹ and argues that instead of saying every affection is actually self-love, we should instead consider it a “secondary affection” that follows original ones. In the same manner as we feel hungry or thirsty and then seek food or drink, we are actuated by many “mental passions, by which we are impelled immediately to seek particular objects”. Thus, “[i]f I have no vanity, I take no delight in praise: If I be void of ambition, power gives me no enjoyment” and self-love is the passion we feel afterwards and which compels us to seek whatever our original constitution makes us desire and which constitutes our “happiness”. “Were there no appetite of any kind”, he says, “antecedent to self-love, that propensity could scarcely ever exert itself” (EPM A2.12). And if we are to admit that lust, ambition, hunger and thirst are part of our original constitution,

where is the difficulty in conceiving, that this may likewise be the case with benevolence and friendship, and that, from the original frame of our temper, we may feel a desire of another’s happiness or good, and is afterwards pursued, from the combined motives of benevolence and self-enjoyment? (EPM A2.13)

⁹ He was not the first to do that. Annette Baier (2010, p. 222) notes that Butler had made the same argument before him.

Thus, Hume is arguing that benevolent sentiments are an original part of the human constitution, and that the variety of benevolent affections have “their causes, effects, objects, and operations, marked by common language and observation” and distinct from the strictly self-regarding affections (EPM A2.6). He further divides benevolence into two kinds, general and particular. The latter “is founded on an opinion of virtue, on services done us, or on some particular connexions”; the former “is, where we have no friendship or connexion or esteem for the person, but feel only a general sympathy with him or a compassion for his pains, and a congratulation with his pleasures” (EPM A2.5 n. 60). While the examples mentioned above fit in the “particular” kind, he affirms that “general benevolence, or humanity, or sympathy” may be assumed “from general experience” as real as its particular counterpart: in section 5 (which I consider below), he says that even “a person ever so selfish” whose attention is fully directed to her private interest will unavoidably feel, at least in instances where her interest is not concerned, “*some* propensity to the good of mankind, and make it an object of choice, if every thing else be equal” (EPM 5.39).

In the Appendix, Hume only proposes that we need not reduce benevolent sentiments to something else. The book will then pursue a line of argument where this willingness to approve of what tends to the good of humankind, at least when one’s interests are not concerned, takes an important role, as I indicated in the quote above from section 5. Nevertheless, benevolence is not only this capacity or willingness and most people act out of a concern for others: the *virtue* of benevolence is the first mental quality he consider in his analysis of the complex of mental qualities called personal merit. He devotes a handful of pages to that virtue, only to highlight that when we praise a humane and beneficent person, “there is one circumstance which never fails to be amply insisted on, namely, the happiness and satisfaction, derived to society from his intercourse and good offices” (EPM 2.6). If the person is “confined to private life”, her benevolence is praised for its utility to those around her; if she is “exalted into a higher station”, she is praised because humankind “and posterity reap the fruit of [her] labours” (EPM 2.7). From this he concludes that “the UTILITY, resulting from the social virtues, forms at least, a *part* of their merit, and is one source of that approbation and regard so universally paid to them” (EPM 2.8).

1.2.2 - Justice in the second *Enquiry*

Hume's choice to begin the EPM highlighting the original capacity to benevolent affections and the virtue of benevolence certainly is not meant to affirm human beings are fully benevolent: we are not and justice, "the cautious, jealous virtue" (EPM 3.3), is necessary exactly because of this. Indeed, his aim in section 3 and in the third Appendix is to show "that public utility is the *sole* origin of justice" (EPM 3.1).

His account begins with the circumstances that make justice necessary and useful to society. He asks us to imagine four different hypothetical situations. First, he asks us to imagine a world of "*abundance* of all *external* conveniences", where every human need would be immediately provided by nature. In these circumstances, justice would be completely useless: "[w]hy give rise to property, where there cannot possibly be any injury?" (EPM 3.3). Even in the actual, not so plentiful circumstances of humankind, society does not recognize property in goods that are found in abundance, such as air, even though they are absolutely necessary to human life; in some societies, water can be used freely but scarce land must be divided, in others the opposite is true because water is scarce and land is abundant (EPM 3.4-5). Second, Hume asks the reader to imagine a world where "the mind is so enlarged, and so replete with friendship and generosity, that every man has the utmost tenderness for every man" (EPM 3.6). In this case, there would be no need to divide the world between mine and thine, because every one would be "a second self to another, would trust all his interests to the discretion of every [other]" (EPM 3.6). In our actual disposition, the family is the only social gathering that *comes close* to a situation where no distinction of property is necessary¹⁰; and where this "community of goods" has been attempted by people Hume calls "imprudent fanatics", they found by the "experience of the inconveniences" attending the communality of goods that justice is indeed useful.

The last two hypothetical scenarios cover the opposite extremes. He asks us to imagine a scenario of absolute penury, where "the utmost frugality and industry cannot preserve the great number from perishing, and the whole from extreme misery" (EPM 3.8). In shipwrecks or in a besieged city, every one is to provide oneself as one is able to, because respecting justice will not do that for us:

The USE and TENDENCY of that virtue is to procure happiness and security, by preserving order in society: But where the society is ready to perish from extreme necessity, no greater evil can be dreaded from violence and injustice; and every man

¹⁰ I emphasize "comes close" here because, as I will show below, there are rules within the family and it is relevant, in a later paragraph (EPM 3.21), that families are not places where complete benevolence take place. Hume writes "the case of families approaches towards it" in the quoted passage (EPM 3.7)

may now provide for himself by all means, which prudence can dictate, or humanity permit. (EPM 3.8)¹¹

The final hypothetical scenario stands opposite to the scenario of perfect humanity. If a person happens to fall in a “society of ruffians” who have no regard for others, Hume believes this honest person “must consult the dictates of self-preservation alone” and “make provision of all means of defence and security”, since his attendance to justice is “no longer of USE to his own safety or that of others” (EPM 3.9)¹².

These four hypothetical scenarios are clearly only hypothetical and do not describe the usual circumstances of society. “The common situation of society is a medium amidst all these extremes” (EPM 3.12) of abundance or penury, humanity or rapaciousness. It is from this median situation that justice derives its usefulness:

Thus the rules of equity and justice depend entirely on the particular state and condition, in which man are placed, and owe their origin and existence to that UTILITY, which results to the public from their strict and regular observance. Reverse, in any considerable circumstance, the condition of men: Produce extreme abundance or extreme necessity: Implant in the human breast perfect moderation and humanity, or perfect rapaciousness and malice: By rendering justice totally useless, you thereby totally destroy its essence, and suspend its obligation upon mankind. (EPM 3.12)

Hume still allows for that fact “we are naturally partial to ourselves, and to our friends” (EPM 3.13), as he did in the *Treatise*. Nevertheless, he goes on to say that we “are capable of learning the advantage resulting from a more equitable conduct”, a conduct that allows us “by art, labour, and industry” to make great abundance of the “[f]ew enjoyments [that] are given us from the open and liberal hand of nature”. It is from its capacity to make art, industry, and labor prosper that “the ideas of property becomes necessary in all civil society”, that “justice derives its usefulness to the public” from this alone “arises its merit and moral obligation” (EPM 3.13). There are no signs of the formerly necessary motive to justice or of the artifice that allowed the covenants of justice to go beyond the natural partiality we are all subject to. In the EPM’s account of justice, Hume does not bother to explain how we go beyond that partiality or what is needed to do so; he does not deem necessary to explain how humans need first to be lured into justice by self-interest and how, when they go through the conventions of justice, they generalize the partial sympathy they feel and begin to attribute moral obligation to justice —

¹¹ Even though Hume is not making this a *rule*, it is interesting to note that he says “or humanity permit”. Even in extreme situations such as shipwreck, Hume seems to still consider that some people will display some humanity, even if nothing obliges them to. We have already been through one instance of that minimum of benevolence in the last section and will see it appear in other passages.

¹² It is important to observe that justice becomes unnecessary in this situation because it is useless *both* to individual *and* to the public, since this is a relevant point to the chapter as a whole.

he simply takes for granted that most of us will perceive it and approve of justice: we can recognize the utility of this virtue and stick to its observance. As it should become clearer in the next section (1.3), Hume is, in fact, saying that we are capable of learning the advantages of justice *despite* our natural partiality.

More importantly, in the EPM, Hume systematically refers to our *collective* interest in justice. As we saw above, it is to the “UTILITY, which results to the *public*” that justice owes its existence (EPM 3.12) and it is from its capacity to promote industry, labor, and the arts that it “justice derives its usefulness *to the public*” (EPM 3.13, emphasis mine). In speaking of promises and contracts, he affirms that fulfilling them “secure[s] mutual trust and confidence, by which the **general interest of mankind**” is promoted (EPM 3.28¹³). More broadly, all the rules that distinguish each person’s property terminate in “the interest and happiness of *human society*” (EPM 3.35, emphasis mine). He concludes the section on justice stating that we can always have “recourse to the principle of *public utility*” (emphasis mine), that is, we can always ask ourselves “*What must become of the world, if such [licentious] practices prevail?*” and “*How could society subsist under such disorders [that follow the abandonment of justice]?*” (EPM 3.47). Justice in the EPM is always treated as a public matter, and our approval of it is always based in its public, not private utility. That does not mean our private interest is always in tandem with public interest¹⁴ and “a man, taking things in a certain light, may often *seem* to be a loser by his integrity” (EPM 9.22, emphasis mine), but Hume seem not to worry in the EPM that this light will be the light in which most of us place justice; self-interested we surely are, but most of us recognize justice as a collective affair that brings collective advantage. For those who do not, who cannot “persevere in a steady adherence to a general and distant interest” and fall prey “to the allurements of present pleasure and advantage” (EPM 4.1), Hume has very little to offer in the second *Enquiry* beyond the law and the magistrates who enforce it.

Even though I have been emphasizing the abandonment of the *Treatise*’s conjectural history of the artifice of justice, Hume still provides, in the EPM, an argument that could be read as some sort of “conjectural history” of the evolution of justice and some comments on whether justice is artificial or not. In the last two paragraphs of the first part of section 3, he first asks us to suppose a self-sufficient person. If the human species were framed so that each individual were fully self-sufficient and every person lived by herself, this being “would be as

¹³ Italics in original, bold is mine.

¹⁴ Even though it commonly is: “As much as we value our own happiness and welfare, as much must we applaud the practice of justice and humanity, by which alone the social confederacy can be maintained, and every man reap the fruits of mutual protection and assistance” (EPM 5.5).

much incapable of justice, as of social discourse and conversation”. In this situation, “as each man is here supposed to love himself alone” and to depend only on himself, he “would, on every occasion, to the utmost of his power, challenge the preference above every other being, to none of which he is bound by any ties” (EPM 3.20). But humans are not framed in this way, they are capable both of justice and of social discourse and conversation:

But suppose the conjunction of the sexes to be established in nature, a family immediately arises; and particular rules being found requisite for its subsistence, these are immediately embraced; though without comprehending the rest of mankind within their prescriptions. Suppose, that several families unite together into one society, which is totally disjointed from all others, the rules, which preserve peace and order, enlarge themselves to the utmost extent of that society; but becoming then entirely useless, lose their force when carried one step farther. But again suppose, that several distinct societies maintain a kind of intercourse for mutual convenience and advantage, *the boundaries of justice still grow larger, in proportion to the largeness of men’s views*, and the force of their mutual connexions. History, experience, reason sufficiently instruct us in *this natural progress of sentiments*, and in *the gradual enlargement of our regards to justice*, in proportion as we become acquainted with the extensive utility of that virtue. (EPM 3.21, emphasis mine)

The rules existent within a family are of the same kind as that which preserve order and peace in a larger society. These rules only grow according to the “gradual enlargement” of the views of those who instituted them and are approved of only to the extent they prove themselves useful. As Annette Baier (2010, p. 83) observes, the EPM does not place an “undue emphasis on security of property” and “being just comes to mean keeping the law, and informal precursors to law, on all matters, including respect for others’ persons as well as their property”. In other words, being just in the EPM means respecting what guarantees the “social discourse and conversation” we depend on and the laws that do so are always related to the scope of the connexions we form in these social interactions¹⁵.

In the third Appendix, Hume retakes the question concerning the artificiality of justice, which was the crux of his account of justice. In the EPM, he repeats nearly verbatim many arguments he uses in the *Treatise*, but instead of saying as if it was an argument of his own¹⁶, he says “It has been asserted *by some* that justice arises from HUMAN CONVENTIONS, and

¹⁵ In her wider interpretation, Baier (2010, ch. 4) suggests that there is an enlargement of Hume’s concept of justice throughout his writings, from narrowly defined justice of the *Treatise*, which emphasizes respect to property, to the loose definition given in “Of the Origin of Government”, the last essay Hume wrote, where he defines justice as whatever high court have to judge. This interpretation lends support to the present reading of the EPM, since Hume’s abandoning the conjectural history of the *Treatise*, within which justice-as-property had a very precise role to play, leads him into a recognition of the different forms the rules that regulate intercourse in society can take, as discussed in section 1.2.3 below.

¹⁶ As he had done in the *Treatise*: “This can be done after no other manner, than by a convention enter’d by al the members of the society” (T 3.2.2.9).

proceeds from the voluntary choice, consent, or combination of mankind” (EPM A3.7, emphasis mine). He proceeds to repeat arguments he had made before: “if by convention be meant *a sense of common interest*”, which each person feels and expresses, to concur “into a general plan or system of action, which tends to public utility”, then, “in this sense, justice arises from human conventions” (EPM A3.7). He then makes an analogy to oarsmen, money and language: “Thus two men pull the oars of a boat by common convention [...] Thus gold and silver are made the measure of exchange; thus speech and words and language are fixed, by human convention or agreement” (EPM A3.8). Even if, overall, the argument remains the same, Hume did change some of the wording and, for instance, instead of saying that “I observe, that it will be for my interest to leave another in the possession of his goods, *provided* he will act in the same manner with regard to me” (T 3.2.2.10, italics in the original), he simply says that we “embrace” justice with “an eye to the whole plan or system” and thus “expect the concurrence of [our] fellows in the same conduct and behaviour”. Instead of an oarsman who only rows synchronically *provided* the other oarsmen do the same and who is apparently ready to row off the rhythm if the others also do not respect the convention, the EPM’s oarsmen simply embrace rowing synchronically, perhaps because there’s little sense in desiring to do otherwise.

Another aspect of Hume’s account of justice in the EPM that deserves attention is his discussion of “*whom* it is that justice protects”, as Annette Baier puts it (2010, p. 246). He supposes there were a species of creature living along with humankind, “which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength, both of body and mind, that they ere incapable of all resistance” (EPM 3.18). He believes that we would only be bound to this species “by the laws of humanity”, but that we would not be “under any restraint of justice with regard to them”. Since justice exists because of the advantage it affords in keeping the order of society, this species’ incapacity to offer resistance simply means that no disadvantage would follow from ours behaving as we please towards them, that “no inconvenience ever results from the exercise of a power, so firmly established in nature”. Indeed, the kind of intercourse we would have with them “could not be called society, which supposes a degree of equality”. In other words, justice only protects those who can “make us feel the effects of their resentment” and claim rights and property (EPM 3.18) and those species which cannot will have only our humanity to appeal to (which, it seems, Hume believes will restrain at least in some measure our behavior towards them). While this relationship describes well our relation to animals (regardless of whether they possess reason or not), he says, this certainly isn’t the case of the relationship between “civilized EUROPEANS” and the “barbarous INDIANS” they met with in America: the European settlers

were wrong believing they owed the natives the same treatment dispensed to animals and should not have “throw[n] off all restraints of justice, and even of humanity, in [their] treatment of them” (EPM 3.19). Equally, the relationship between men and women is not akin to that which would hold between humans and that supposed species, as “many nations” which treat women like slaves and render them incapable of property seem to have believed. Even though man, “when united, have, in all countries, bodily force sufficient to maintain this severe tyranny”, women “are commonly able to break the confederacy, and share with the other sex in all the rights and privileges of society” (EPM 3.19).

1.2.3 - Context, utility and the social virtues

So far, I have gone over Hume’s conclusions that the social virtues — benevolence and justice — are approved of because they are useful to the public. As a conclusion to this section, I will first present Hume’s remarks on the difference between these two virtues and, finally, a similarity they share concerning their usefulness.

The benevolent person does not depend on the concurrence of others to act and to successfully attain the ends of her benevolent action. Benevolence and humanity “exert their influence immediately, by a direct tendency or instinct, which chiefly keeps in view the simple object, moving the affections” (EPM A3.2). Thus, once this object is pursued and achieved, the social passions are satisfied and “[i]n this, they acquiesce”. Our moral sentiment of approbation is excited when we perceive the resulting good, “without any reflection on the farther consequences” other than this immediate good and, if “the generous friend or disinterested patriot” were the only benevolent person around, that “would rather enhance his value in our eyes, and join the praise of rarity and novelty to his other more exalted merits” (EPM A3.2).

In the case of justice, in contrast, being the only one to adhere to it makes one’s just behavior useless rather than more exalted. As we have already seen above, in a “society of ruffians”, one’s regard to justice is not useful either to oneself or to society as whole and justice ceases to be necessary. This is so because the usefulness of justice “is not the consequence of every single act; but arises from the whole scheme or system, concurred in by the whole, or the greater part of society”, and individual just actions may often be hurtful, while the overall scheme is “to the highest degree, advantageous” (EPM A3.3). Justice may sometimes deprive a benevolent person of her possessions, if she acquired them by mistake, without a having a right to them, and give it to a miser, but “[p]ublic utility requires, that property should be

regulated by general inflexible rules” (EPM A3.6) and general rules may not be beneficial in all particular instances, even if, on the whole, they are indeed the rules that serve best public interest. “It is sufficient”, Hume says,

if the whole plan or scheme be necessary to the support of civil society, and if the balance of good, in the main, does thereby preponderate much above that of evil. Even the general laws of the universe, though planned by infinite wisdom, cannot exclude all evil or inconvenience, in every particular operation. (EPM A3.6)

Hume offers a metaphor to illustrate the difference between benevolence and its subdivisions and justice: the first “may be compared to a wall, built by many hands”, each stone adds to the height of the wall and the wall grows as fast as there are people helping to build it. Justice and its subdivisions, contrastingly, “may be compared to the building of a vault”, where each stone alone would not stand and the vault is supported only “by the mutual assistance and combination of its corresponding parts” (EPM A3.5). This metaphor, while used to illustrate the differences between justice and benevolence, serves well to the purpose of highlighting their similarities.

In section two, after concluding that public utility seems to be the source of the praise we give to benevolent actions, Hume goes on to affirm that utility seems indeed to enter in all determinations of morality and that “wherever disputes arise, either in philosophy or common life, concerning the bounds of duty, the question cannot, by any means, be decided with greater certainty, than by ascertaining, on any side, the true interests of mankind” (EPM 2.17). If a false opinion prevails, once we find the true tendency of the actions we praise by “experience and sounder reasoning”, we have no difficulty adapting our sentiments “and adjust[ing] anew the boundaries of moral good and evil” (EPM 2.17). In other words, the approbation of benevolence is dependent both on the context surrounding the action and, because it depends on context, it is also dependent on our capacity to discern how the action being observed expresses its tendency in context. Hume offers some examples to illustrate his claim: first, giving alms to beggars is usually praised, he says, but “when we observe the encouragement thence arising to idleness and debauchery” we retract our feelings and no longer approve of giving alms and consider charity “rather as a weakness than a virtue” (EPM 2.18). Similarly, liberality in princes is considered a mark of beneficent character. But once we reason that the prince’s actions tend rather to take “the homely bread of the honest and industrious” and convert it into “cates for the idle and the prodigal” (EPM 2.20), again we adjust our sentiments and our understanding of good and evil.

The other two examples he offers are perhaps more important, because they show that this adjustment of the “boundaries of moral good and evil” is not just a matter of *personal* circumstances, but also of *historical* circumstances. Tyrannicide was highly praised in ancient societies, because people believed that it not only removed the tyrant from power, but made her an example “to keep others in awe” and not to dare doing the same. However, “history and experience having since convinced us, that this practice encreases the jealousy and cruelty of princes”, we no longer take tyrannicides as models of character and no longer praise Timoleon or Brutus for their murder of Timophanes and Julius Caesar even if we treat them “with indulgence on account of the prejudices of their times” (EPM. 2.19). It is relevant to note that Hume does not seem to be condemning Timoleon and Brutus, as he does when he calls charity a weakness; it seems those two historical characters happened to live in times when “history and experience” either were at their sides or at least the matter was debatable. It is the passing of history and the knowledge humankind acquired from it that made their actions, in Hume’s time, something improper.

Hume’s last example is luxury or “a refinement on the pleasures and conveniences of life”. Once more, this was “universally regarded as a vice”, the source of corruption in government and the cause of civil wars and “the total loss of liberty”. However, in Hume’s time this judgment was being overthrown due to the perception that luxury “rather tend[s] to the encrease of industry, civility, and arts” (EPM 2.21)¹⁷. Yet, he has no problem acknowledging that luxury may indeed have been (or still be) pernicious in some societies, useful in others: luxury in Switzerland may be hurtful, in England and France quite the opposite (EPM D.41). Thus, French or British writers who argue that luxury makes industry, civility, and arts flourish may well “regulate anew our *moral* as well as *political* sentiments”, but that may not apply to writers trying to do the same elsewhere. Luxury and the professions that promote it¹⁸ become worthy of praise as a society is introduced to commerce, but we cannot condemn a Swiss shepherd for taking it in a different light, for luxury may indeed have pernicious effects in a society predominantly composed of shepherds.

What we learn from these four examples is that the utility which attends benevolence, though it results from each benevolent act individually and not as the result of the concurrence of many benevolent actions, is something to be understood in context. Moreover, context may

¹⁷ Hume himself, as we shall have time to appreciate in the next two chapters, is among those who were defending such an understanding of luxury and refinement.

¹⁸ “Can any thing stronger be said in praise of a profession, such as merchandize or manufacture, than to observe the advantages which it procures to society?” says Hume (EPM 2.11).

have a historical meaning and we adapt the “boundaries of good and evil” as circumstances evolve, ceasing to praise what we discover, perhaps only after centuries of experience, not to be as conducive to good as our ancestors had thought.

In the second part of his account of justice, Hume turns to “the *particular* laws, by which justice is directed” (EPM 3.22) and here we find remarks concerning justice similar to those I have highlighted above concerning benevolence. He affirms that “in order to establish laws for the regulation of property, we must be acquainted with the *nature* and *situation* of man” (EPM 3.27, emphasis mine). If we are acquainted with the *nature* of man, Hume believes, we will readily reject ideas of perfect equality which, if they weren’t impracticable, would be “extremely pernicious to human society”: persons naturally have different “degrees of art, care, and industry” which would break perfect equality and lead either to general impoverishment, if such a scheme succeed in checking these virtues, or to “[t]he most rigorous inquisition” and loss of liberty, which would be needed to recompose perfect equality and punish those who do not respect it (EPM 3.26). Acquaintance with the *situation* of man leads us to allow, as I have already indicated above, for the possibility that what goods exactly can be designated as someone’s property is a matter dependent on context: some societies will adopt property on land and not on water, others will do the opposite. In the same manner, in a situation where nobody has a claim to property, “first possession is supposed to convey property” as a matter of analogy. In other matters, where utility and analogy fail, civil laws “supply the place of the natural *code*”, such as in determining the time span necessary for prescription or long possession to convey property (EPM 3.33).

Hume concludes that the distinction of property is subordinate to civil laws and how they modify the “rules of natural justice, according to the particular *convenience* of each community” (EPM 3.34):

The laws have, or ought to have, a constant reference to the constitution of government, the manners, the climate, the religion, the commerce, the situation of each society. (EPM 3.34)

That is, if our ideas of “natural justice” are founded on the advantages it procures to society, the particular laws which regulate it must take into consideration the particularities — social, political, and natural — of the society it is supposed to benefit. Mentioning social and political circumstances makes us realize that Hume’s perception of what counts as the “situation of man” is not just whether there’s abundant land or water around us; justice refers to circumstances which are open to historical variations as much as to variations in natural conditions. Given

these circumstances, when the particular laws set by magistrates “crosses all interests of society”, they lose their authority and people turn to their ideas of natural justice again. In such a “perverse” situation, even our obligation to obey the magistrates and their laws may cease, since it is “founded on nothing but the interests of society” (EPM 3.34 n. 12). If disobedience to “perverse” laws was supposed to reveal the weakness of his theory by showing that not all laws are useful, Hume says it rather makes it stronger: where those particular laws are discarded, it becomes clear that society always seeks advantageous laws. These ideas Hume credits to Montesquieu, “[a] late author of genius, as well as learning” who proposed a system of political knowledge which grasped the importance of the relation between the laws and the circumstances of society (EPM 3.34). Even if Montesquieu failed to found this system on sentiment rather than reason¹⁹, Hume does not fail to acknowledge his debt to the French writer.

To conclude this section, let me return briefly to the building metaphor Hume uses to distinguish the difference between justice and benevolence. Hume concludes his section on justice asking whether we have any innate idea of justice. To this question he answers in the negative, because if justice were innate we would also have innate ideas of the definitions of property and of the various relations into which property resolves such as acquisition by first possession, occupation, industry, inheritance etc, and innate ideas of the authority of those who can enforce respect to property. He then asks “Who sees not, that all these institutions arise merely from the necessities of human society?” To this rhetorical question he answers with a comparison: birds of the same species build their nests in the same fashion in every age and country — “[i]n this we see the force of instinct”. Humans, in contrast, build their houses differently in different ages and countries — “[h]ere we perceive the influence of reason and custom” (EPM 3.44). Justice is as human-made as human houses:

How great soever the variety of municipal laws, it must be confessed, that their chief outlines pretty regularly concur; because the purposes to which they tend, are every where exactly similar. In like manner, all houses have a roof and walls, windows and chimneys; though diversified in their shape, figure, and materials. The purposes of the latter, directed to the conveniences of human life, discover not more plainly their origin from reason and reflection, than those of the former, which point all to a like end. (EPM 3.45)

¹⁹ “This illustrious writer, however, sets out with a different theory, and supposes all right to be founded on certain *rappports* or relations; which is a system, that, in my opinion, never will be reconciled with true philosophy. Father MALEBRANCHE, as far as I can learn, was the first that started this abstract theory of morals, which was afterwards adopted by CUDWORTH, CLARKE, and others; and as it excludes all sentiment, and pretends to found every thing on reason, it has not wanted followers in this philosophic age” (EPM 3.34 n. 12).

It is interesting that Hume chooses here the image of house building. Humans always build things for a purpose and reason assists us in building things fit for the purposes they are meant to. Justice is a building which, like a vault, requires “the mutual assistance and combination of its corresponding parts” and some rather complex calculations, often involving “[t]he debates of civilians; the reflections of politicians; the precedents of history and public records” (EPM A1.2). Benevolence is a much simpler building and we need only place stone by stone in order to build the wall it is. But benevolence is a building nevertheless and, as we have seen, there is some reasoning to it; in the case of benevolence, reasoning enters in making sure each stone is placed in a way that makes the wall grow in height rather than fall to the ground. Wall or vault, both social virtues are meant to raise the building Hume calls “[t]he happiness and prosperity of mankind” (EPM A3.5). And both social virtues, benevolence and justice, which together compose the building of human happiness and prosperity, vary in every country and age according to the situation of society; and their variations discover, as much as the choice of how to build “a roof and walls, windows and chimneys”, that humans’ preference and praise for what is useful depends on reasoning and reflection about our circumstances, natural and historical.

There remains, however, the task of showing *why* we approve of what is useful and how we reach agreement about that.

1.3 - THE SENTIMENT OF HUMANITY AND MORAL DISCOURSE

1.3.1 - The sentiment of humanity

We approve of the social virtues because they are useful to society. Hume’s task after reaching this conclusion is to answer why we approve of what is useful or, as he titled section 5, “why utility pleases”. The first possible answer he tackles is that of the “sceptics”, likely Bernard de Mandeville, who affirm that these moral distinctions were invented and encouraged “by the art of politicians, in order to render men tractable, and subdue their natural ferocity and selfishness, which incapacitated them for society” (EPM 5.3). He reckons the importance of education, which can influence our moral sentiments, either increasing or diminishing our original approbation or dislike, and sometimes even create a new sentiment. But it is impossible that *all* moral affections arise by the art of politicians because, had nature not made any distinctions of this kind in the “original constitution of our minds”, they would not have been

able to make the very words that distinguish praise or blame intelligible and thus convey to the people what they wanted them to approve or disapprove (EPM 5.3).

The social virtues — justice and benevolence — must, he concludes, “be allowed to have a natural beauty and amiableness” antecedent to education which “recommends them to the esteem of uninstructed mankind, and engages their affections” (EPM 5.4). Since he concluded in the first part of the EPM that public utility is at least part of the merit of benevolence and the sole merit of justice, this utility must engage some affection in us and “must please, either from considerations of self-interest, or from more generous motives and regards” (EPM 5.4). Because our personal interest is often connected to that of society as a whole and because we seem to take much pleasure and advantage from life in society, some philosophers concluded that

As much as we value our own happiness and welfare, as much must we applaud the practice of justice and humanity, by which alone the social confederacy can be maintained, and every man reap the fruits of mutual protection and assistance. (EPM 5.5)

But even though our individual interests frequently concur with the interests of society at large, this should not lead us to conclude that we praise useful mental qualities only because of self-interest. Hume remarks that we praise virtuous actions performed in distant places and ages where no turn of imagination could ever discover “any appearance of self-interest” or connect us in some manner to that distant person who possessed it (EPM 5.7). In the same manner, we frequently praise a virtuous action done by an adversary, even if that action affects our private interest negatively (EPM 5.8). When someone describes a virtuous person and the many good offices she has done to society, we praise her even before hearing she lived long ago in a distant country (EPM 5.10). Hume considers “a weak subterfuge” the selfish theorists’ argument that we “consider the advantage, which we should have reaped from these characters, had we been contemporaries, and had any commerce with the the persons” — a real sentiment cannot arise from an “known *imaginary* interest” (EPM 5.13).

These examples are instances of what Francis Bacon called an “*experimentum crucis*” which allows us to reject the attempts to resolve moral distinctions into self-interest:

We have found instances, in which private interest was separate from public; in which it was even contrary: And yet we observed the moral sentiment to continue, notwithstanding this disjunction of interest. [...] Compelled by these instances, we must renounce the theory, which accounts for every moral sentiment by the principles of self-love. (EPM 5.17)

However, if we praise something because it is useful, it must be useful to someone, but to whom? Usefulness is only a tendency towards an end and the means cannot please where the ends do not. The ends of what we praise for being useful must please us, and this end is the happiness of society:

If usefulness, therefore, be a source of moral sentiment, and if this usefulness be not always considered with a reference to self; it follows, that every thing, which contributes to the happiness of society, recommends itself directly to our approbation and good will. Here is a principle, which accounts, in great part, for the origin of morality (EPM 5.17)

Everything that is presented to us is presented “with the view of human happiness or misery” and always excites in us “a sympathetic movement of pleasure or uneasiness” (EPM 5.23) and we must allow that “the interests of society are not, even on their own account, entirely indifferent to us” (EPM 5.17). Here, Hume argues that we can rest our enquiry and that “[i]t is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others. It is sufficient that this is experienced to be a principle in human nature” (EPM 5.17 n.19). Every science has general principles “beyond which we cannot hope to find any principle more general” and we must therefore stop the examination of causes; while Hume does not deny the possibility that the principle of humanity may be resolved into another more general principle, he finds it “not probable” and believes that, even if it were done, it would not belong to “the present subject”. In his enquiry into the principles of morals, he deems the principle of humanity a principle general enough to account for the origin of moral distinctions and concludes “Happy, if we can render all the consequences sufficiently plain and perspicuous!” (EPM 5.17 n.19)²⁰.

In order to show that the principle of humanity can be considered a principle in human nature, Hume frames several times the image of a very selfish person – as I have already mentioned above in section 1.2.1 – and shows that even she would still make place her preferences, at least in some cases, on the side of society. “No man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others” (EPM 5.17 n.19) and even though persons differ greatly in the “warmth” of their concerns for the interests of our species, no one “who wears a human

²⁰ Vitz (2004), in his defense of the coherence between the *Treatise* and the EPM, states that, in the latter, Hume is attempting to “trace up particular phenomena to, or ‘near to,’ general principles” and that he could have further reduced the principles of sympathy and humanity of the EPM to associations of ideas and impressions as he did in the *Treatise*, but decided not to because of the EPM’s aim to show greater warmth for virtue and to reach a wider audience. As I comment in subsection 1.3.3, that may indeed be possible and Hume’s decision not to do so may be related to the audience he chose for the book, but given the change of approach in the EPM, I would rather say that Hume *does not need to* reduce the principles of sympathy and humanity to more general explicative principles.

heart can remain indifferent when presented to different systems of conduct, some beneficial to society, some harmful:

Let us suppose such a person ever so selfish; let private interest have ingrossed ever so much his attention; yet in instances, where that is not concerned, he must unavoidably feel *some* propensity to the good of mankind, and make it an object of choice, if every thing else be equal. [...] We surely take into consideration the happiness of others, in weighing the several motives of action, and incline to the former, where no private regards draws us to seek our own promotion or advantage by the injury of our fellow-creatures. (EPM 5.39)

Those with warmer concerns for our species will often *act* out of this consideration to the happiness of others and even the most selfish person will, if given a choice, choose the good of society where her own interests are not concerned. From this Hume concludes that if the principles of humanity are capable of influencing our actions in some circumstances, they “must, at all times, have *some* authority over our sentiments” and make us feel, even if we don’t act out of this feeling, a preference towards what is useful to society (EPM 5.39). The principle of humanity or “the natural sentiment of benevolence”, that incapacity to be absolutely indifferent to the well-being of other persons, is sufficient to supply “the faint rudiments, at least, or outlines, of a *general* distinction between actions” (EPM 5.43), that is, a capacity to approve of what is useful to society and disapprove of what is not. And as a person feels a stronger humanity, her sentiments of praise and blame acquire “proportionable vigour”. In all persons, there is always *at least* a “cool approbation” which can be converted into warmer feelings:

Bring this virtue nearer, by our acquaintance or connexion with the persons, or even by an eloquent recital of the case; our hearts are immediately caught, our sympathy enlivened, and our cool approbation converted into the warmest sentiments of friendship and regard. These seem necessary and infallible consequences of the general principles of human nature, as discovered in common life and practice. (EPM 5.43)

After section 5, Hume moves beyond the social virtues, which are useful to society as a whole, towards other forms of personal merit which, he believes, “will bring a farther confirmation of the present theory” (EPM 5.47). Section 6 is dedicated to qualities useful only to its possessor, that is, qualities whose approbation can never be based on self-love, because the observer has no way of reaping advantages from them. And still, we praise the person for the natural talents and acquired abilities that promote her happiness — “The ideas of happiness, joy, triumph, prosperity, are connected with every circumstance of his character, and diffuse over our minds a pleasing sentiment of sympathy and humanity” (EPM 6.3). Again, Hume

follows his argument in favor of the non-selfish origins of our moral distinctions with an account of how even a selfish person will not fail to make these distinctions. Only the “more generous minds” are “prompted to seek zealously the good of others, and to have a real passion for their welfare”; in those with “narrow and ungenerous spirits”

this sympathy goes not beyond a slight feeling of the imagination, which serves only to excite sentiments of complacency or censure, and makes them apply to the object either honourable or dishonourable appellations. (EPM 6.3 n.26)

However, even a “gripping miser” is not absolutely indifferent to qualities useful only to their possessor and will “praise extremely *industry* and *frugality*” in others, because she knows well the good that those virtues produce to their possessor, and thus she feels “that species of happiness with a more lively sympathy” than he would feel if presented to other qualities. He may not “part with a shilling to make the fortune of the industrious man”, but she will not fail to sympathize with the industrious person and feel a sentiment of approbation (EPM 6.3 n.26).

This time, Hume goes a step further and tries to frame what would be a person *wholly* indifferent to others, who had “no manner of concern for his fellow-creatures”. This person, “if the prosperity of nations were laid on the one hand, and their ruin on the other, and he were desired to choose”, would stand “like the schoolman’s ass” incapable of deciding, since however great the pleasures or pains, they would be indifferent to him (EPM 6.4). Indeed, this person, “being absolutely unconcerned, either for the public good of a community or the private utility of others”, would be incapable of any moral distinction. This definitely is not the picture of a human being and “if instead of this fancied monster, we suppose a *man* to form a judgment in this case”, he will plainly choose the good of society or of the individual person he’s judging,

however cool his choice may be, if his heart be selfish, or if the persons interested be remote from him; there must still be a choice or distinction between what is useful, and what is pernicious. **Now this distinction is the same in all its parts, with the moral distinction**, whose foundation has been so often, and so much in vain, enquired after. (EPM 6.5, bold is mine)

That is, the moral distinction “is the same in all its parts” with the distinction between what is useful and what is pernicious: “The same endowments of the mind, in every circumstance, are agreeable to the sentiment of morals and to that of humanity” (EPM 6.5). Hume then adds a comment that will prove important in the discussion on the different interpretations of the second *Enquiry* below: these two sentiments, the sentiments of morals and the sentiment of humanity, seem to always be moved simultaneously and in the same degree; he says that “the same temper is susceptible of high degrees of the one sentiment and of the other; and the same

alteration in the objects, by their nearer approach or by connexions, enlivens the one and the other”. From this he concludes that, “by all rules of philosophy”, they are “originally the same” (EPM 6.5). The moral distinction, the sentiment of humanity and the distinction between what is useful and what is pernicious are the same. And I believe we may justly add that both the gripping miser’s cool approbation and the generous minds’ “real passion” for the well-being of others qualify as moral sentiment or, what is the same, as sentiment of humanity — they are just different degrees of a sentiment Hume believes no single person is incapable of feeling.

This perspective on the moral sentiment allows him to say, in the conclusion of the book, that his theory of the origin of the moral sentiment has the strength of not entering “into that vulgar dispute concerning the *degrees* of benevolence or self-love, which prevail in human nature”, a dispute that will likely remain unsolved, because the phenomena under consideration are “dispersed”, uncertain and “subject to many interpretations” (EPM 9.4). It is sufficient for his theory “that there is some benevolence, however small, infused into our bosom”:

Let these generous sentiments be supposed ever so weak; let them be insufficient to move even a hand or finger of our body; they must still direct the determinations of our mind, and where every thing else is equal, produce a cool preference of what is useful and serviceable to mankind, above what is pernicious and dangerous. A *moral distinction*, therefore, immediately arises; a general sentiment of blame and approbation; a tendency, however faint, to the objects of the one, and a proportionable aversion to those of the other. (EPM 9.4)

In that section, Hume turns again to the sentiment of humanity to show, after going through the four different sources of personal merit²¹, to derive from his survey what, in the end, are the circumstances “implied” by the notion of morals. First,

the notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it. (EPM 9.5)

Thus, “[a]varice, ambition, vanity, and all passions vulgarly, though improperly comprized under the denomination of *self-love*” (EPM 9.5) cannot be the sentiment implied by the notion of morals. Hume admits that those passions have the force, to move us, but they do not have

²¹ Those are qualities useful to society (the social virtues), useful to ourselves, agreeable to ourselves, and agreeable to others. Here, I have covered mostly the social virtues and mentioned briefly some points Hume makes in section 6, dedicated to the qualities useful to ourselves. I return to the qualities agreeable to the possessor in section 1.4 below, when I consider history and cultural variability. In the end of section 5, however, Hume notes that the progress of his argument (the qualities useful to the possessor, and agreeable to the possessor and agreeable to others, covered in sections 6-8) “will bring a farther confirmation of the present theory” (EPM 5.47), that is, he seems to believe the analysis of the social virtues is sufficient to afford the conclusion his enquiry yields and that the other sources of moral approbation serve the purpose of confirming what he concludes from the social virtues alone.

the proper direction: my ambition is not the same as another person's ambition and the same object may satisfy one of us but not the other, "[b]ut the humanity of one man is the humanity of every one; and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures" (EPM 9.6). As we have seen above, both the selfish and the more humane person will agree (at least when the former's interest is not concerned) in praising what is useful.

The notion of morals implies a second circumstance, namely, that this universally felt sentiment (i. e., felt equally in all or almost all persons) be also

universal and comprehensive as to extend to all mankind, and render the actions and conducts, even of the persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure, according as they agree or disagree with that rule of right which is established. (EPM 9.5)

When someone has me in high regard and esteem, that flatters my vanity, but this passion cannot be the sentiment implied by the notion of morals because my vanity is flattered (or displeased, if that person does not esteem me) only by those persons with whom I have some commerce and to whom my name is known — "there are few, who come within the sphere of this passion, or excite, on its account, either my affection or disgust" (EPM 9.7). The same works for the passions usually understood as "self-love": if someone does a good office that pleases my avarice, I approve of her, but my avarice does not reach every person since most persons in the world neither satisfy nor displease it. But when a "tyrannical, insolent, or barbarous behaviour" is represented to us, regardless of where and when the possessor of that character lived, our sentiment of humanity is displeased. No character can be completely indifferent to our sentiment of humanity and "every quality or action, of every human being, must, by this means, be ranked under some class or denomination, expressive of general censure or applause" (EPM 9.7).

"These two requisite circumstances belong alone to the sentiment of humanity here insisted on" (EPM 9.5). And exactly because this sentiment is attended by these two circumstances, it can have such a strong influence in life, "though springing from principles, which may appear, at first sight, somewhat small and delicate" (EPM 9.9). The public and social character of our sentiment of humanity allows it to overcome other passions which may be individually stronger, "yet being selfish and private [...], yield the dominion of our breast to those social and public principles" (EPM 9.9).

Before I turn to an explanation of why Hume believes the sentiment of humanity becomes strong due to its public and social character, let us return to sympathy. Sympathy as a

mechanism that communicates other persons' passions to us is still present in the second *Enquiry*. While Hume never delves into the kind of explanation he offered in the *Treatise* (T 2.1.11) about how we convert the idea of another person's passion to an impression of that passion in ourselves through that person's resemblance to ourselves, he still refers to sympathy as a principle that makes others' passions be conveyed to us. Thus, after urging us to adopt a "more public affection" (EPM 5.17) as the source of our approbation of the social virtues — which he names "humanity or fellow-feeling" (EPM 5.17 n.19) —, he spends a dozen small paragraphs offering instances of how others' passions are conveyed to us sympathetically: a virtuous person's relatives make us feel a "pleasing sympathy" when we regard their happiness (EPM 5.20); every moment of a play, if written by a skillful poet, "is communicated, as it were by magic, to the spectators" (EPM 5.26). Also, when discussing cheerfulness, he says that it "readily communicates" itself from the possessor to those around her and the "flame spreads through the whole circle" (EPM 7.1). The mechanism of sympathy is, in the EPM, still the source of many passions, from the moral sentiment to some rather dangerous passions: "[p]opular sedition, party zeal, a devoted obedience to factious leaders" cannot be accounted by self-interest or the unsocial passions alone and "are some of the most visible, though less laudable effects of this social sympathy" (EPM 5.35)²².

I have already mentioned in the previous section that Hume does not abandon the idea that our sympathy is affected by a range of circumstances that make the affections we feel sympathetically vary. We feel a "less lively sympathy" towards a statesman who served another country in a distant age than that we feel towards a statesman that served our own country in the present, even though we may admit that both of them have equal merit. Hume allows that "[s]ympathy [...] is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and sympathy with persons remote from us, much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous" (EPM 5.42). "The judgment here corrects", he says, "the inequalities of our internal emotions" in the same manner we correct the variations in size of an object presented to our sight at different distances (EPM 5.41). For the same reasons, we consider the "tendencies of actions and characters", not their "real accidental consequences" in our moral judgments. Thus, we pay a "greater regard" to a

²² Kate Abramson counts twenty-two passages where Hume employs the term "sympathy" (often more than once in a single passage). In fifteen of these passages sympathy refers to "our capacity to share in another's feeling" without any mention to sympathy "giving rise" to moral sentiments; in four others he places sympathy alone as the source of moral sentiment (Abramson, 2001, pp. 49-50). I provide here only some instances to illustrate that sympathy *qua* sharing in another's feeling in the EPM, especially non-moral feelings such as those we usually feel in the theater.

person whose social rank and fortune allows her to be useful to society, but we can separate character from fortune “by an easy and necessary effort of thought” and give that person the same general praise we give to another less fortunate but still useful person (EPM 5.41 n.24) and, in the end, we expect more from a person according to the “station” she possesses (EPM 5.38 n.22).

Yet, in the EPM, even that partiality which was deemed problematic in the *Treatise* and which made “our uncultivated ideas of morality” (T 3.2.2.8) a problem becomes something in favor of the happiness of society:

It is wisely ordained by nature, that private connexions should commonly prevail over universal views and considerations; otherwise our affections and actions would be dissipated and lost, for want of a proper limited object. Thus, a small benefit done to ourselves, or our near friends, excites more lively sentiments of love and approbation, than a great benefit done to a distant commonwealth (EPM 5.42 n.25)

When we consider the two statesmen, we estimate their merits according to the effects they bring upon the people living in their own countries (and thus feel a more “lively sympathy” towards the statesman of our own country), especially when his actions are not as advantageous to other countries, because his fellow citizens are the “objects, which lie nearest the eye”. Again, Hume considers it wisely ordained that persons attend to the good of their own community, because “the general interest of mankind is better promoted” in this way than “by any loose indeterminate views to the good of a species, whence no beneficial action could ever result, for want of a duly limited object, on which they could exert themselves” (EPM 5.38 n.22).

In conclusion, Hume seems to argue that every person is capable of feeling *at least* a “cool approbation” towards those mental qualities that promote the happiness of society or of their possessor. That distinction, the *moral* distinction, is the same as the sentiment of humanity and, as long as it fulfills the two circumstances implied by the notion of morals — that it be universally felt and that it include every person under its judgment —, it is still the sentiment of humanity. The griping miser fails to act out of this sentiment, but she is still capable of feeling it. Some persons, however, feel more than just a “cool approbation”: they feel a “real passion” towards the goods of others and act out of that sentiment, thus becoming a benevolent person. If we try to frame a person who would be indifferent to the moral distinction, that is, someone incapable of feeling even a cool approbation towards what promotes the happiness of humankind, we can only end up with a monster, not a person. Hume still acknowledges that the sympathetic process upon which this sentiment depends suffers from the same variations he

said it suffered from in the *Treatise*, but there is no talk of the necessity to *extend* our sympathy (nor our humanity, as I discuss in section 1.3.3 below), so that it can become a general point of view or a standard of virtue. Notwithstanding the absence of this argument, Hume has no problems affirming that we can simply discern those variabilities and make moral distinctions which should meet with nearly universal agreement. Where does the standard of virtue comes from in the second *Enquiry*? How do we reach agreement? Hume's answer in his mature moral philosophy seem to rely mostly on our capacity to understand moral language and on the capacity of conversation to form that standard we can agree on. This is the subject of the next subsection.

1.3.2 - Moral language, conversation and good judgment

As Jacqueline Taylor (2009) notes and as I have already hinted at above, Hume's strategy for establishing the foundations of morals in the EPM is different from that he employs in the *Treatise*. In the latter, he "invoked the principles of association and sympathy to give a causal story of how the moral sentiments, a particular kind of impression, originate in the mind" (p. 315). In the former, he focuses on "our actual experience of moral evaluation as a social process grounded in language and discourse" (p. 315). Sure, the principles of association make occasional appearances in the EPM²³, but Hume refrains from the technicalities they were accompanied with in the *Treatise*: for instance, in section 7, Hume says that all passions, even the painful ones, convey satisfaction when represented in poetry "from a mechanism of nature, not easy to be explained" (EPM 7.6) and continues with his argument without discussing how a painful passion, by association of ideas, can convey pleasant feelings. In the final paragraphs of section 1, Hume lays out his method, which begins with the analysis of the "complication of mental qualities" called, in common life, "personal merit", considering the attributes of the mind which make a person the object of esteem or contempt and implies praise or blame. Here, "[t]he very nature of language guides us almost infallibly in forming a judgment of this nature" and "[t]he only object of reasoning is to discover the circumstances on both sides [blamable or praiseworthy], which are common to these qualities" (EPM 1.10). In other words, the moral philosopher need only follow language to draw the "catalogues" of virtues and vices of a moral community, then his main task is to search what is common in each of the sides of the catalogue.

²³ cf. EPM 4.7, 5.17, 6.3, 6.33 n.34, for example.

Language can be a guide to the philosopher because its very presence refutes the skeptics who try to deny the existence of moral distinctions. In a passage we have already gone over above, Hume criticizes the skeptics for attempting to prove that morality is only an artifice of politicians desiring to tame the populace. This is impossible exactly because the very words the politicians would have to teach people — “*honourable and shameful, lovely and odious, noble and despicable*” — would be completely unintelligible if they weren’t the expressions of real sentiments “founded on the original constitution of the mind” (EPM 5.3). Common language (not the schoolman’s language) is an indication of the existence of sentiments which it is meant to express. Thus, if “private advantage” and “general affection for virtue” have a “very different feeling and influence on the mind” (EPM 5.9), the moral philosopher might as well expect this difference to be expressed in common language, and that people are able to recognize whether the other person meant to judge out of private advantage or out of general affection for virtue. Indeed, Hume says “we may attempt to bring over others to our sentiments, without endeavouring to convince them, that they reap any advantage from the actions which we recommend to their approbation” (EPM 5.10) and the person we are trying to convince will likely understand that we are trying to convince her of a moral matter, not of any advantage she could gain in joining our side of the discussion. Even the “gripping miser” can understand “honourable and dishonourable appellations” (EPM 6.3 n.26) because she, like every other human being, was necessarily born in a “family-society” and “trained up by their parents to some rule of conduct and behaviour” (EPM 5.16) and must have learned to distinguish the appellations that exist in common language (even if she failed to learn to behave according to them).

Reasoning and language are as important to the moral philosopher enquiring on the principles of morals as they are to every agent insofar as she makes moral distinctions, even if sentiment has the final word. Reason, as Annette Baier notices (2010), gains “considerable potency” (p. 219) in the EPM and, instead of the master-slave pair of the *Treatise*, we now have “cooperating partners, warm sentiment and cool reason” (p. 218)²⁴. In the first section, Hume introduces the reader to the arguments of those defending reason or sentiment as the foundation

²⁴ Hume does not attribute new capacities to reason in the EPM: it still only “judges either of *matter of fact* or of *relations*” (EPM A1.6). However, he seems to accept that there’s a great deal of matter of facts and relations to be reasoned about before we can arrive at a moral judgment — “[b]ut in moral deliberations, we must be acquainted, before-hand, with all the objects, and all their relations to each other; and from comparison of the whole, fix our choice or approbation” (EPM A1.11). The share of reason in morality continues to be enlarged in Hume’s later writings, to the point he can write, as Baier (2010, pp. 246-247) notes, that virtue “is nothing but a more enlarged and more cultivated reason” (Hume, 1983, vol. 1, p. 179).

of morals and recognizes that, notwithstanding “specious arguments” (EPM 1.5), there are many plausible arguments on both sides and that “*reason* and *sentiment* concur in almost all moral determinations” (EPM 1.9). The “final sentence”, he says advancing the conclusion of the *Enquiry*, probably depends on “some internal sense or feeling”, but moral beauty, like the finer arts, “demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind” (EPM 1.9). This reasoning takes the form of a cultivated capacity to judge, of learning how to correct our feelings “in order to feel the *proper* sentiment” (EPM 1.9, emphasis mine). Thus, in section five, Hume affirms that “the more we habituate ourselves to an accurate scrutiny of morals, the more delicate feeling do we acquire of the most minute distinctions between vice and virtue” (EPM 5.14), that is, there seems to be a virtue²⁵ of good judgment which can be cultivated by constant contact with and survey of virtue and vice. For instance, a “rude, untaught savage regulates chiefly his love and hatred by ideas of private utility and injury, and has but faint conceptions of a general rule or system of behaviour” (EPM 9.8 n.57); this savage hasn’t learned how to differentiate the distinct feelings of private advantage and general affection for virtue that we, “accustomed to society, and to more enlarged reflections” have learned to differentiate. Hence, when she stands against another person in a battle, she does not consider, as we do, that she would do the same and serve her country were she on the other side of the battle, and desires “the most extreme punishment and vengeance” to that enemy she can only evaluate in terms of her private utility²⁶.

As the quote above says, the cultivation of good judgment is related to society, and is usually a *collective* affair. In his discussion of the moral sentiment in the first Appendix, Hume affirms that good reasoning and judgment are markedly relevant in questions concerning justice, since some particular just acts may be pernicious even if the overall scheme is the very foundation of social life. In the case of justice

The various circumstances of society; the various interests, which may be proposed: These, on many occasions, are doubtful, and subject to great discussion and enquiry. The object of municipal laws is to fix all the questions with regard to justice: The debates of the civilians; the reflections of politicians; the precedents of history and public records, are all directed to the same purpose. And a very accurate *reason* or *judgment* is often requisite, to give the true determination, amidst such intricate doubts arising from obscure or opposite utilities. (EPM A1.2)

²⁵ Insofar as we define virtue as “*whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary*” (EPM A1.10).

²⁶ The existence of a virtue of good judgment in the EPM is a point made by Taylor (2002), which is integrated into a wider account of Hume’s moral philosophy in her latest book (cf. Taylor 2015, pp. 122-124, for good judgment in the EPM).

Good reasoning and judgment are decisive in the case of justice, but as public virtues used in public debate, by politicians and civilians and by studying historical precedents. Reasoning about justice is not just something one does within one's own mind, alone before deciding whether or not his using a horse or entering a house is lawful or not; before we can reason about whether an action is lawful or not, we have to decide in the public sphere (or at least be informed about what is decided) what are the particular laws that distribute property and create rights — a lot of public reasoning about the relation of particular laws to the “nature and situation of man” has to precede our individual deliberation about whether the action we are about to do is lawful or not. As we have seen in section 1.2.3 above, justice is only a general rule and human reason and judgment decide what particular laws better suit our society's customs, political constitution, climate, etc. Now we can add that these particular laws don't just display the presence of reason in justice, they are the product of the *collective* exercise of good reasoning and judgment about the social, political and natural contexts each human society finds itself embedded in.

Justice is not the only virtue where we reach a standard by collective deliberation. In the second *Enquiry*, the very corrections we make our sentiments go through so that we can reach a common standard of virtue are corrections we make *in order to* make ourselves intelligible to other moral agents and to receive their agreement and approbation. Further, we cultivate our good judgment not only in order to make us able to talk to others, but *by actually talking* to others. The “scrutiny” of virtue, like the deliberation regarding justice, is something done collectively.

If we return to the two paragraphs in which Hume discusses the corrections to sympathy, we can see that Hume's main emphasis is on conversation and how we can agree about the sentiments we express. Hence, our judgment corrects our internal sentiments as it corrects the perceptions we receive through our eyes because without these corrections “men could never think or talk steadily on any subject”, since their varying sentiments would “throw them into such a different and contrary lights and positions” (EPM 5.41). Without these corrections, we cannot talk to each other because we stand in different positions and see objects under different lights, but how do we know what a “corrected” sentiment is? Learning the “general preferences in society through conversation:

The more we converse with mankind, and the greater social intercourse we maintain, the more shall we be familiarized to these general preferences and distinctions, without which our conversation and discourse could scarcely be rendered intelligible to each other. (EPM 5.42)

We learn from conversation and social intercourse how our differing, partial sentiments stand in relation to each other's and by talking to each other we find what we have in common. From conversation, a "general language" is formed, "moulded on some general views" which "affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community" (EPM 5.42). Were we to remain in our particular points of view, "we could never converse" with others, but the "intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general unalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners" (EPM 5.42). The standard of virtue arises from the intercourse of sentiments, and we correct our sentiments towards this standard formed in society and affixed in general language. In conclusion, Hume writes:

And though the heart takes not part entirely with those general notions, nor regulates all its love and hatred, by the universal, abstract differences of vice and virtue, without regard to self, or the persons with whom we are more intimately connected; yet have these moral differences a considerable influence, and being sufficient, at least, for discourse, serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools. (EPM 5.42)

Thus, even though not all of us will actually *feel* sentiments in total conformity to the general notions of virtue and vice, we will recognize the epithets that express them and recognize that they were formed according to the sentiments and preferences of our community as a whole. In the conclusion of the book, Hume goes a step further and distinguish moral language from the language of self-love²⁷:

When a man denominates another his *enemy*, his *rival*, his *antagonist*, his *adversary*, he is understood to speak the **language of self-love**, and to express, sentiments, peculiar to himself, and arising from his particular circumstances and situation. But when he bestows on any man the epithets of *vicious* or *odious* or *depraved*, he then speaks **another language**, and expresses sentiments, in which, **he expects**, all his audience are to concur with him. He must here, therefore, depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others. (EPM 9.6, bold is mine)

The very words we use denote what kind of sentiment we are trying to communicate to others. Some words — enemy, rival, adversary — communicate to our audience that the person we are

²⁷ Taylor (2015, pp. 185-187) finds two other kinds of discourses in Hume's moral philosophy: the discourse of gallantry, which "functions to reduce any natural (so Hume thinks) inferiority of women or an inferiority constituted by the conventions requiring more modest, feminine behavior"; and the discourse of rank, which is the kind of discourse we adopt when we address the person according to her "rank" or "station" (what we would call "socioeconomic status") because, in society, it is generally expected to treat people according to their station in life or at least to the station her appearance seems to suggest, cf. EPM 6.30-34. Since my emphasis is on the moral sentiment in contrast to our private interest, I will not enter this discussion, but I do agree with Taylor on the existence of forms of discourse other than the two I am considering here.

talking about stands in a position in relation to myself which may not be the position she stands in relation to my audience. Thence if a British soldier talks to a French audience about her French counterpart in the Seven Years' War and says that person was her *enemy*, she does not (or should not) expect her audience to agree with her, but if she says that person is *odious* because she was cruel during the war, she does expect even her French audience to agree with her. In a note quoted above (9.8 n.57), Hume affirms it is expected that "rude, untaught savages" will not be able to make this distinction, but eighteenth-century French and British persons, accustomed to society and conversation, will identify what is being said and agree with it. If we want to speak in the moral register, we "must move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string, to which all mankind have an accord and symphony" (EPM 9.6) and if we succeed in doing so, we have "chosen this common point of view, and [have] touched the principle of humanity, in which every man, in some degree, concurs". Thus, the moral language is the language we speak when we *want* to find agreement and it is the language in which we *expect* to find agreement; the principle of humanity is the principle we *want* to move in others and *expect* to move in others when we express an appropriate moral judgment. And since language is an expression of common sentiment, we may say that the sentiment of humanity — the sentiment from which moral language is moulded — is the sentiment we *expect* and *want* others to feel when they evaluate our character or when they are confronted with our moral judgments.

There remains a question of whether we only speak moral language or really act according to it. So far, Hume has emphasized that every person will be able to recognize this language and express her moral judgments according to it "in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools". He brings forth "[a]nother spring of our constitution, that brings a great addition to moral sentiment", love of fame (EPM 9.10):

By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those, who approach and regard us. This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others; which is the surest guardian of every virtue. (EPM 9.10)

Because most of us, who have a "generous mind", have a concern for our reputations, we will consider moral language not as merely a language we speak for the convenience of making ourselves understood and of keeping the advantageous commerce society affords us, but as a standard of virtue genuinely expressive of the sentiments and preferences of society (which

includes our own sentiments and preferences) and according to which we evaluate our own actions. Thus, Cleanthes, Hume's perfect model of virtue (EPM 9.2), may not expect that every other person will find his "knowledge of both men and business" advantageous, because some persons will be his competitors in business and will lose due to his ability, but he likely expects that even his competitors will acknowledge his talents for business as something to be praised, because those competitors likely seek the same kind of talent themselves and can recognize that it is called a talent because it promotes the fortune of the person who possesses it. However, he probably *does* expect that everyone will recognize and praise the advantages society as whole receive from his regard to "honour and humanity" and the "*fair and kind* treatment" he dispenses to all. And he behaves that way, because he knows what the standard of virtue is, because he has a concern for his reputation and thus because he can survey his own character and ask whether he is acting according to the standard he learned in society and which expresses our — and his, if he is truly the model of virtue — sentiments: "He needs only enter into his own breast for a moment, and consider whether or not he should desire to have this or that quality ascribed to him" (EPM 1.10).

Therefore, it is possible to repeat what I said above not only referring to our moral judgments, but, at least insofar as those who care for their reputations are concerned, to our actions: the principle of humanity is the principle we *want* and *expect* to touch in others when we act according to the standard of virtue; the sentiment of humanity is the sentiment we *want* others to feel and *expect* them to feel when we act (or believe to be acting) in conformity with the "rule of right" (EPM 9.5) resulting from the standard of virtue we form through conversation and communication of our moral judgments. In our intercourse with others, when we either share our judgments or display our character, we discover what they feel and what we feel in reaction to their responses, thus allowing us to discover that "the humanity of one man is the humanity of every one; and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures" (EPM 9.6). Despite the moral sentiment being originated by "somewhat small and delicate" principles (EPM 9.9) and being not "so strong as vanity or ambition" (EPM 9.6), it is common to all and thence "it occurs more frequently in discourse, is cherished by society and conversation [...], [and is] thereby roused from that lethargy, into which they are probably lulled, in solitary and uncultivated nature" (EPM 9.9). The selfish and private passions, though stronger individually, "yield the dominion of our breast to those social and public principles" (EPM 9.9) and the "correspondent approbation of mankind" ends up "prop[ping] our tottering judgment". Hume

then concludes that “[h]ence is the most perfect morality with which we are acquainted: Here is displayed the force of many sympathies” (EPM 9.11).

1.3.3 - Interpretations on the moral sentiment

Before we advance to the final section of this chapter, I would like to go over some recent discussions about the second *Enquiry*. Most of the recent commentaries on the EPM focus on how it is related to the *Treatise*, that is, on whether we can find coherence between the two works. In general, those papers have taken the form of a search for concepts and arguments from the *Treatise* in the second *Enquiry*, which may not be the most productive way of approaching the EPM if we want to consider a stand-alone text, as it was when Hume published it. This is not what I attempted here and the first section of this chapter, dedicated exclusively to Book III of the *Treatise*, should be considered as a way of making some particularities of the EPM clearer when contrasted with Hume’s first work, especially the accounts of benevolence and justice. Indeed, we still lack an extensive interpretation of the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* as a stand-alone work. Nevertheless, these recent commentaries raise relevant questions, which I will try to relate to what I have presented here.

First, Abramson (2001), Vitz (2004) and Debes (2007a, 2007b) argue that Hume does not reject his theory of association and the consequent theory of sympathy he developed in the *Treatise* and which formed the basis of his investigation of morality in Book III of that work. As I noted above (see note 23 above), we can find some instances where associations of ideas are explicitly mentioned and, as Debes (2007a, pp. 326-327) notes, Hume did keep that theory in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and in *A Dissertation on the Passions*. However, he did not try to employ the same method of inquiring after the origins of our mental contents even if he could have (see note 20 above). This is clear in his discussion of justice in the EPM, where, as I have noted, there is no trace of the discussion we find in *Treatise* 3.2.1 on what could be the natural motive to justice. In the *Treatise*, the missing motive forces Hume to say that justice is artificial; in the EPM, even though Hume uses similar wording to talk of the conventional character of justice (compare EPM A3.7-8 and T 3.2.2.10), there is no need to discuss the missing motive to act justly.

Concerning the theory of sympathy, I agree with those authors that Hume still uses sympathy *qua* mechanism that makes us share another person’s feelings and that the moral sentiment still depends on our sympathizing with other persons and with those who feel the consequences of that person’s character, but I would not go so far as to claim, as Debes (2007b,

pp. 37-39) or Baier (2010, p. 238), that the sentiment of humanity is just a new label for the extensive sympathy of the *Treatise*. Debes (2007b) argues that the sentiment of humanity, like sympathy in the *Treatise*, has a narrow and an extensive version and that we *extend* our humanity so that we can judge from a common point of view. In the present chapter, I have argued that Hume begins his account affirming the existence of both particular and general benevolence; all persons are capable of feeling both, even if some people feel the latter only as a cool approbation. The griping miser may limit her benevolence (the virtue) to her family, but she is still capable of praising an unknown industrious person and she understands what other, more generous people, mean when they say someone is virtuous. The process upon which the sentiment of humanity or, what is the same, the moral sentiment depends is conversation rather than an extension of one's particular benevolence or humanity: the griping miser agrees with a generous person in their praise of industry, because both can sympathize with its possessor's capacity to make a figure in life, but the generous person may make her words deeds, and help the industrious person succeed, while the miser does not give a single penny. Further, the miser may not feel any desire to be benevolent (that is, to possess the virtue of benevolence, to do good to others), probably because she praises her fortune more than the reputation of being benevolent, while the more generous person surveys herself and desires to be what the epithet "benevolent", moulded according to general sentiments, describes.

On the other side of the debate, Ryan Hanley (2011, pp. 215-219) argues that Hume's account of sympathy in the EPM contrasts with the earlier account of the *Treatise* in that in the latter sympathy is related to all three forms of association of ideas — contiguity, resemblance, causality —, while in the former sympathy is associated mostly with a spectatorial process and therefore to contiguity; the sentiment of humanity, in contrast, is mostly related to resemblance, especially to the fact that we all share the same kinds of sentiments. If we look at EPM 5.18-29, we can indeed see that Hume describes a variety of sympathy-based but non-moral sentiments, such as those we feel in the theater, that depend on actually seeing other people and the sentiment of humanity differs from our partial feelings exactly because it can transpose distance in time and space. However, I am not quite sure if this distinction is necessary for us to make sense of the relation between sympathy and the sentiment of humanity. What distinguishes the sentiment of humanity from other non-moral sympathy-based sentiments is simply that their feeling is different, that we can express this in common language and make others understand what kind of feeling we are being actuated by and want to communicate to them. Other sympathetic sentiments do not imply this desire to find agreement: we don't expect

others to agree with us and feel the same joy we feel when a close friend of ours arrives in town, despite the fact that they may be infused with our joy and end up sharing it (partially, since they stand in a different relation to our friend).

Hanley also argues (pp. 221-222) that the sentiment humanity is a “cool preference” for the well-being of others. I would rather say, agreeing with Taylor (2015, p. 126) that the sentiment of humanity is *at least* a cool preference for the well-being of others: it is just a cool preference for the griping miser, but it is a warmer sentiment on more generous minds. For a generally accepted distinction between vice and virtue to arise, it is not necessary that all persons feel and display warmer sentiments: insofar as some people possessed of more generous inclinations who act out of them become an object of praise, by the cool approbation of others in her community, conversation and intercourse gradually enshrine this preference in common language and make everyone (or almost everyone) consider it as a model of virtue. For this reason, I have chosen to define the sentiment of humanity in terms of the agreement those who judge or act according to it expect to find, rather than in terms of what actually happens in one’s mind and how it differs from other feelings, such as, for instance, the joy we feel sympathetically when our favorite character is pleased in a play²⁸. In this sense, I not only stand opposite to those who consider the sentiment of humanity the same as the extended sympathy of the *Treatise*, but I also place my interpretation at some distance from those of Ryan Hanley and Jacqueline Taylor. It is the role of language and conversation in the making of the moral sentiment in the EPM that makes it different from that of the *Treatise*.

Overall, from what has been presented here, the greatest difference from the *Treatise* to the EPM is the absence in the latter of the *chronological* origins of morality. Independently of our agreement on whether the sentiment of humanity is just a new label to the extensive sympathy of the *Treatise*, there is no conjectural history in the EPM of how society was formed when justice was convened and — if we follow the “transformation” interpretation of Book III of the *Treatise* and say that justice is necessary to allow us to overcome our natural partiality— of how the conventions of justice are necessary to the stability of the standard of virtue. Hume began his account of the virtues in the *Treatise* with the artificial virtues because there seemed to be “some artifice” (Baier, 1991, pp. 177-178) even in the moral approbation of the natural

²⁸ Notwithstanding, we should not confuse the sentiment of humanity with the virtue of benevolence: when we approve of someone for being benevolent, we are approving of her benevolent motive (the character trait that makes her willing to actually do good to others) and not just of her inclination to approve of what is good to others.

virtues, and that artifice had to be explained before he reached the moral point of view. In the EPM, in contrast, Hume begins with benevolence, and it is our capacity to feel benevolent affections and to approve of what promotes other persons' happiness that ends up being the origins of the moral distinction and of the sentiment of humanity. There is no need to account for the rise of that capability because it is present everywhere and even when Hume does offer a discussion that *could* be read as a conjectural history of the rise of justice (EPM 3.21) it serves only to confirm that no conjectural history is needed, because his aim is to say that the rules that "preserve peace and order" are present in every community — from a single family to a modern society — and that their boundaries are as large as the kind of connections persons in each community establish with each other.

If we perceive, in the EPM, the apparent absence of a chronological origin of virtue, we may justly ask whether Hume means to say that a standard of virtue worthy that name is always be present in every society. While appellations denoting merit and demerit are always present, a shared moral sentiment may not be equally present, and we have already gone over some allusions to this question: the "rude, untaught savage" regulates his love and hatred by private utility rather than by a system of behavior (EPM 9.8 n.57); also, the sentiment of humanity will be strong where it is nurtured in conversation, but it may be lulled into lethargy in a "solitary and uncultivated nature" (EPM 9.9). However, the variations in morals in the EPM are set mostly in *historical* terms, rather than *conjectural* historical ones. The EPM, though it has a much stronger historical inclination than the *Treatise*, is not itself a historical enquiry, but as Baumstark (2008, ch. 2) notices, it was written in the same period Hume was writing his dissertation on the "Populousness of Ancient Nations", which would be published a year after the EPM in the *Political Discourses* (1752), and after Hume returned from his trip to the continent following General St. Clair in an embassy to Turin. During this period, Hume both experienced a unique opportunity to know other cultures and, when he returned to Ninewells, read extensively on ancient Roman and Greek societies, not only rereading some classics of literature and philosophy, but delving into books of geography, history, public orations, religion, etc he had not read before. A more historically inclined enquiry to discover why, in some societies, the sentiment of humanity "display[s] the force of many sympathies" and, in others, is "lulled" into lethargy only appears in the *Political Discourses*, but the EPM, likely because it was written at the same time, does contain, first, an open acknowledgement of historical variations in morals, and, second, some hints about how these variations may come for better or worse. These are the two topics of the final section of this chapter.

1.4 - HISTORY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE SECOND *ENQUIRY*

As I discussed above, although there are mentions in the EPM to a “natural” or “rude” state of society supposedly existent in the infancy of humankind, this work does not try to present an account of the development of such a society into more complex forms of sociability where a standard of virtue worthy of the name exists. Rather, in the EPM, Hume acknowledges that even complex, actually existent societies, such as eighteenth-century Britain or France and ancient Greece or Rome, display varying catalogues of praiseworthy and blameful personal qualities and thus have apparently different standards of virtue and vice. Hence, his task in the EPM is that of explaining if and how these variations fit within the theory he outlines throughout the book. The bulk of the discussions on moral variations is contained in “A Dialogue” which was annexed to the EPM since its first edition; here, the narrator, which upholds positions Hume defended in the main body of the book, discusses with Palamedes, a friend “who has run over, by study and travel, almost every region of the intellectual and material world” (EPM D1) and who takes what we could call a relativist stance, that is, who affirms the impossibility of reducing the observed historical variations to a single explicative principle.

Palamedes tells the narrator about the time he spent in a country called Fourli. In this country, he had the opportunity to live among the best company and to observe many customs and moral distinctions which stood frankly at odds with the customs deemed acceptable in the eighteenth century. The first difficulty he went through were the “double pains” he had to submit himself to, “first to learn the meaning of the terms in their language, and then to know the import of those terms, and the praise or blame attached to them”. He had believed that he would only have to learn, for instance, the word that described “doing good to others”, whose English correspondent would be “benevolence”²⁹. However, he soon discovered that he also had to learn whether the word correspondent to “benevolence” implied praise or blame, since he found out many epithets implying praise in English were considered “mortal affronts” in Fourli’s common language. Among other things, he also discovered that people praised

²⁹ As Taylor (2009, pp. 336-339) notes, Palamedes’ double pains pose a difficulty to Hume’s reliance on language and the assumption that it is moulded from shared sentiments. Palamedes’ need to learn what the words in Fourli’s language meant (in terms of praise and blame) shows not only that the words differ among societies, but also that the sentiments they express are different and may be at first incomprehensible to an outsider. I don’t believe, however, this poses an unsurmountable challenge to Hume’s argument (and neither does Taylor), especially when we consider how he relates the standard of morals to the necessity of experience of common life and knowledge of history, as I argue below.

Alcheic, his host, for killing one of his best friend, Usbek³⁰, and for hanging himself when he fell into a bad state of health; further, the people of Fourli had no problems in abandoning their children to death if they could not properly raise them and considered extramarital same-sex relationships perfectly acceptable (Alcheic’s wife, who was also his sister, was not scandalized by her husband’s habit of courting young students in the local university). The narrator reacts saying that “[s]uch barbarous and savage manners are not only incompatible with civilized, intelligent people, such as you said these were; but are scarcely compatible with human nature” (EPM D12), to which Palamedes answers that he was only describing customs and moral judgments widely accepted among ancient Athenians and Romans, though disguising the characters under fake names. The narrator accuses Palamedes of “impeaching” the ancients’ morals – the area of human knowledge where the moderns could not claim superiority – and claims that in so doing, he forgot that one should not “try a GREEK or ROMAN by the common law of ENGLAND”, that one should “[h]ear him defend himself by his own maxims; and then pronounce” (EPM D18). The same artifice, the narrator continues, could be used against the moderns, thus leading us to conclude, if we follow Palamedes’ arguments to their roots, that “[t]here are no manners so innocent or reasonable, but may be rendered odious or ridiculous, if measured by a standard, unknown to the persons” (EPM D19). This, indeed, is Palamedes’ conclusion: he “only meant to represent the uncertainty of all these judgments concerning characters, and to convince you, that fashion, vogue, custom, and law, were the chief foundation of all moral determinations” (EPM D25); if among civilized nations such as the French and the Athenians there can prevail such wide differences, what differences could we expect between them and barbarians? “How shall we pretend to fix a standard for judgments of this nature?”

The narrator’s answer to Palamedes extends through the next 26 paragraphs. His answer begins

By tracing matters [...] a little higher, and examining the first principles, which each nation establishes of blame or censure. The RHINE flows north, the RHONE south; yet both spring from the *same* mountain, and are also actuated, in their opposite directions,

³⁰ Hume’s choice of names reveals an implicit mention to Montesquieu: Usbek is the name of the main character of the latter’s *Lettres Persanes*, which, like Palamedes in “A Dialogue”, plays the role of making others aware of cultural and moral variations by comparing different societies and their customs and mores. It is worth noting that, among the commentators mentioned in this chapter, those who claim the EPM differs significantly in *content* from the *Treatise* often allude to the explicit and implicit references to Montesquieu (e.g., Harris (2015, pp. 251-252), Baumstark (2008, pp. 113-115) or to the importance of “A Dialogue” within the EPM (e.g., Taylor (2015, pp. 163-166)), while those who see the EPM as coherent with arguments offered in the *Treatise* (and thus differing chiefly in terms of presentation) usually don’t mention either the appearance of Montesquieu or any relevance of “A Dialogue” (e.g., Abramson (2001), Vitz (2004), Debes (2007a, 2007b)).

by the *same* principle of gravity. The different inclination, in which they run, cause all the difference of their courses. (EPM D26)

In tracing matters higher, the narrator thus distinguishes two issues that need to be addressed in his metaphor: what is the “principle of gravity”, which actuates on both Rhone and Rhine, and what are the “different inclinations” in which the principle of gravity actuates and which combined make Rhone and Rhine actual rivers. He runs over many of the moral variations highlighted by Palamedes in order to show how they can be resolved into the combination of a general point of agreement on the one side and a particular set of customs on the other side, which redirects this agreement towards a specific social expression of it: thus, for instance, the narrator admits that “GREEK loves” arise from the custom of practicing exercises and was recommended among Greek men as sources of “friendship, sympathy, mutual attachment, and fidelity”, qualities considered praiseworthy in all societies, however blamable we may consider the particular expression of it the Greeks happened to adhere to. The same argument can be applied to other variations: tyrannicide could be understood as a form of recovering public liberty, something valued everywhere, and infanticide was deemed an expression of parental love (refusing to let one’s children live a miserable life), another affection universally approved of. The narrator thus concludes that “the principles upon which men reason in morals are always the same”, even though the conclusions they reach may be different. These principles are those Hume identifies throughout the main body of the EPM:

It appears, that there never was any quality recommended by any one, as a virtue or moral excellence, but on account of its being *useful*, or *agreeable* to a man *himself*, or to *others*. For what other reason can ever be assigned for praise or approbation? Or where would be the sense of extolling a *good* character or action, which, at the same time, is allowed to be *good for nothing*? All the differences, therefore, in morals, may be reduced to this general foundation, and may be accounted for by the different views, which people take of these circumstances. (EPM D37)

Thus, the principle of gravity in the narrator’s metaphor — the principle which actuates universally — is our approbation of qualities useful or agreeable, to ourselves or to others. In every society, these four forms of esteem and approbation guide moral distinctions and mould the general language that prevails.

However, as the narrator admits, the prevalence of these principles does not lead to uniformity because of how they interact with the “circumstances”. He identifies two ways in which they interact with the principles of approbation: first, some “peculiar circumstances of things render one moral quality more useful than others, and give it a peculiar preference” (EPM D38). Hence, courage is more highly praised where nations are in constant war than where

peace prevails and “magnanimity, greatness of mind, disdain of slavery, inflexible rigour and integrity” (EPM D40) also tend to promote one’s “safety and advancement” in these situations, since, in an environment of war, one’s dignity must be constantly reaffirmed if one is not to be subjugated by one’s enemies. Indeed, the narrator argues, “as the difference between war and peace is the greatest that arises among nations and public societies, it produces also the greatest variations in moral sentiment, and diversifies the most our ideas of virtue and personal merit” (EPM D39)³¹. Thus, we may say that particular circumstances alter the “parameters” under which our four criteria of approbation work, defining whether some particular quality is useful or not³² in the circumstances a society finds itself embedded.

Beyond the circumstances that may make some particular qualities more useful, there’s also a choice between utility and agreeableness and between self-regarding and more social qualities. One of these two characteristics of mental qualities is usually sacrificed in order to obtain the other and we “cannot pretend to reach alike every kind of advantage” (EPM D47). Our preference for useful or agreeable, for self-regarding or more social qualities is influenced by prevailing customs:

Different customs have also some influence as well as different utilities; and by giving an early bias to the mind, may produce a superior propensity either to the useful or the agreeable qualities; to those which regard self, or those which extend to society. These four sources of moral sentiment still subsist; but particular accidents may, at one time, make any one of them flow with greater abundance than at another. (EPM D42)

The narrator illustrates his point with references to the treatment of women: the Greeks had the most reserved manners, restricting a man’s commerce with women, even of his own family, to a minimum. In contrast, women “enter into all transactions and all management of church and state” in France (EPM D46), and a much freer commerce takes place between the sexes, often leading to “intrigues and gallantry” (EPM D47). The Romans and the English seemed to adhere to a medium between the jealousy of the Greek and the gallantry of the French (EPM D48). These variations could also be extended to the male sex: where men live closer to each other, agreeableness is often deemed more important and qualities such as delicacy of taste and politeness more exalted; where men live apart from each other, utility is deemed more important, and prudence and simplicity of manners are taken in the highest esteem. “These”,

³¹ As we shall see in the next chapter, the circumstance of war and peace is a relevant theme in Hume’s political economy and the way he deals with it in the *Political Discourses* helps clear the apparent impasse concerning moral variations we find in “A Dialogue”.

³² The narrator does not refer to agreeable qualities in this part (EPM D38-41) of his answer to Palamedes.

the narrator concludes, “are the *natural* effects of such customs” and reveal that chance “has a great influence on national manners” and that some events in society “are not to be accounted for by general rules” (EPM D50). In other words, it seems we cannot go much further in our enquiry than recognizing that customs exist and that they influence the particular shape moral distinctions take in particular societies. The “different inclinations” a river runs through, comprised by the particular circumstances and the prevailing customs, are simply there to lead the four sources of approbation towards a particular form of social expression.

So far, it seems the narrator has managed to explain the variations, but has not managed to give his friend a way of “fixing a standard for judgments of this [moral] nature” (EPM D25), if any single standard is possible at all. In the final part of his argument, he develops the conclusion that variation is the natural effect of customs into two different albeit related discussions. First, he argues that custom affects chiefly young men, “who can aspire to the agreeable qualities, and may attempt to please” and thus “[t]he MANNER, the ORNAMENT, the GRACES, which succeed in this shape, are more arbitrary and casual”; in more mature men, there prevails the esteem for “the other more solid and useful qualities of the human mind” such as “integrity, humanity, ability, [and] knowledge” (EPM D51). In other words, the narrator attributes the variations of custom chiefly to the preference for agreeableness, which tends to diminish as people become more mature and discover the more solid merit of useful qualities (young Greeks and Englishmen will prefer different agreeable objects, but their more mature counterparts will be inclined to more similar, useful objects).

Second, the narrator distinguishes whatever natural effects variations of custom may produce from “artificial lives”. After listening to the narrator’s answer, Palamedes begs him to find a standard of morals that can contain the admiration both Pascal and Diogenes met with in their respective ages. Diogenes, as Palamedes says, made the utmost efforts to display his independence and superiority, to free himself from unnecessary wants and superstitions and took every opportunity to rail at his friends for not joining him. Pascal, in contrast, made profession of humility and abasement, refused to indulge in any kind of pleasure, however innocent, and submitted to the “most ridiculous superstitions” in faith and practice. Yet, both of them were considered “models of imitation” in their respective ages. To Palamedes’ last challenge, the narrator answers:

An experiment, said I, which succeeds in the air, will not always succeed in a vacuum. When men depart from the maxims of common reason, and affect these *artificial* lives, as you call them, no one can answer for what will please or displease them. They are in a different element from the rest of mankind; and the natural principles of their

mind play not with same regularity, as if left to themselves, free from the illusions of religious superstition or philosophical enthusiasm. (EPM D57).

In other words, the principles the narrator advocates are not supposed to be principles that can account for what goes beyond common life and the natural effects of the variations of custom and circumstances. The artificial lives are driven by principles which are incapable of moving a whole society, or at least the narrator seems to have some confidence that they will not; even though these unnatural principles may be objects of admiration, it seems not many admirers of Pascal would be willing to live according to the principles their object of admiration lives by.

Hence, “A Dialogue” concludes with two remarks that limit what the narrator’s positions must be capable of accounting for. A standard of virtue need not account for either the arbitrary and casual caprices of youth or the follies of those seized by religious superstition or philosophical enthusiasm: the narrator’s standard of virtue is a standard of mature, experienced persons who may disagree on the particular expression they give to the more solid and useful qualities, but who would surely understand that their disagreement on these particularities should not mean a disagreement on the general sentiment they are expressing. Further, they will understand that their disagreement are historical products, that is, caused by the particular situation they happened to lived in, not products of the follies of individual men (often created by their enthusiasm and superstition). The conversation between a man who has run over almost every region of the material and intellectual world and an equally experienced narrator (given his vast use of classical and modern references) thus reaches the conclusion that the standard of virtue, if any exists beyond the wide differences of custom and moral distinctions observed throughout history, seemingly requires that those who judge from its standpoint be knowledgeable, like the two parties in the dialogue, about common life and the diverse forms it took in different ages and countries. But how does this requirement of historical knowledge and common experience relates to the main body of the EPM or, in other words, how does “A Dialogue” stands in relation to the book as a whole?

There seems to be little doubt that the narrator of “A Dialogue” defends ideas Hume argues for throughout the book. But how does Palamedes or the uncertainty his arguments raise stand in relation to the book as a whole? Baumstark (2008, pp. 114-115) argues that “A Dialogue” Hume makes his entrance in the literary genre that intends to make European readers aware of the “otherness” of other nations. However, Hume goes further than his predecessors in the genre, such as Michel de Montaigne or Montesquieu, and instead of just opposing European culture to the unfamiliar societies of Asia or the Americas, he transforms the

Europeans' own past into an unfamiliar society. Palamedes' artifice of changing the names of places and persons in his account of the time he spent in Fourli thus serves the purpose of detaching us from our own past and of making us realize that the past is "a foreign country where they do things differently from us" (p. 115). In Baumstark's conclusion, "Hume, the moral philosopher, thus requires the expertise of the historian in order to explain the origins of customs and moral standards" (p. 113) and "A Dialogue" plays the role of illustrating Hume's "sceptical point about the relativity of manners, mores, and standards of morals" (p. 114), a relativity that exists even between us and our past. While I do agree with Baumstark on Hume's use of Palamedes as a way to make us realize the "otherness" of our own past, my presentation of the narrator's final argument does not fit in his claim that "A Dialogue" has a skeptical conclusion. Indeed, throughout this chapter I have been emphasizing Hume's rejection of the "skeptics", Mandevillian or Hobbesian, and I have already noticed two remarks in the closing paragraphs of "A Dialogue" that point to a non-relativist or skeptical position.

James Harris (2015, pp. 251-253), takes a similar, though less radical line: "A Dialogue" can be read as "a conversation between Hume and himself" over the question of whether "a system of morality is always particular to a single time and place" (p. 252); it is a product of Hume's "adventuring in both space and time", by traveling or reading during the couple of years before the publication of the EPM. In this period of change, Hume's direct contact with other cultures, his readings of the classics and, most importantly his reading of Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Lois* appear "to have changed Hume's sense of how much could be achieved by an experimental science of human nature in general" (p. 252). This science seemed not to yield any more "complete confidence that 'human nature' is a single thing, to be characterized by means of a combination of introspection and observation of the world around one" and it had to be supplemented with "more particular and localized histories of morals and manners" (p. 252). Harris further notices that the style of composition of the EPM points to a different engagement with the readers: the abundance of references to Greek, Roman, and French authors, sometimes quoted without translation, shows that Hume "addressed his readers as persons of taste and sophistication, who had read widely in history and literature in several languages" (p. 263). Further, Hume's "rhetoric of experimentalism", that is, the EPM's insistence that it is only surveying common language and discovering what is common among the qualities that are considered meritorious and among those considered blamable, made the reader "an ally of the new community of moral scientists at work on the project of clearing away the errors of dogmatic metaphysicians" (p. 264). In Harris' conclusion, the EPM

spoke to the reader in the reader's own idiom, made use of the reading that the reader could be supposed to have done, and at the same time enlisted the reader into new philosophical movements, into the project of an inductive science of the mind, and into the sophisticated historicism of Montesquieu. (Harris, 2015, p. 264)

Putting Harris' conclusion in other words, the EPM engages the reader assuming she is the sophisticated, experienced moral evaluator of the end of "A Dialogue", who prefers the solid qualities of the riper years to the capriciousness of youth, who can understand why her ancient counterpart's manners are not so distant (in terms of the principles upon which they are founded) from his own, even if they are expressed in historically and regionally localized terms.

"A Dialogue" is a fairly neutral account of moral variation throughout history. Apart from the artificial lives of Pascal and Diogenes, there is nothing one cannot understand as the product of the interaction between the four sources of approbation and the particular context a society finds itself embedded³³. French and Greek, English and Roman, most cultural variations receive their share of critique as well as of understanding. However, we can find in the main body of the book, especially in section 7, some hints showing that Hume sees some qualities praised in particular societies as incompatible with others. Notably, he seems to regard some qualities approved of because of their sublimity as incompatible with the "more solid" qualities and the sentiment of humanity that approves of them.

Section 7 is dedicated to qualities immediately agreeable to ourselves, that is, qualities we approve of without their having any utility towards a further good, social or individual (EPM 7.2). Hume focuses on three virtues, all of them usually recognized as classical virtues: greatness of mind, courage, and philosophical tranquility. We approve of these qualities because they make us feel sublime sentiments of elevation and dignity, such as in the "instance of true sublime" in the tragedy of Medea who answered, when asked by her confident whom she could count, "myself, I say, and it is enough" (EPM 7.7)³⁴. However, because those qualities are approved of without any reflection — courage, for instance, "catches the eye, engages the

³³ Hume rails against the monkish virtues in the conclusion of the book as well: "Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they every where rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor encrease his power of self-enjoyment?" (EPM 9.3)

³⁴ See Taylor (2015, ch. 5) for a discussion on dignity and the virtue of proper pride in Hume's moral philosophy. As Taylor argues, greatness of mind or proper pride, that is, recognizing one's worth and not submitting to others, has an important role in Hume's social theory. It is related, for instance, to Hume's argument that everyone who can make one's resentment felt must be included in justice: making one's resentment felt is claiming what one believes is one's rights and asserting one's belonging to the community that recognizes those rights.

affections, and diffuses, by sympathy, a like sublimity of sentiment over every spectator” (EPM 7.11) —, they can sometimes trump other virtues, most notably the social virtues that maintain peace in society. Thus, Alexander, the Great’s greatness of mind led him to feel “such a dignity and right of empire, that he could not believe it possible, that any one would refuse to obey him” and “Wherever he found men, he fancied he should find subjects” (EPM 7.6).

In the same fashion, Hume admits that even though courage has, beyond utility to society and to the possessor, a “peculiar lustre” derived “from that noble elevation inseparable from it” and presents “a sublimity and daring confidence” whenever displayed. However, when carried beyond its proper bounds, courage or martial bravery can also destroy the sentiments of humanity, “a virtue surely much more useful and engaging” (EPM 7.14). The martial temper of the Romans made them simply call courage “virtue” (EPM 7.13) and it was the foundation of the Scythians’ custom of scalping their enemies and using their skins as towels (EPM 7.14). Even the Athenians, who could boast about the invention of agriculture or of the laws, preferred to boast about their war feats: “Lysias, Thucydides, Plato, and Isocrates discover, all of them, the same partiality; which though condemned by calm reason and reflection, appears so natural in the mind of man” (EPM 7.25). To make courage the predominant excellence is, Hume argues, common “among all uncultivated nations, who have not, as yet, had full experience of the advantages attending beneficence, justice, and the social virtues” (EPM 7.15).

Thus, while qualities such as magnanimity and courage may still be considered virtues, since they are immediately agreeable to their possessors (and may be also useful to their possessors or to society as a whole), their capacity to go beyond adequate limits and encroach upon the dominion of the social virtues and thus destabilize peace and order places them in contrast with the virtues approved of because of their utility to society, which, in Taylor’s (2015, p. 152) words, makes “[m]embers of the modern moral community, in contrast, take a shared perspective and employ an impartial moral vocabulary so that they can make themselves intelligible to one another”. In “A Dialogue”, the circumstance of war and peace is a crucial circumstance in explaining the variations of morals and manners we discover in history (EPM D39). However, there is another circumstance which may be perhaps even more relevant: the constitution of government. I have already mentioned above Hume’s explicit reference to Montesquieu’s *De l’Esprit des Lois*, where he says that particular laws determining property must have “constant reference” to a diversity of circumstances, including “the constitution of government, the manners, the climate, the religion, the commerce” (EPM 3.34). In a similar

fashion, Hume concludes section 6, dedicated to qualities useful to the possessor, allowing that the constitution of government has a great influence in determining what is useful:

Where birth is respected, unactive, spiritless minds remain in haughty indolence, and dream of nothing but pedigrees and genealogies: The generous and ambitious seek honour and authority and reputation and favour. Where riches are the chief idol, corruption, venality, rapine prevail: Arts, manufactures, commerce, agriculture flourish. The former prejudice, being favourable to military virtue, is more suited to monarchies. The latter, being the chief spur to industry, agrees better with a republican government. And we accordingly find, that each of these forms of government, by varying the *utility* of those customs, has commonly a proportionable effect on the sentiments of mankind. (EPM 6.35)

And finally, in section 7, Hume also recognizes the role of government in modern societies' rejection of the ancient virtues: the ancients heroes of philosophy, patriotism and war have "a grandeur and force of sentiment, which astonishes our narrow souls, and is rashly rejected as extravagant and supernatural" mostly because the moderns have attained "in the administration of government" a "degree of humanity, clemency, order, tranquility, and other social virtues" that would appear as "romantic and incredible" to an ancient observer.

In conclusion, even though the narrator of "A Dialogue" affirms that our attribution of merit in the riper years usually inclines to the more solid qualities, regardless of whether this maturity comes in 4th-century BC Athens or in eighteenth-century Edinburgh, it seems Hume does not consider those societies equally inclined to the solid social virtues that maintain peace and order in society. The constitution of government, the wealth or poverty, peace or war alter fundamentally some of our moral preferences and some societies may not nurture the sentiment of humanity enough or may even nurture sentiments that destroy it. If we are educated to either be great or submit to greatness, we may not be able to reach the kind of moral standard Hume described in the conclusion of the book, a standard represented in common language and which contains the force of multiple sympathies because it touches a sentiment that is common among all humankind, the very sentiment that is "implied" by the notion of morals. Hume's apparent adoption of a "sophisticated historicism" from Montesquieu in "A Dialogue" does not mean an absolute relativism. It only means that a good moral judge must be aware of historical variations in morals and manners and must be able to discern whence came those variations.

1.5 - CONCLUSION

In the guise of a conclusion, I recapitulate what has been presented in this chapter. I first briefly presented moral evaluation in the *Treatise*, focusing on the moral approbation of justice.

Hume's account leads part of the commentators to dismiss much of the discussion about the "motive to justice" as not very relevant, either because his theory is, in the end, an error theory or because what matters is simply that we approve of justice, regardless of motives. Such interpretations would lead us to ask why he bothers to discuss the motive to justice we approve of as extensively as he does, if it doesn't matter in the end. The other interpretation suggests that Hume is giving a processual account of the origin of morality, that there is some sort of development by which we learn to approve of character traits from a common point of view. As I noted, even though this account supposes time, it is not a historical account, it is rather a conjectural historical account — a rational reconstruction of what persons in a "natural" state would have done in the infancy of humankind. In section 1.2, I argued that the EPM relies on a different argument: instead of trying to discover how we came to the "civilized" state whence we can judge according to a standard of virtue, Hume begins his argument emphasizing that all persons, however selfish, will choose the good of others, at least when their own good is not concerned. In section 1.3, I argued that this capacity to benevolent affections, however cool it may be, is sufficient to create a moral distinction, that is, a preference for what is useful over what is not, which Hume deems equivalent to our sentiment of humanity. In the griping miser, this sentiment takes the form of a "cool approbation", while it may be a real, warmer passion in more generous minds. Griping misers and generous minds, when they converse and have commerce with each other in society, will form a standard of virtue, which is expressed in common language: the appellations we use denote merit or demerit and most of us can understand what is meant when another person calls someone "vicious" and distinguish it from "enemy". This standard of virtue (or the "notion of morals") exists because the sentiment which it touches, the sentiment of humanity, is both universally felt and, when felt, refers to all persons. Because of this universal presence, when we act or morally judge a person, we expect our action or judgment to touch other spectators' sentiment of humanity. A key difference between the EPM and the *Treatise* — which I tried to comprehend in my definition of the sentiment of humanity as that which we *expect* and *want* others to feel when we act or judge morally another person — is that that we look not to the agent's motives (or to our own, when we are the agent displaying them), but to how they appear to others. Because most persons have a concern for their reputations, this turns reflexively onto oneself as a form of self-surveying: if I believe I am acting morally, I expect others to feel some specific sentiment of approbation. This process depends chiefly on social intercourse and conversation, because one depends on the feedback of others to learn about one's own judgments and actions. Since we are aware of

the limitations of our sentiments, there's in the EPM the presence of a virtue of good judgment: the good moral judge is someone who can distinguish characters which truly incline to the good of society; she has to be aware of our natural partiality and how it sometimes affects our judgments (or the judgments of those judging us, so she also has to learn when to disregard a judgment as a matter of private advantage); she has to know what appellations are meant to represent laudable and blamable actions and whether these appellations are intended to mean a moral judgment or just a judgment from a private standpoint. Not all of us will be equal moral judges, but all of us, the griping miser included, *can* become good moral judges if we keep continuous contact with others' sentiments and scrutinize constantly theirs and our own sentiments. Usually, a good moral judge will also be a good person, because of our concern for reputation, but what matters most to Hume is that in the pulpit, in the theater or in the schools we can use and identify moral discourse.

In the final section of the chapter (1.4), I first discussed how "A Dialogue" presents a challenge to the argument found in the main body of the book and how Hume (or the narrator of "A Dialogue") attempts to answer the challenge. Hume's argument in the nine sections and four appendixes is that common language expresses general sentiments and that we can agree on moral matters with other persons because we share the same sentiment of humanity. However, "A Dialogue" opens with Palamedes affirming that the sentiments from which the language of Fourli was molded were different from those which molded his own language. The recognition that there can be different *sentiments* from which common moral discourse is molded undermines the book's claim that through acquaintance with common language and conversation we can discern a standard of virtue. The narrator's answer that, in the end, moral approbation still boils down to utility and agreeableness, to ourselves and others, does not solve, by itself, the problem Palamedes' arguments pose against the existence of a single, unified standard of virtue. That is why the narrator has to go beyond that answer and offer something else to his friend. First, he accepts that there is indeed variation in morals and manners but limits the scope of variations to the "natural effects" of customs, thus excluding what he calls "artificial lives", such as the life of Pascal. The French philosopher's principles are not natural in the sense that they are not commonly observed in history and that, for most people, it would be utterly impossible to live according to them, for they would require a constant effort to go against the grain of one's own inclinations towards pleasure, conversation, etc. Second, the narrator argues that mature and experienced persons, even if they lived in different ages and societies, will gravitate towards more "solid" forms of merit, such as humanity, integrity,

knowledge, and ability, even if the specific forms of expression of these qualities vary according to the circumstances of each society (for instance, good memory was an ability praised in the ancient world, but not so much in modern societies, EPM 6.19).

While the first limitation to the observed historical variations of morals and manners works only to exclude what Hume considers some fringe, lopsided attributions of merit, the second observation begins to build a way to distinguish among societies and their specific expressions of the mature form of merit. Hume never developed an extensive argument on how to resolve the question of moral variations in history: as Harris (2015, p. 252) notes, Hume did not seek after the “localized histories of morals” his science of human nature depended on to succeed and left “the development of Montesquieu’s insight to friends such as Kames, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and John Millar”. However, as I argued above, there are elements of these “histories” in the EPM and in other works Hume wrote after the EPM. In his enquiry on morals, especially in section 7, Hume begins to delineate a “comparative study” of ancient and modern morals and manners, pointing to the superiority of the latter: the ancient’s sublime virtues compared unfavorably to the modern’s humanity and justice, because the former had a tendency of making the possessor of the sublime virtues go beyond the rules of equity and humanity, treating others as either subjects or enemies and thus limiting the potential of forming a moral community based on a sentiment that is universally felt and applies universally.

I observed in the final paragraphs of section 1.4, that some practices and institutions seem to affect a society’s preference for humanity or for other forms of merit, such as the sublime virtues, namely, war and peace, wealth and poverty, and the constitution of government. They appear as influencing all forms of virtue: they tilt the utilities of qualities useful to the possessor alone, they are relevant to the particular laws that regulate justice and they place limits on the sublime virtues. While Hume did not develop the “localized histories” in an explicitly moral argument, we find in some of his essays, most notably in the *Political Discourses*, which was written in the same period as the EPM, extensive comparative discussions of ancient and modern manners and how they influenced by the circumstances of war and peace and the constitution of government. Thus, the thread that is apparently left loose in the EPM is developed elsewhere, even if it was not the main purpose of the *Political Discourses* to do so. In the next chapter, we turn to Hume’s essays on political economy in order to find how he deals with the differences in manners between ancients and moderns, how they are influenced by these societies’ governments and inclinations to war or peace. There we will find that Hume’s admission of historical variations is not as neutral as “A Dialogue” may

lead a reader to conclude and that he stands on the side of modern commercial societies' capacity to foster the sentiment of humanity.

CHAPTER 2 – THE *POLITICAL DISCOURSES* AND THE RISE OF HUMANITY

INTRODUCTION

Commerce and trade are themes that appear in most, if not all, of Hume's writings. If we accept the established dating of his *memoranda* as pre-*Treatise* notes (though Sakamoto, 2011, argues convincingly that the *memoranda* were more likely written in the late 1740s), the numerous notes about modern and ancient authors discussing trade and commerce show that Hume was interested in these topics as early as his twenties. Even if we accept Sakamoto's (2011) dating, the *Treatise*, though not discussing economic themes directly as I show below, often discusses examples that resemble closely the sociability of a "commercial society". And as early as in the first volume of the *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741), commerce and other economic matters become central to Hume's arguments: in "Of Liberty and Despotism"³⁵, Hume puts a flourishing commerce as one of the elements that were making republican and monarchical governments similar in the modern age. He notices, however, that until a quite recent period, commerce was not deemed very relevant:

Trade was never esteemed an affair of state till the last century; and there scarcely is any ancient writer on politics, who has made mention of it. Even the ITALIANS have kept a profound silence with regard to it, though it has now engaged the chief attention, as well of ministers of state, as of speculative reasoners. The great opulence, grandeur, and military achievements of the two maritime powers [England and Holland] seem first to have instructed mankind in the importance of an extensive commerce. (E 88-89)

The "Italians", Machiavelli included, missed the importance of commerce perhaps because they "lived in too early an age of the world" (E 88) to see how it would become the source not only of the opulence, grandeur and military might of the great European powers, but also of changes in manners, morality and politics. And though Hume was willing to admit that the world was perhaps still too young in the 1740s to establish many political truths, the time that separated his writings from those of Machiavelli had at least established that a discussion of commerce and economic matters in general could not be avoided if one wished to understand almost every other aspect of human sociability.

³⁵ Hume changed the title of this essay to "Of Civil Liberty" in 1758.

From 1741 until the late 1740s, commerce became a steady of object of Hume's writings – it appears prominently “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” (1742) and “Of National Characters, to name only a couple of essays, besides the EPM as we have seen in the previous chapter –, but only in the *Political Discourses* he offered a complete picture of the modern societies that had commerce and manufacturing as their defining practices, analyzing the economic phenomena that characterize them – interest rates, the circulation of money, etc. – and their political, social and moral consequences. In the *Discourses*, though the essays are divided in a topical fashion, with each essay dealing with a particular phenomenon, Hume provides an extensive picture of the “spirit of the age” (E 271) that was becoming widespread in Europe during the couple of centuries before its publication. However, more than just a picture of commercial societies, the *Discourses* also draw a picture of the manners and institutions of the ancient age (and to a lesser extent, of the feudal age) and compares these two pictures exhaustively.

This chapter is an attempt to distill from the topical organization of the *Political Discourses* an extensive comparison between what I call below agrarian and commercial societies. Before I sum up the sections that are part of this chapter, it is important to note that this conceptual choice blurs some distinctions that are important to Hume, especially that between feudal and ancient societies. The *Discourses* most often compare modern, European commercial societies to ancient commonwealths, since that was the comparison in discussion in the eighteenth-century “ancient vs. modern” controversy, but in the last essays that discuss the politics of Hanoverian England the comparison focuses on the differences between modern commercial and the immediately preceding period. For all their differences, though, feudal and ancient societies were both agrarian and, as I argue below, the eventual rise of commerce is the single most important factor in Hume's analysis. The differences between ancient and feudal societies may reveal why Hume's objection to the former is far from absolute as the latter is (I cannot recall a single instance in the *Political Discourses* where he praises a feudal institution or practice), but it is in their similarities that we find the reason why he thought both were not on a par with modern commercial societies.

Conceptual caveats apart, the chapter is divided as follows. The first section looks at what I call the “economic content” of the *Treatise*³⁶. As in the first chapter, this is not an attempt to draw an extensive comparison between the *Discourses* and the *Treatise*. Nevertheless, the *Treatise* is ridden with economic imagery and, in this section, I pick two examples which I deem representative of the a-historicity of the economic content of that work, namely, the conventions of justice and the relation between pride and wealth. The differences between the economic content of the *Treatise* and the economic thought of the *Discourses* refer less to *what* Hume says than to *how* he says it: in the latter, there is a comparison between different historical periods, while the economic phenomena discussed in the former cannot be understood as representing the practices or institutions of a particular society.

In the second section, I present the fundamental economic differences between agrarian and commercial societies and how Hume narrates the historical transition from the former to the latter. At the center of the transition is the rise of industry. Raymond Williams (1960, pp. xi-xii) highlighted the change in meaning of the word “industry” as one of the significant marks of cultural changes during the industrial revolution: it ceased to be solely a human attribute – an industrious person, that is, one who does things expediently, diligently – to become also the collective name for manufacturing and productive institutions. Though Hume uses industry, insofar as I know, always in the first sense, the predominance of this human attribute is, in his account of the transition to commercial societies, intimately linked to the presence of industry in its late eighteenth-century sense. Hume’s use of industry as a human attribute, but one closely linked to the existence of certain institutions, could perhaps be understood as the beginning of the “reification” of industry, happening two decades before the time frame Williams attributes to the Industrial Revolution³⁷. Thus, section 2.2 looks at Hume’s account of the rise of the commercial and manufacturing sectors and the ensuing predominance of a habit of industrious work.

The history of the transition to commercial societies, if viewed from a different angle, is also the history of how the expression of some universal human passions and inclinations changed with changes in manners and institutions. In the third section of this chapter, I look at two human passions, love of gain and the desire for action, that undergo remarkable changes in the way they are expressed during the transition to commercial societies. These passions are

³⁶ The choice of “economic content”, rather than “economic thought” refers to the fact that commerce, its characteristic phenomena or its absence were not the object of that work, but appear as elements of other discussions.

³⁷ As well as of the time frame of E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*.

both present in the *Treatise* and love of gain stands as perhaps the most important passion of Book III³⁸, but again, Hume gives them a historical treatment in the *Discourses*, rather than the a-historical treatment of the *Treatise*.

The final section of the chapter looks at the “non-economic” part of the manners and institutions of ancient and commercial societies. First, I look at the other two elements that make the “indissoluble chain” of “industry, knowledge, and humanity” that define the refined or luxurious commercial age; the picture Hume draws of the manners of commercial societies and their relation to the rise of commerce is then contrasted with the manners of ancient societies and their most important economic institution, slave labor. In the second part of the section, I argue that beside creating more humane manners and customs, the rise of commerce raises to power a rank of men whose interests are tied to the preservation of this new state of affairs. The “middling rank of men” gains considerable power with their newly acquired wealth, changing the balance of power among the ranks of society. Furthermore, the humane manners of commercial societies become part of the interactions in the public sphere as much as of the private relations among individuals: party politics and even wars become more moderate and less factious and bloody, in a stark contrast with ancient politics, which Hume describes as inhumane to the point that it becomes superfluous to try to find a reason that explains any specific violent political action of the ancient age. I conclude the chapter arguing that Hume’s economic thought is better understood as an economic, moral, and political defense of the ongoing transformation in Great Britain (and in other parts of Western Europe) which had commerce as its main cause and humanity as its main effect against attempts made by the civic tradition to emulate the “ancient maxims” of policy.

2.1 – AHISTORICITY AND THE ECONOMIC CONTENT OF THE *TREATISE*

As mentioned in the introduction, Hume’s concerns with commerce and other economic phenomena can be found in his earliest published works. In the first two volumes of the *Essays*, Hume both noticed the absence of commerce even in the works of Italian political thinkers writing in commercial cities and chose commerce as the privileged object of study within the

³⁸ At least according to the interpretation that sees a “transformation” in Book III. I discussed this interpretation briefly in the first section of the previous chapter.

“human affairs”³⁹. The *Treatise* does not contain any explicit discussion of economic matters: the only section title referring to something related to this branch of human knowledge is “Of Property and Riches” (T 2.1.10), a section where Hume discusses the relation of external possessions to the indirect passions of pride and humility. This, however, should not lead the reader to fault Hume for the same reasons he faulted Italian and classical writers: first, more explicit discussion of economic matters would probably appear in the intended fourth book of the *Treatise* dedicated to “politics” (T advertisement, p. 2); second, and more important, even if economic matters did not make it to the titles, the content of the three books Hume actually wrote and published are full of examples that involve trade, property, wealth, credit and other economic phenomena.

Since this is a thesis about the relation between *Political Discourses* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, I turn to the *Treatise* in the same fashion I did in the last chapter, that is, in order to highlight what these two mature works share with one another and in order to show their particularity in relation to the earlier period of Hume’s intellectual biography. More specifically, the economic content of the *Treatise* interests us less because of *what* is said than because of *how* it is said. Since Eugene Rotwein’s ([1955]2007) now classic introduction to Hume’s economic writings, it has become commonplace to find in Hume’s economic essays the mechanics of the human mind described in the *Treatise*. In most of the cases this transposition works out fine – as it does, though to a lesser extent, in the move between the *Treatise* and the EPM. For instance, Rotwein’s comparison of our desire for action in the *Political Discourses* and our love of truth in the end of Book II (T 2.3.10) uncovers Hume’s continued belief that the human mind pursues and is pleased by movement and activity rather than by boredom and languor. The key difference is *how* this continued belief is stated in each text: in the present example, the desire for action of the *Political Discourses* is historically situated, with different historical contexts affecting whether and how this desire for action is expressed, while in the *Treatise* it is considered abstractly as one among other passions of the human mind. More specifically, the desire for action is, as we will see below, a key element of the explanation of a historical transition between two kinds of society.

In this section, I will briefly analyze two examples of economic phenomena discussed in the *Treatise* which are not historically situated and which appear as important elements of what I take to be Hume’s main concern in the *Political Discourses*: the transition from agrarian

³⁹ Cf. section 2.2 below.

to commercial societies and the comparison between them. First, we turn to the relation between pride and wealth. As Taylor (2015, ch. 2-3) notes, Hume’s discussion of the passions in Book II of the *Treatise* goes much further than the principles of association of ideas on which it depends: in her reconstruction of the “social theory” of Book II, Taylor finds that the indirect passions of pride and humility, love and hatred, depend on common beliefs about the social context, the socially established values attributed to specific objects, and the socio-economic status of the person that is related to the object. Since the “parameters” of the indirect passions are related to institutionalized or conventional practices, they acquire an element of normativity, with other people *expecting* us to act according to them.

Hume sees wealth as a cause of pride⁴⁰ – the relation of property “of all others, produces most commonly the passion of pride” (T 2.1.10.1) – and the mechanism he ascribes to this relation reveals its dependence on context: first, Hume acknowledges that the pride we feel in relation to wealth and riches is not due to the direct pleasure caused by them (that is, due to “certain qualities of solidity, weight, and fusibility” of gold), but due to their capacity to purchase the “pleasures and conveniences of life” (T 2.1.10.3). Regardless, those who possess wealth feel proud of it and other people sympathize with the pleasure and pride wealth gives to its possessor – indeed, the purpose of the section on “Our esteem for the rich and powerful” is to argue that the *only* source of the general esteem paid to them is sympathy that makes us share their pleasure (T 2.2.5.14). This sympathy makes people love or esteem the rich⁴¹ which, in turn, “mirrors” back to the rich the fact that wealth is indeed a source of pleasure. However, this mirrored approbation is itself one of the most common sources of pride:

Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue, beauty and riches, have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others. (T 2.1.11.1)

⁴⁰ In Hume’s terminology, the object of pride (and humility) is always the self (T 2.1.2.2-3). The *cause* of pride is the object that makes ones proud and Hume distinguishes between the *subject* of the cause and the *quality* of that subject that actually causes one to be proud (T 2.1.2.4-5). Pride is the pleasant sensation one feels because an object related to oneself is a source of pleasure. Thus, for an object to be the cause of pride, it must be both pleasurable and related to oneself.

⁴¹ Again, we must pay attention to Hume’s terminology: what Hume terms “love” would most commonly be considered “esteem” in contemporary usage. We love a person that is related to characteristics or objects we believe to be sources of pleasure (T 2.2.1), thus the difference between love and pride is that the latter always has the self as its object, while the former always has another person as its object. Both depend on the object of the passion (self or other) being connected to a pleasurable subject, such as wealth or virtue.

The pride wealth causes also creates the opportunity for comparisons: the proud rich person feels contempt towards the poor because poverty produces uneasiness, which is then compared to the pleasures she feels from her own wealth. This comparison, besides the contempt, makes the superior person keep a distance from the inferiors and creates a “sense of superiority” (T 2.2.10.9). That sense of superiority is shared by the spectators who esteem the rich person, thus also making them feel uneasiness when they observe a poor person approaching too closely a rich person. Because general rules “have a great influence upon pride and humility, as well as on all other passions”, we tend to “form a notion of different ranks of men, suitable to the power or riches they are possess of”, regardless of whether that particular rich person actually feels pride of her own wealth and contempt towards the poor, thus trying to keep a distance from her inferiors (T 2.1.6.8). Therefore, the workings of sympathy with rich persons, along with our propensity to compare (and to avoid uneasy comparisons) and our propensity to generalize these passions to “ranks of men” make people consider an inferior person approaching a superior without “redoubl[ing] the marks of respect and reverence, when they are obliged to approach him” as a “a piece of ill-breeding”, showing that “he is not sensible of the disproportion, and is no way affected by it” (T 2.2.11.10). In other words, by the workings of the indirect passions, the practice of esteeming the rich and considering disregard for the appropriate distance as a mark of ill-breeding becomes an institutionalized practice of the community in question, something every person aware of this practice expects to find in the behavior of other people. As Hume acknowledged, if an adult person that were

on a sudden transported into **our world**, he wou’d be very much embarrass’d with every object, and wou’d not readily find what degree of love or hatred, pride or humility, or any other passion he ought to attribute to it. [...] But as custom and practice have brought to light all these principles, and have settled the **just value** of every thing; this must certainly contribute to the easy production of the passions, and guide us, by means of general establish’d maxims, in the proportion we ought to observe in preferring one object to another. (T 2.1.6.9, emphasis mine)

As Taylor (2015, p. 70) argues, our capacity to interact with other human beings depends largely on our knowledge of the established maxims (the “just value”) that prevail in the context of that interaction. However, we must notice that Hume says that the “just value” is set in “our world”, not “our community”, that is, he is speaking about a general feature of human nature and there is no discussion of whether different communities in different times and places will

attribute “just values” according to different “establish’d maxims”. Taylor believes that Hume is arguing in the *Treatise* explicitly that sympathy depends on the context of the persons involved and thus that he acknowledges that the just value and established maxims will be historically localized and related to the particular circumstances of different human communities. While discussing the a-historicity of the *Treatise* is not the direct object of this thesis, the lack of references to particular historical cases is, in my view, an indication that Hume had no concerns about the historicity of the passions he was describing when he wrote the *Treatise*. The whole train of causes delineated here about the relation between wealth and pride may not have worked or may not have produced an institutionalized practice, for instance, in ancient Athens, where “it seem[ed] requisite, either that he [a rich man] impoverished himself, or that the people would impoverish him, and perhaps kill him into the bargain” (E 412). In that particular space and time, wealth may not have been a source of pride, or even if it still caused pride in its possessor, she would likely conceal it at the risk of being dispossessed and even killed, thus interrupting the process of “mirroring” between her and the spectators that sympathize with her pride of wealth. In this situation, there would not be an institutionalized practice of esteem for the rich, perhaps creating the opposite effect. Whether or not the concern with the passions as they actually exist or existed in particular human communities, as we can find it in the post-*Treatise* works, represents a theoretical change in relation to the *Treatise* is not a question this thesis will attempt to answer. However, we must notice that *there is* in these later works a concern with the historical identification of the relations between passions, their causes and the circumstances that we do not find in the *Treatise*.

The second example of economic phenomena discussed in the *Treatise* that reappears in the *Political Discourses* as historically situated is Hume’s discussion of the conventions of justice. I have already argued in the previous chapter that, in the *Treatise*, the conventions are a “conjectural history”, but there the focus was moral approbation; here I will look at the economic aspects of the conventions of justice and of the establishment of government.

It must be noted outright that despite the main “problem” of justice being the source of its approbation, justice and government are necessary only because their absence endangers the most basic material reproduction of human beings. As such, the discussion of justice is embedded in an argument about the production, circulation and consumption of goods. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the section on the origins of justice begins with humans’ “cruel” circumstances of having more wants and necessities than means of providing for them

(T 3.2.2.1). Society alone provides the remedy for such a cruelty and the medicine takes the form of a division of labor:

When every individual person labours apart, and only for himself, his force is too small to execute any considerable work; his labour being employ'd in supplying all his different necessities, he never attains a perfection in any particular art; and as his force and success are not at all times equal, the least failure in either of these particulars must be attended with inevitable ruin and misery. Society provides a remedy for these *three* inconveniencies. By the conjunction of forces, our power is augmented: By the partition of employments, our ability increases: And by mutual succor we are less expos'd to fortune and accidents. 'Tis by this additional *force*, *ability*, and *security*, that society becomes advantageous. (T 3.2.2.3)

Thus, society is a solution for the problems humans would face in their material reproduction if they lived alone. The problem humans face in the *establishment* of society is also related to their material reproduction: as I have covered in the previous chapter, it is the insecurity of external possessions combined with humans' avidity that pose a threat to peaceful coexistence (T 3.2.2.7-8). The "economic" aspect of the problem becomes even more evident when we consider, as Baier suggests (1991, pp. 222-224), that Hume's "justice-initiators" are not Hobbesian inhabitants of a state of nature where one is ready to answer insult with violence or to hoard goods just for the sake of it; rather, the character Hume attributes to pre-justice humans is that of parents possessed of noble, though partial, affections trying to feed their families (T 3.2.2.5-6). It is not the meanness of human nature or the unlimited desire of possessing everything one can possess that creates the problem the conventions of justice are supposed to solve; it is the material reproduction of limitedly social and generous human beings that creates inevitable conflicts about who owns such or such good. Unbound acquisitiveness becomes a problem only when society has grown so large that the person suffering from my unjust acts is no longer my somewhat noble neighbor from whom I stole the fruits of a tree, but an unknown stranger to whose representative I promised to deliver goods brought from another continent (T 3.2.7.2-3). At this point, we find a new problem which requires a new solution: justice alone becomes ineffective and government appears to enforce it.

But before we reach the discussion of the origins of government, we must go through the three conventions of justice. Each of them addresses a specific problem related to conditions of material reproduction which were themselves created by the expansion made possible by the previous convention. The first convention stabilizes property and solves the initial problem

created by the instability of external possessions and the partiality of human affections. The establishment of the basis of what we may call the division of labor “is of all circumstances the most necessary to the establishment of human society” (T 3.2.2.11). The second convention, which allows the transference of property by consent, solves the mismatch between goods and wants or abilities created by the stabilization of property: since it is impractical (or indeed impossible) to stabilize property according to each person’s need or ability to produce, property is stabilized following rules of the imagination which inclines humans to present possession, accession, succession, and occupation (T 3.2.3), but this creates a situation where each person may possess things she either does not want or cannot use. Transfer by consent makes barter possible, thus creating an incipient economy where people try to fulfill their desires by exchanging their unwanted property for goods they want (T 3.2.4). However, the ability of bartering goods does not solve the problem of people who want to exchange services or goods that cannot be delivered immediately and thus “the mutual commerce of good offices [is] in a manner lost among mankind, and every one reduc’d to his own skill and industry for his well-being and subsistence” (T 3.2.5.8). The third and final convention, which establishes the obligation of promises, solves this final problem by establishing “*a certain form of words*” by which one binds oneself to deliver what is promised, thus allowing neighbors to work on each other crops in turn and to sell in advance to a merchant a certain amount of wheat they expect to harvest. The third convention is the basis of most commercial activities, since it refers to contracts and even to money.

Thus, justice is explicitly placed as a solution to the series of economic problems a human community faces as it develops “force, ability and security” to fulfill its needs and wants. Only with the third convention of justice the “self-interested commerce of men begins to take place, and to predominate in society”, replacing (but by no means abolishing) “the more generous and noble intercourse of friendship and good offices” (T 3.2.5.10). As this commerce with strangers predominates, the problem of the shortsightedness of our interested affection that made justice necessary in the first place returns: the enlarged productive powers of humanity places each person in situations where she no longer observes the damaging effects of her unjust actions, “the consequences of every breach of equity seem to lie very remote, and are not able to counter-balance any immediate advantage, that may be reap’d from it” (T 3.2.7.3). The remedy takes the form of appointed officials whose immediate interest is the enforcement of justice – “civil magistrates, kings and their ministers, our governors and rules” (T 3.2.7.6). However, these magistrates end up doing more than simply enforcing the rules of justice, which,

as we saw above, are directly linked to economic activity: shortsightedness means that more than acting in ways we ought not to, we also miss opportunities to positively affect our convenience and well-being, that is, our short-term inclinations incapacitates us to work on collective projects such as building improvements and adequately defending our community. Magistrates fulfill the role of coordinating short-term interests to positively promote our long-term interests:

Magistrates find an immediate interest in the interest of any considerable part of their subjects. They need consult no body but themselves to form any scheme for the promoting of that interest. And as the failure of any one piece in the execution is connected, tho' not immediately, with the failure of the whole, they prevent that failure, because they find no interest in it, either immediate or remote. Thus bridges are built; harbours open'd; ramparts rais'd; canals form'd; fleets equip'd; and armies disciplin'd; every where, by the care of government, which, tho' compos'd of men subject to all human infirmities, becomes, by one of the finest and most subtile inventions imaginable, a composition, that is, in some measure, exempted from all these infirmities. (T 3.2.7.8)

In conclusion, Hume's description of the conventions of justice and of the establishment of government can be read as a discussion about the conditions of the material reproduction of human beings, that is, what is required for human beings to leave their rude state and reach a state in which contracts, including money, exist and long-term economic projects can be undertaken. However, we should pay attention to *how* this discussion is carried out. The six sections quoted above, notwithstanding their thorough description of the economic aspects of the conventions of justice and of the establishment of government, run almost completely without reference to historical events⁴², making the events and circumstances they describe stand outside of historical time. Wennerlind (2002, p. 247) argues that this raises the question of whether Book III of the *Treatise* must be read as a "foundational theory of all human co-existence" or as providing a discussion of a particular historical transformation.

On the one side, I have already argued in the previous chapter that Hume's account of justice is a conjectural history of the transition from man in "his rude and more *natural* condition" to man in "his civiliz'd state" (T 3.2.1.9). To this identification, following Baier

⁴² The only references to historical characters or events appear in footnotes to section T 3.2.3, where Hume discusses the rules according to which property is fixed. However, they are not meant to locate the conventions historically.

(1991, p. 239), we can also add that one of the suppositions Hume seems to make about the conventions of justice is that there is, prior to the stabilization of property a “tolerable degree of equality”: the redirection of the interested affection supposes that the person redirecting her interests identifies the possibility of improvement if possessions are respected; however, if she does not possess any property and cannot foresee the possibility of acquiring any property – as we might reasonably argue was the case of most person throughout history –, she would have no interest at all in the stabilization of property, especially if property is stabilized primarily according to present possession, as Hume thinks would be the case (T 3.2.3.4). The supposition of tolerable equality, says Baier, leads us to “suppose there was a golden age when things did more or less work out better for all” as the best way to “make sense” of Hume’s justice in the *Treatise*. Indeed, in the first clear historical identification the events narrated in section 2 of Book III, Hume places the origin of government in the transition from societies in which “the pleasures of life are few and of little value” to societies where “any considerable goods” are thrown among men, causing them to quarrel and thus to demand someone to settle the conflicts, that is, in the “infancy of society”, a state similar to that of American Indians (T 3.2.8.1). However, if the conventions of justice are identified as the first transition of human beings into life in large societies, then Hume’s own later understanding of classical antiquity as constituted of societies that did not take property rights very seriously (as we will have the opportunity to explore below) conflicts with his description of the transition into society as the transition towards respect to property rights.

On the other hand, as Finlay (2007) notices, not only Book III, but the whole *Treatise* uses characteristically commercial social interactions as the “laboratory” of the sciences of human nature. This can be clearly seen in the discussion between wealth and pride I presented above: a person’s pride of her wealth needs the mirroring of society to be sustained and to produce an institutionalized expectation about human behavior, a practice that will arise where wealth is the main source of social distinction. MacIntyre (1988, ch. 15-16) interprets Hume’s use of commercial sociability as the default of human nature as an instance of his parochialism and, more largely, of the Enlightenment’s inclination to consider eighteenth-century European sociability as the measure stick of humanity. Finlay (2007, pp. 6-7), while accepting that Hume’s adoption of his own sociability as the source of experience of common life is related to the fact that it was the experience most immediately available to him, prefers to read the *Treatise* as arguing that “human nature was most fully instantiated in the eighteenth-century contexts of polite British and French society”. Wennerlind (2002, p. 247) opts to read the

Treatise as a “philosophical elaboration of the central conventions of the nascent commercial society”, namely, property, markets and money represented each by a convention of justice.

In conclusion, the two examples discussed above create confusion about the need and the possibility of locating the economic content of the *Treatise* in history. On the one hand, they suggest specific kinds of sociability, pointing to commercial sociability; on the other, Hume’s concern with explaining the origin of institutions and conventions makes him employ a vocabulary that points to the earliest periods of human history, perhaps to its very beginning. Readings such as Wennerlind’s and Finlay’s raise the question of why Hume fails to clearly identify the *Treatise* as the abstract elaboration of a specific moment of human history and to argue explicitly that human nature was fully instantiated in that moment. Re-stating the caveat I made in the previous chapter that a full discussion of this question is not the object of this thesis, I would suggest that Hume does towards economic relations what he does to moral approbation: the *Treatise* attempts to explain simultaneously the *chronological* and the *foundational* origins of human sociability and the confusion between these two kinds of origin leads to the confusion we observed in the two examples given above. That is, Hume is simultaneously trying to find general principles from observed experience and to describe how this experience came about. We have already seen that, in the EPM, Hume dropped the attempt to tell the *chronological* origin of morals to focus on its *foundational* origins, that is, on the fundamentals of morality that apply to all historical situations if we allow for the variations in circumstances. The sections below place the *Political Discourses* as a chronological (or, more properly, historical) origin of two different kinds of sociability.

2.2 – LUXURY AND PRODUCTIVITY: THE TRANSITION FROM AGRARIAN TO COMMERCIAL SOCIETIES

Hume opens “Of Commerce” (E-Co), the first essay of the *Political Discourses*, dividing “the greater part of mankind” into two classes: shallow and abstruse thinkers. The former “fall short of the truth”, the latter “go beyond it” (E 253). Implicitly, Hume posits a third class, seemingly not making a great share of mankind: “those of *solid* understanding”, who are neither metaphysicians, unnecessarily refining their propositions, nor limited to their own particular situations. Each of the first two classes sees in those persons of solid understanding the mistakes of the other class, but solid understanding requires one to understand simultaneously that “a great number of particulars, [have] that common circumstance in which

they all agree” and that, nevertheless, general principles only “prevail in the general course of things, though they may fail in particular cases” (E 254).

“Domestic politics” is a subject where general principles may be drawn to explain the general course of events produced by particular deliberations and Hume had known that at least since the first edition of the *Essays*: in 1741, he argued that “so great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government” that they may afford consequences “as general and certain” as the mathematical sciences do (E 16). In the second edition of the *Essays* (1742), Hume further elaborates on the amenability of domestic politics to general analysis in “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” (E-RPAS): the passions that move domestic politics are “always of a grosser and more stubborn nature, less subject to accidents, and less influenced by whim and private fancy” thus making “the domestic and gradual revolutions of a state [...] a more proper subject of reasoning and observation” than, for instance, foreign policy (E 112). Indeed, “avarice, or the desire of gain”, being an “universal passion, which operates at all times, in all places, and upon all persons” makes commerce an excellent – if not the best – subject for enquire about general principles (E 113).

But we may ask what is the time framing a philosopher works with when she proposes “general principles” concerning domestic politics. Returning to “Of Commerce”, Hume suggests a distinction that may initially seem puzzling to his own contemporaries as well as to our twentieth-first century minds used to taking “long-term” to mean half a dozen years (or the time it takes for wages to adjust to external shocks): “form[ing] schemes in politics, trade, oeconomy, or any business of life” falls in the category of deliberations concerning “particular affairs” (E 255) – Hume is looking well beyond five-year government budget plans. The time horizon of “those who employ their pens on political subjects”, he suggested in 1741, may be even longer than written history could afford in the eighteenth century:

I am apt, however, to entertain a suspicion, that the world is still too young to fix many general truths in politics, which will remain true to the latest posterity. We have not as yet had experience of three thousand years; so that not only the art of reasoning is still imperfect in this science, as in all others, but we even want sufficient materials upon which we can reason. (E 87)

The *Political Discourses* take that early suspicion seriously and work with a time frame rather unusual to “discourses on *commerce, luxury, money, interest, &c*”⁴³, as Schabas (2008, p. 137) says of Hume’s monetary thought, “it might be more accurate to ascribe 300 years as the short run [...] and over 1,500 years as the long run”. What is true of his monetary thought also applies to the *Discourses* as a whole: the backbone of the fifteen essays published in 1752 is a transformation of political and economic practices and institutions that happened in the “short-run” separating the birth of Machiavelli and the publication of Hume’s economic essays (for the Italian’s misfortune, as I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter). The short-run of the *Discourses* is characterized by the rise of modern commercial societies in Europe and the main threads of the essays are descriptions of the general principles of this form of social, economic, and political organization and their comparison with previous forms of organization. Furthermore, “backbone” is a particularly accurate description, since the *Political Discourses* are not organized around a narrative of this transition: the visible face of the essays is divided into analyses of particular phenomena such as money, party politics, luxury, and population, but the analysis of the transition from agrarian (classical then feudal) society to commercial societies is the structuring element that makes the work stand in its feet.

Dealing with such long-term historical transition is certainly a daunting task and Hume’s attempts to come to terms with an adequate method of accounting for it reach back more than a decade before the publication of the *Political Discourses*. The previous section shows that although the account of justice in Book III of the *Treatise* already contains an element of processuality, that is, it considers the conventions of justice as a sequence of non-reversible⁴⁴ events that become necessary due to previous developments in the productive capacities of human societies, even if it fails to identify the historical dimension of this process. As Sakamoto (2003) discusses, at least since E-RPAS Hume was trying to explain the transition between different *historical* forms of organization⁴⁵. Though E-RPAS and other essays such as “Of

⁴³ This is the reading of the original 1752 edition, which was changed in 1760 to “discourses on *commerce, money, interest, balance of trade, &c.*”, adapting to the change in the title of the second essay from “Of Luxury” to “Of Refinement in the Arts” and the addition of “Of Jealousy of Trade” in the previous edition of 1758.

⁴⁴ I.e., “undoing” the conventions would not result in the same state of affairs that existed before they happened. Quite the opposite, Baier (1991, p. 235) argues that, instead of taking society back to the stage where the noble but partial parents were trying to feed their families, the breakdown of justice would create a truly “Hobbesian” state of war of all against.

⁴⁵ Sakamoto (2003, p. 88) argues that E-RPAS finds a dead end due to its emphasis on forms of government. He considers that “Of National Characters” (1748) offers a partial solution of the problem in its articulation of the *Treatise*’s concept of sympathy in historical terms. Thus, his interpretation claims that Hume changes his position during the 1740s and that only the *Political Discourses* offer a comprehensive and coherent account of the transition. Berry (2006, esp. p. 292n) disagrees with Sakamoto, seeing no discontinuities between E-RPAS, “Of National Characters” and the *Political Discourses*. For the purposes of this thesis, it matters that the latter offers a

National Characters” discuss both methodological aspects and specific elements of the transition from agrarian to commercial societies, it is only in the *Political Discourses* that Hume offers an extensive discussion of its causes and consequences comprehending the social, political, and economic practices of each of these societies within the notion of a “manners” or of a “spirit of the age”.

The core element of the transition, that is, the change that causes all the other changes and that is the chief element to be explained is the rise of a habit of industrious work especially in agriculture, or what we would call an increase in productivity during the early modern period. In “Of Commerce”, after the opening methodological paragraphs, Hume compares the productivity of agrarian and commercial societies and tries to explain how the increased productive capacity of the latter arose from the institutions of the former. This comparison appears woven into the construction of the actual proposition or general principle the essay seeks to prove, namely, that

[t]he greatness of a state, and the happiness of its subjects, how independent soever they may be supposed in some respects, are commonly allowed to be inseparable with regard to commerce; and as private men receive greater security, in the possession of their trade and riches, from the power of the public, so the public becomes powerful in proportion to the opulence and extensive commerce of private men. (E 255)

Like many other essays of the *Political Discourses*, E-Co begins with the statement of a proposition that runs contrary to some commonly held eighteenth-century belief. In this case, Hume is attacking the belief that the greatness of the state depends on its citizens foregoing a luxurious lifestyle and adopting frugal habits. It was based on the following reasoning (E 256-257): in every society, men are divided chiefly between those who work on the land (farmers and husbandmen) and those who produce manufactures. Whenever the productivity of agriculture and husbandry rises, less hands are necessary in that sector of the economy to feed the whole population. The freed hands can either work in manufactures, “apply[ing] themselves to the finer arts, which are commonly denominated the arts of *luxury*”, thus adding to the happiness of the subjects, or be employed by the sovereign in armies, fleets or in the civil service, thus supporting the greatness of the state. This reasoning is supported with the historical evidence of ancient societies such as Sparta and Rome (E 257-258), which sustained

more *comprehensive* account of the transition and that, contrasting with the *Treatise*, it discusses the subject in historical terms.

proportionally larger armies than similarly sized modern regions could do. They could afford large armies because citizens were divided between a free citizenry and the rural workers, such as in the case of Sparta, where the enslaved Helotes worked the land and as few as possible artisans were maintained while the free Spartans fought in the army.

While Hume does accept that this description of ancient societies' economic organization is true, he refuses to accept the relationship between the greatness of the state and the frugality of the subjects as a timelessly true causal relation:

Man is a very variable being, and susceptible of many different opinions, principles, and rules of conduct. What may be true, while he adheres to one way of thinking, will be found false, when he has embraced an opposite set of manners and opinions. (E 256)

The ancients' "manners and opinions" were very particular and related to their specific historical context: ancient states were small, free republics in a martial age, where free citizens enjoyed a great equality of fortunes and where neighboring nations were at continual war, thus begetting in their citizens a public spirit or "*amor patriae*" that made "every citizen a soldier", "addicted to arms" (E 259). These circumstances cannot be taken for granted, and we should not expect to find in every historical situation such a high level of public spirit and willingness to sacrifice one's comfort as well as one's limbs to the greatness of one's nation. Indeed, as Hume says, "these principles are too disinterested and too difficult to support" (E 263) and if "the testimony of history [had been] less positive and circumstantial, such a government would appear a mere philosophical whim or fiction, and impossible ever to be reduced to practice" (E 259). Rather, sovereigns should "take mankind as they find them" without "pretend[ing] to introduce any violent change in their principles and ways of thinking" (E 260) and according to

the most natural course of things, industry and arts and trade encrease the power of the sovereign as well as the happiness of the subjects; and that policy is violent, which aggrandizes the public by the poverty of individuals. (E 260)

At this point, Hume delineates what he deems to be the relation between the greatness of the state and the happiness of the public in the more commonly found historical circumstances. He returns to the division of society between husbandmen/farmers and manufacturers to construct a comparison between an agrarian and a commercial society.

In an agrarian society (E 260-261), “where manufactures and mechanic arts are not cultivated”, the majority of the people will work on the land. Since there are not many manufactures they can purchase with the occasional surplus they may produce, farmers will only produce what suffices to maintain their own families. In this situation, every improvement that raises productivity reduces the amount of work done instead of increasing the output, because there is nothing “which may serve either to [the farmers’] pleasure or vanity”. A “habit of indolence” naturally prevails among this people, and the share of land that is cultivated will not yield “its utmost for want of skill and assiduity in the farmers”. In case of a public emergency, the sovereign may need either to tap from production or to draw men to the army, but due to the lack of productivity, this subtraction will not be easily supplied:

The labourers cannot increase their skill and industry on a sudden. Lands uncultivated cannot be brought into tillage for some years. The armies, mean while, must either make sudden and violent conquests, or disband for want of subsistence. A regular attack or defence, therefore, is not to be expected from such a people, and their soldiers must be as ignorant and unskilful as their farmers and manufactures. (E 261)

Therefore, in the absence of manufactures, the state is incapable of drawing great numbers of men into the army, since the “free hands” are limited to what the low productivity of agriculture can afford, as well as incapable of tapping from the agricultural surplus to maintain the army, since farmers produce a very small surplus due to the absence of motives to do otherwise. In this situation, the only form of extracting surplus from the farmers is the “violent method, and in most cases impracticable” of obliging them to produce more than they would do off of their own will (E 262). Thus, unless the historical circumstances create some principle to animate producers, the want of motives to produce beyond what is sufficient to feed one’s own family severely limits the capacity of the state to assert its greatness in the society of nations.

In contrast, in societies where “manufactures and mechanic arts” abound, there are motives to produce surplus. “Every thing in the world is purchased by labour; and our passions are the only causes of labour” (E 261), Hume says, and where there are objects that can excite men’s passions, they will labor: in manufacturing societies, the surplus produced in agriculture and husbandry can be exchanged for manufactures and thus “[t]he proprietors of land, as well as the farmers, study agriculture as a science, and redouble their industry and attention” (E 261). In such a society, land furnishes much more produce than what is necessary to maintain those working on it. In times of peace, the surplus production of agriculture goes to “manufacturers

and the improvers of liberal arts”, but if a public exigence arises, the sovereign can either tap from the surplus of agriculture or impose a tax on manufactured goods to maintain the army. Either way, part of the workforce of the manufacturing sector is forced into the army or public services, since there is less demand for manufacturing goods (because there is less agricultural surplus to exchange for them or because the tax increases the price and decreases demand for them). Furthermore, if in agrarian societies there is a “habit of indolence”, in commercial societies, laborers become “accustomed to industry” (E 262) and continue to work industriously even if the public exigence temporarily disrupts the production of more superfluous manufactured goods that serve chiefly to increment the comforts of life. In the same way the farmers could not raise their productivity on a sudden, laborers of a commercial society do not diminish their industry immediately, because in Hume’s scheme productivity changes by habituation to the different circumstances and the motivations they create. Finally, in an agrarian society, if the state had to employ a “violent method” to increase surplus in order to maintain its endeavors, in a commercial society it needs only “furnish him [the laborer] with manufactures and commodities, and he will do it himself” (E 262), since commercial societies are “animated” “with a spirit of avarice and industry, art and luxury”, principles which, as I mentioned in the beginning of this section, operate more universally and thus can be relied upon.

In conclusion, the key concept in the comparison Hume articulates in E-Co is the understanding of the manufacturing sector as a “storehouse of labour”:

The increase in consumption of all the commodities, which serve to the ornament and pleasure of life, are advantageous to society; because, at the same time that they multiply those innocent gratifications to individuals, they are a kind of *storehouse* of labour, which, in the exigencies of state, may be turned to the public service. (E 272)

However, even though Hume regards the goods themselves as “real riches – “[a] public granary of corn, a storehouse of cloth, a magazine of arms; all these must be allowed real riches” (E 262) –, what truly sustains the greatness of the state *and* the happiness of the subjects is the capacity and willingness to produce goods beyond the necessities of life created by the habit of industrious work:

The more labour, therefore, is employed beyond the mere necessities, the more powerful is any state [...]. In a state without manufactures, there may be the same

number of hands; but there is not the same quantity of labour, nor of the same kind.
(E 262)

In a nation, where there is no demand for such superfluities, men sink into indolence, lose all enjoyment of life, and are useless to the public, which cannot maintain or support its fleets and armies, from the industry of such slothful members. (E 272)

Describing these two different states of affairs is perhaps the easier task; the most difficult part is to explain how the existing agrarian societies transitioned into their manufacturing and commercial successors, something many thinkers of the eighteenth-century attempted to do in their accounts of the origins of the practices and institutions of their own countries⁴⁶. The difficulty arises because in agrarian societies every advancement in productive technology that could potentially disrupt the established practices and institutions was met with a counter-balancing factor that returned the society to its prior status. In this chapter, we have already seen at least two ways this may happen: in the first section, I briefly mentioned the Athenians' practice of killing rich citizens and in the present section we went over Hume's description of Spartan economic practices; in both cases, any accumulated surplus would either be taken from those who produced it or dissipated in the maintenance of a war effort. Indeed, in "Of the Independency of Parliament" (1741) Hume affirms that

[f]or so great is the natural ambition of men, that they are never satisfied with power; and if one order of men, by pursuing its own interest, can usurp upon every other order, it will certainly do so, and render itself, as far as possible, absolute and uncontrollable. (E 43-44)

In agrarian societies, those who controlled power managed to reproduce the existing balance. Thus, an analysis of the transition to commercial societies needs explain what historical event broke the dynamics of agrarian societies, eventually leading to a balance of power within nations that would allow the "storehouses of labour" of commercial societies to come into existence.

"If we consult history", Hume says, "we shall find, that, in most nations, foreign trade has preceded any refinement in home manufactures and given birth to domestic luxury" (E 263). Foreign goods are imported ready to be consumed while creating the capacity to produce

⁴⁶ MacFarlane (2001) discusses how Hume, Adam Smith and Montesquieu deal with the "agrarian trap".

a commodity at home is a process that “advance[s] by slow degrees” (E 264); hence “[t]he temptation is stronger to make use of foreign commodities”, giving great profits to the merchants who possess the “secret” of importation and exportation. Foreign commerce creates a two-sided stimulus to domestic production: it makes men aware of possibilities of consumption they did not even know were possible, putting them in contact with new goods and pleasures, and it sparks a spirit of emulation in “adventurers” who seek to rival the merchants that profit from this new path of economic development. The “mechanics” of the introduction of foreign commerce, that is, the passions that make people seek new forms of consumption and production, are discussed in the next section. Here, we must notice that foreign commerce creates the possibility of a regime of accumulation of surplus based on industrious work that differentiates a commercial society from its agrarian predecessors. On the one hand, exports create a market for native commodities: it allows farmers to sell what they produce above their subsistence, avoiding the inevitable “habit of indolence” that predominates when people have nothing to trade their surplus with. On the other hand, imports furnish materials for the new manufacturers that follow the path opened by the consumption of foreign goods. Imports bring to the country not only the goods themselves, but often the knowledge of how to produce them: as Hume says of Great Britain in “Of the Jealousy of Trade”, added to the *Political Discourses* in 1758, in the preceding two centuries “every improvement” it had made in its then “extremely rude and imperfect” agriculture and manufacturing sectors came from the imitation of foreigners (E 328).

In conclusion, foreign commerce furnishes from abroad what agrarian societies – except in unusual situations such as that of the ancient city-states – cannot create by themselves: an incentive to produce beyond the necessities that puts in motion a habit of industrious work. It creates benefits for the individuals, in terms of consumption and profit, as well as to the public, since “a greater stock of labour is, by this means, stored up against any public exigency; that is, a greater number of laborious men are maintained” (E 263). In the essay “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations”, Hume admits that agriculture may flourish without the development of the manufacturing sector of the economy and gives Switzerland as a modern example beside the classical ones already mentioned,

[b]ut is it just reasoning, because agriculture may, in some instances, flourish without trade or manufactures, to conclude that, in any great extent of country, and for any great tract of time, it would subsist alone? The most natural way, surely, of encouraging husbandry, is, first, to excite other kinds of industry, and thereby afford

the labourer a ready market for his commodities, and a return to such goods as may contribute to his pleasure and enjoyment. (E 419-420)

The transition is thus explained as the rise of a habit of industrious work, brought about by foreign commerce and continued by the growth of the domestic manufacturing sector. However, identifying the chief difference between commercial and agrarian societies and explaining in broad brushes how the latter transforms into the former is just the crude backbone of the *Political Discourses*. As I quoted above, the passions are the only “causes of labour” and the economic essays give extensive insight into what Hume considered as the forces that put commercial societies into motion. These are the objects of the next section.

2.3 – THE MECHANICS OF THE TRANSITION TO COMMERCIAL SOCIETIES: LOVE OF GAIN AND DESIRE FOR ACTION

In the beginning of the final chapter of Book III of the *Wealth of Nations* (WN III.iv.4)⁴⁷, Adam Smith refers to Hume as the “only writer who, so far as I know, has hitherto taken notice” of the role of manufactures in the development of commercial societies. Indeed, in the three final chapters of Book III, he develops an account of the transition to commercial societies in many aspects similar to the Hume’s account described in the previous section. However, even though Smith recognizes his indebtedness to Hume, the theory of development in the rest of the WN is different and in some respects contradictory to the historical account of WN III.ii-iv which was inspired by his best friend’s analysis of commercial societies: in the first chapter of Book III Smith deems the European path of development from feudal to commercial institutions as “unnatural and retrograde” (WN III.i.9). In his natural order of development, which he attributes to the North American colonies (WN III.i.7), the capital of a society is first employed in agriculture and accumulated to the point when it becomes profitable to apply its excess to domestic manufacturing and, subsequently, to foreign commerce (WN III.i.8). “Private frugality and good conduct of individuals” or “their universal, continual, and uninterrupted effort to better their own condition” (WN II.iii.6) are the drivers of capital accumulation in Smith’s theory of development regardless of the circumstances in which they are exerted. Agriculture is the first stage in the natural order of accumulation of capital because in this sector

⁴⁷ References to the *Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1976, WN hereafter) follow the notation used by the editors of the Liberty Fund edition (book; chapter; section if existent; paragraph).

the accumulation of capital receives an additional impulse from the “work of nature”, that is, from the natural fertility of the land that is incorporated into the end product (II.v.12), thus making agriculture the fastest form of capital accumulation (II.v.20-21). Hence, the European order of development, starting from foreign commerce, which develops domestic manufactures and only afterwards affects the countryside, meant that “human institutions” had “thwarted those natural inclinations” of the human passions combined with the characteristics of the natural environment (WN III.i.3).

I highlight this contrast between Smith’s theory of natural development and his historical account of the development of Europe taken at least partially from Hume because, as Davis (2003) notices, they reveal a much deeper disagreement between the two Scottish friends about what drives human actions⁴⁸. While Smith regards economic development as the progress caused by our drive to better our condition, Hume is much more concerned with the relation between different historical circumstances and the human passions: what kind of passion predominates in agrarian societies? Why did they change? What passions predominate in a commercial society? Sure, Hume does hold positions about what passions are universally present in the human constitution (and I will return to this matter in the third chapter), but what really matters in the *Political Discourses* is *how* these passions are expressed in particular historical contexts and what are the consequences of the different forms of expression. In this section, I look at two passions that permeate Hume’s account of the transition to commercial societies, with the changing form of expressing them being a mark of the transition. In other words, I retell the story told above from the point of view of the human desire for action and love of gain.

In the beginning of the second essay of the *Political Discourses*, “Of Refinement of the Arts” (E-RA)⁴⁹, Hume offers a very general definition of happiness, following “the most received notions, as always composed in some measure of “action, pleasure, and indolence” (E 269). Among its three parts, action stands out as the most important element: it is “that quick march of spirits, which takes a man from himself” stirred by active occupations that “chiefly gives satisfaction”, since indolence and repose, if prolonged for too long, “beget a languor and lethargy, that destroys all enjoyment” (E 270). In the essay “Of Interest”, Hume further complements this picture of human beings as creatures craving for occupation and liveliness:

⁴⁸ And, perhaps, a contradiction within the WN between “Smith, the economic historian” and “Smith, the political economist”. But this is a controversy that does not belong to this thesis.

⁴⁹ The original title of this essay was “Of Luxury” until the 1758 edition. In the 1760 edition of the *Essays*, Hume changed the title to the one we currently use.

There is no craving or demand of the human mind more constant and insatiable than that for exercise and employment; and this desire seems the foundation of most of our passions and pursuits. Deprive man of all business and serious occupation, he runs restless from one amusement to another; and the weight and oppression, which he feels from idleness, is so great, that he forgets the ruin which must follow him from his immoderate expences. Give him a more harmless way of employing his mind or body, he is satisfied, and feels no longer that insatiable thirst after pleasure. (E 300-301)

The importance of action to human happiness and the attribution of the desire for it as one of the most elementary characteristics of the human frame reaches back to the *Treatise*. In Book II, Hume accepts the claim made by “Those, who take a pleasure in declaiming against human nature” that

Man is altogether insufficient to support himself; and that when you loosen all the holds, which he has of external objects, he immediately drops down into the deepest melancholy and despair. From this, say they, proceeds that continual search after amusement in gaming, in hunting, in business; by which we endeavor to forget ourselves, and excite our spirits from the languid state, into which they fall, when not sustain'd by some brisk and lively emotion. To this method of thinking I so far agree, that I own the mind to be insufficient, of itself, to its own entertainment, and that it naturally seeks after foreign objects, which may produce lively sensation, and agitate the spirits. (T 2.2.4.4)

Notwithstanding his agreement with the proposition, Hume does not take this restlessness inherent in human beings as an imperfection of human nature, as Pascal did; rather, he simply takes it as a fact about human nature and looks to its consequences. The desire for action reappears in the *Treatise* when Hume discusses “love of truth”, the passion behind the search for knowledge: what renders the discovery of truth agreeable is not the truth itself, but “the genius and capacity, which is employ'd in its invention and discovery” (T 2.3.10.3), that is, “the pleasure of study consists chiefly in the action of the mind, and the exercise of genius and understanding” (T 2.3.10.6). Admittedly, the truth must be of some relevance, though this is not due to any addition to the pleasure we feel, its relevance being initially “requisite to fix our attention” (T 2.3.10.6), that is, to attract us to the subject. The discovered truth does gain importance in the “natural course of the affections” because we end up taking it as a token of

our achievement (T 2.3.10.7). Love of truth seems to fall in a category of “active habits” Hume describes in an earlier section of Book II of the *Treatise*: these are habits that, by repetition, beget a “facility” which is “an infallible source of pleasure, where the facility goes not beyond a certain degree”; they always contain a mixture of novelty and repetition, difficulty and facility, sometimes even of pleasure and pain (T 2.3.5.3). Because of this mixture of sensations, repetition makes the spirits “sufficiently supported of themselves” giving new “force, and bends them more strongly to the action” (T 2.3.6.5). The repetition of passive habits, in contrast, begets languor and lethargy because the facility “takes off from the force of the passive habits by rendering the motion of the spirits faint and languid” (T 2.3.6.5), since there is no real movement in passive habits.

Rotwein (2007) compares the description of love of truth in the *Treatise* to the description of our desire for action in the *Political Discourses* following Hume’s suggestions in the former (notice that “business” appears as a source of “amusement” in the quote from T 2.2.4.4 above). However, as I argued in the first section of this chapter, the chief difference between the *Treatise* and the *Political Discourses* is not so much *what* is said, but *how* it is said, especially concerning the historical expression of passions Hume understands as part of our very constitution. Thus, it is

in times when industry and the arts flourish, [that] men are kept in perpetual occupation and enjoy, as their reward, the occupation itself, as well as those pleasures which are the fruit of their labour. The mind acquires new vigour; enlarges its powers and faculties; and by an assiduity in honest industry, both satisfies its natural appetites, and prevents the growth of unnatural ones, which commonly spring up, when nourished by ease and idleness. (E 270, emphasis mine)

In the absence of industry and arts, people cannot be kept in “perpetual occupation”, since, as we saw above, they have no reason to keep working after they produce what is necessary to maintain themselves. Hence, they cannot enjoy the pleasure of keeping mind and body active and develop a “habit of indolence” with the accompanying lethargy it produces. But where there is opportunity and motives to work, “education, custom, and example, have a might influence in turning the mind to any of these pursuits” (E 270)⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ For a lengthier discussion of the habitual character of the transition from agrarian to commercial societies, cf. Berry (2006).

If the pursuit of truth requires an “instrumental end” to be put in motion, so does the habit of industrious work. In the case of work, foreign luxury, as I showed in the previous section, attract workers into this new habit:

Thus men become acquainted with the *pleasures* of luxury and the *profits* of commerce; and their *delicacy* and *industry*, being once awakened, carry them on to farther improvements, in every branch of domestic as well as foreign trade. (E 264)

Luxury awakens the passions in men, “rousing” them from indolence, and presents them to possibilities of consumption “they never before dreamed of”, making them aware of a new and “more splendid way of life than what their ancestors enjoyed” (E 264). Once foreign luxury goods are imitated and domestic manufacturing grows, the sensual pleasures of luxury become “the fruit of their [the workers’] own labour” (E 270). It is important to observe that the pleasure of luxury acquires a new significance in commercial society because it is accompanied by and, perhaps more importantly, produced by a habit of industrious work created by a large and growing manufacturing sector. In the absence of the “action” of business and work, luxury becomes the self-frustrating passive habit of trying to expose oneself to amusement; it is the “achievement motive”, that is, the fact that luxury is the reward of industrious work, that makes pleasure part of an active habit that sustains itself, rather than a source of repeating frustration⁵¹.

Moreover, Hume extends the process of “awakening” of new passions and habituation to industrious work to all classes of society: though only “the gayer and more opulent part of the nation” (E 264) is first presented to foreign luxury and the possibilities it creates, eighteenth-century Britain showed that it was possible to make at least parts of the new way of life reach the laboring classes, even if the “happiness of so many millions” created a disadvantage to the country’s exports because of higher wages (E 265). And though Hume attributes the pioneering of the transition to the “middling rank of men”, as I discuss below, he always speaks of the habit of industrious work as affecting the entire society, including laborers and farmers of the lower classes. As many commentators show⁵², though Hume was not the first to attribute to the working classes these desires and aspirations, he differs from most of the preceding literature in regarding the disposition to work and the capacity of taking pleasure in working as the effect of a historical change rather than an innate characteristic that was often deemed lacking in the

⁵¹ Cf. Hundert (1974) for a longer discussion of the “achievement motive”.

⁵² Johnson ([1937]1965, ch. 14), Coats (1958), Brewer (1998) and Marshall (1998), for instance.

working classes. This position stands in contrast even with later classical political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who took work to be essentially irksome (Rotwein, 2007, p. xliii).

Thus, in a commercial society, individuals find pleasure in both ends: they enjoy their occupation which, in turn, produces goods that are also a source of pleasure when consumed. However, there is another passion beside love of action and the enjoyment of sensual pleasure that pulls the development of commerce and manufactures: love of gain. Again, this is a passion that makes constant appearance in Hume's works since the *Treatise*. In the latter, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the account of the conventions of justice can be read as a conjectural history of the redirection of the interested affection:

'Tis certain, that no affection of the human mind has both a sufficient force, and a proper direction to counter-balance the **love of gain**, and render men fit members of society, by making them abstain from the possessions of others. Benevolence to strangers is too weak for this purpose; and as to the other passions, they rather inflame this **avidity**, when we observe, that the larger our possessions are, the more ability we have of gratifying all our appetites. There is no passion, therefore, capable of controlling the **interested affection**, but the very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction. (T 3.2.2.13)

In other words, the beginning of society is linked to individuals learning that the unrestrained exercise of avidity and love of gain is not the best way of satisfying these passions; rather, their very limitation makes it possible to achieve their ends, since their restraint is the condition to the development of productive forces that can better satisfy our material wants. In the *Treatise*, the awareness of the necessity of restraining the interested affection is created by “a slow progression, and by our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing it” (T 3.2.2.10). Hirschman ([1977]1997) showed that the argument that it was possible for unruly passions such as avidity or love of gain to be redirected into the restrained interested affection (or our “interest”) was a common trope in the defense of the early capitalism in eighteenth-century, but in mixing the arguments Hume makes in the *Treatise* with arguments from the *Political Discourses*, he misses the “historicization” of the redirection of the interested affection that the latter contains. In section 1.2 of the previous chapter, I showed that Hume criticizes the reduction of every affection to self-love, arguing that a philosopher should instead focus on how our different desires (self-centered as well as other-directed) interact with each other in

different circumstances. In the *Discourses*, especially in the essays “Of Money” and “Of Interest”, instead of the *Treatise*’s abstract process of trial and error whereby a single passion corrects itself and generates a set of artificial virtues, Hume offers a history of conflicting passions, with love of gain – and money, the conventional representation of the object of this passion – winning over love of pleasure (the kind of pleasure that, by itself, becomes a source of frustration mentioned above). Further, he associates these passions to particular ranks in society⁵³.

Most of the commentary about Hume’s monetary thought has focused on the kind of policies concerning the circulation of money his ideas suggest, that is, on whether his views imply that money is neutral, and hence monetary policy ineffective, or that money is non-neutral, and hence monetary policy can be employed as a policy tool⁵⁴. As Schabas (2008) argue, these commentaries often lose sight of the larger picture, that is, the fact that Hume is always dealing with the situation of “customs and manners”, in a comparison of different forms of social and economic organization whose “long-rung” reaches close to fifteen hundred years.

In the “first and most uncultivated ages of any state”, Hume says (E 291), people are content with the produce of their own fields and with whatever “rude improvements” they can make on it, and thus “have little occasion for exchange, at least for money, which, by agreement, is the common measure of exchange”. The necessary exchanges occur within a very limited space, with the artisans maintained by the landlord and receiving payment in kind from the people in the same village. Even the rent of the landlord is consumed locally “in rustic hospitality” and only a small share of it is exchanged for money to buy “the few materials of his expence and luxury” that are not found locally. Furthermore, in this state of society, the “landed interest” naturally prevails and

As the spending of a settled revenue is a way of life entirely without occupation; men have so much need of somewhat to fix and engage them, that pleasures such as they are, will be the pursuit of the landholders, and the prodigals among them will always be more numerous than the misers. (E 298)

Thus, in the “rude” state of society, there is simultaneously a low demand for money (and consequently a low quantity of it) as well as a high interest rate, since the excess of prodigal

⁵³ Kalinowski (1993) and Grune-Yannof and McClennen (2008) criticize Hirschman for not perceiving how the historical account of the essays contains a “conflict of passions” rather than the simple redirection of a single passion.

⁵⁴ Cf. Paganelli’s (2009) review of commentaries about Hume monetary ideas.

over frugal people create an excess of demand for loanable funds. Also, in these circumstances characteristic of agrarian societies, “avarice or the desire of gain”, the “universal passion which operates at all times, in all places, and upon all persons” finds little to apply itself to, since trading is limited to local exchanges, often in kind (E 113). Hume says immediately after this passage of the second volume of the *Essays* (1742) that “you will never want book sellers, while there are buyers of books”; it seems that in agrarian societies there were neither many buyers nor sellers of goods in general and that a person’s desire to have access to pleasures may be better satisfied in ways other than in trade and commerce. Indeed, a year earlier, Hume had said in the first volume of the *Essays* that commerce decays not because it is “less secure, but because it is less *honourable*” (E 93). In the historical setting described above, one’s love of gain may be better satisfied by bonding with the local landholder and becoming a guest in his table than by dedicating oneself to productive work.

As we already know, foreign commerce is the element that introduces change, and this is the same for the history of love of gain. If foreign commerce introduces “the gayer and more opulent part of the nation” to new possibilities of luxury consumption, it also makes men “acquainted with [...] the *profits* of commerce”, giving merchants who possess the “secret of importation and exportation [...] great profits” (E 264). The landholders, that opulent part of the nation that can consume luxury now demand rent in money rather than in kind, setting about a process of monetization of the economy:

But after men begin to refine on all these enjoyments, and live not always at home, nor are content with what can be raised in their neighbourhood, there is more exchange and commerce of all kinds, and more money enters that exchange. The tradesmen will not be paid in corn; because they want something more than barely to eat. The farmer goes beyond his own parish for the commodities he purchases, and cannot always carry his commodities to the merchant who supplies him. The landlord lives in the capital, or in a foreign country; and demands his rent in gold and silver, which can easily be transported to him. Great undertakers, and manufacturers, and merchants, arise in every commodity; and these can conveniently deal in nothing but specie. And consequently, in this situation of society, the coin enters into many more contracts, and by that means is much more employed than in the former. (E 291)

This “enlargement” of men’s views regarding their possibilities of gain, as Hume calls it in “Of Interest” (E 299), is actualized by the merchants, “one of the most useful races of men” (E 300), that carry their products back and forth among different regions of the nation and to foreign

countries. Merchant or otherwise, most people in this new state of affairs will be occupied daily with earning money; following his statement that “there is no craving or demand of the human mind more constant and insatiable than that for exercise and employment”, Hume argues that

If the employment you give him be lucrative, especially if profit be attached to every particular exertion of industry, he has gain so often in his eye, that he acquires, by degrees, a passion for it, and knows no such pleasure as that of seeing the daily encrease of his fortune. And this is the reason why trade encreases frugality, and why, among merchants, there is the same overplus of misers above prodigals, as among the possessors of land, there is the contrary. (E 301)

Thus, not only the merchants, who “serve as the canals to convey [industry] through every corner of the state”, but all “industrious professions [...] beget frugality, and make love of gain prevail over the love of pleasure” (E 301). As Grune-Yanoff and McClennen (2008, p. 96) observe, “love of pleasure” – expressed as the early consumption of foreign luxuries – is in the origin of the process that makes love of gain the ruling passion of commercial societies. This process also places the merchant class in the limelight, since their frugality gives them “great command of that industry” (E 301). Their concentrated wealth lowers the interest rate, because the balance between prodigal borrowers and frugal lenders now inclines to the latter; it also makes “the monied interest considerable” with political consequences I present in the next section. Returning to the question of “Of Commerce”, Hume argues that the enlargement of markets and consequent monetization of the economy also works in favor of the greatness of the sovereign: in the “rude” state of society, the state has either to collect taxes in kind or limit tax collection to the cities, where money circulates; now it is able to collect taxes in specie from the whole nation because the usage of money is widespread and because the nation is richer (E 293-294).

In his discussion of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debate on luxury, Berry (1994, ch. 5) argues that the modern perception of humans as “naturally a desirous creature” who could only be free of desires once dead – in contrast with the ancient perception of humans as beings that pursue a certain state of things where one would be happy or virtuous – is the foundation of the eventual “victory” of defenders of luxury such as Hume over those who condemned it, such as the civic moralists. In the *Treatise*, especially in the “conjectural history” told in Book III, this modern perception is truly the case: the source of the problems to be solved as well as the solution to them is always found in our natural avidity or love of gain; it is this

passion that leads humans into each convention of justice and it is its restraint that solves the problems each convention is meant to solve. However, in the *Political Discourses*, though Hume still holds the belief that human beings are naturally desirous creatures, we learn that this desire, by itself, does not explain as much as a historical perspective requires. Rather, “love of gain” now has a history of its forms of expression which shows that, in agrarian societies, it cannot find many places to exert itself, taking the form of a pursuit of honor or relation with those in power. The rise of commerce gives to our love of gain or avidity the possibility of exerting itself in a new form, industrious work. The key change here is that, without commerce, persons are always playing a zero-sum game with each other’s love of gain, that is, it is only by taking someone else’s position in the local lord’s table that one can increase one’s wealth and access to pleasure. In contrast, the rise of commerce offers the possibility of catering to one’s love of gain by producing or trading; merchants, for instance, rise to power by being useful to others and taking the producers’ goods to places where they are demanded. Thus, love of gain finds a new way to express itself; its new object, money, even becomes a source of pleasure in itself rather than only a way to gain access to other commodities.

In conclusion, we have seen in this section that the history of the transition from agrarian to commercial and manufacturing societies can be told from many different points of view: in section 2.2 above, I told that history looking to the growth of the manufacturing sector; here, I told the same history looking to the desire for action and to love of gain. These many sides of the same history are interwoven in a single history of the rise of commercial society: the desire for action of merchants finds in money an object that lets it exert itself endlessly without the frustration that the landowners of agrarian societies met with in their pursuit of pleasure. The merchant excites her animal spirits with the same activity that makes her fortune grow; this process lowers interest rates, brings commerce to every corner of the nation, including all industrious work into the monetized economy, which becomes capable of satisfying previously unimagined wants and desires as well as allowing the sovereign to collect taxes more easily. In this process, pleasure is reaped from many places: from the very activity farmers, laborers and manufacturers perform, from the pleasure of seeing one’s fortune grow, and from the luxury goods one now wants and is able to satisfy.

Hume’s account of the transition from agrarian to commercial societies can be read from different point of views. So far, I have considered it mainly from an economic point of view, focusing either in the overall structure of economic reproduction, as in section 2.2, or in some

of the passions that change their form of expression with the transition; in the next section, I look at the moral and political consequences of the rise of commercial societies.

2.4 – THE MORAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE TRANSITION

If Adam Ferguson must be credited with the invention of the word “civilization” in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society*⁵⁵, the idea that societies can be “civilized”, “polished” and “refined” in contrast with “rude” or “barbarian” certainly antedates the *Essay*: the very concern with the betterment of earthly life in its multiple aspects (material, moral, political) is one of the defining characteristic of eighteenth-century or Enlightenment thought (Robertson, 2005, ch. 1). Unsurprisingly, this was a major concern for Hume and, as McArthur (2008, pp. 7-8) argues, “to civilize”, civilized, and other variations may be considered the most frequent concept in Hume’s works – far more than “sceptic” and its variations, for instance. Further, the notion of civilized society can be considered as the unifying concept of Hume’s social thought: if “manners”, the compound of social, moral, political, and economic practices, are the object of Hume’s social thought, the categories “civilized” and “barbarian” and its variations serve as the organizing concepts of that thought.

In the two subsections below, I discuss how Hume’s account of the transition from agrarian to commercial societies is a moral and political change as much as it is an economic one. If economic change is given causal antecedence in Hume’s account – the transition has the expansion of commerce in its origins –, its consequences may have the greatest weight in his approbation of the outcome of the transition. The rise of humanity as the defining sentiment of the social and moral practices of commercial societies, which is accompanied by the rule of law as its political counterpart, two components of true civilized society, are shown to have been brought about by the rise of industry.

2.4.1 – The indissoluble chain: commercial societies and the rise of humanity

As Berry (1997, pp. 30-47) shows, one of the main tenets of enlightened Scottish social thought is the rejection of historical perspectives based on the acts of “great men”, especially the belief that “lawgivers” can dictate wise laws out of their own superior conscience to make

⁵⁵ Cf. Pimenta (2011).

a well-ordered society; rather, Scottish thinkers considered historical processes as the unintended consequences of gradual changes, often imperceptible to those living through them, sometimes even going against what may have been the explicit purpose of those acting in the context of the change. Although Hume does reserve a high place of honor to wise lawgivers and sovereigns⁵⁶, this is a very precise description of his account of the rise of humanity as the defining sentiment of commercial sociability⁵⁷: instead of finding its origins in some law or in the desire of the people to create a different sociability, humanity rises as the unintended consequence of the rise of the habit of industrious work described in the previous two sections.

In “Of Refinement in the Arts”, after describing the “received notions” of happiness and how the habit of industrious work satisfies them with its capacity to provide in a self-sustaining fashion the action as well as the pleasure humans naturally desire, Hume looks to the consequences of that habit created by luxury consumption. The animal spirits stirred by continual dedication to business and production produce effects beyond these occupations. As Hume explains in “Of National Characters” (1748), living close together to other persons and having constant commerce – understood in the broad eighteenth-century sense of the word – with them produce an inevitable “contagion”, making us display similar passions and inclinations (E 202). Thus, the changes in the mechanical arts spill over to the liberal arts, where one also observes constant occupation and enterprise. The ages that produce great artisans such as ship-carpenters and weavers often produces great poets, generals, philosophers and politicians. This spillover from the sphere of commerce and manufacturing produces a “spirit of the age”:

The spirit of the age affects all the arts, and the minds of men, being once roused from their lethargy, and put into fermentation, turn themselves on all sides, and carry improvements into every art and science. Profound ignorance is totally banished, and men enjoy the privilege of rational creatures, to think as well as to act, to cultivate the pleasures of the mind as well as those of the body. (E 271)

Therefore, nations that have a “storehouse of labor” are also the nations where there is a large “stock”, if we may call it so, of contributions to human knowledge. Possessing such a

⁵⁶ In “Of Parties in General” (1741) he writes: “Of all men, that distinguish themselves by memorable achievements, the first place of honour seems due to Legislators and founders of states, who transmit a system of laws and institutions to secure the peace, happiness, and liberty of future generations” (E 54)

⁵⁷ And it seems a promising question to ask to what extent Hume’s post-*Treatise* writings contributed to create this mode of thought and to make it a distinct feature of the Scottish Enlightenment.

material and intellectual affluence, these persons will inevitably seek a different form of sociability where they can exchange their goods and knowledge and be proud of what they know or possess. The solitude of “ignorant and barbarous nations”, where one’s connections are limited to the local village and perhaps to the court of the local lord cannot support the “fermentation” of the spirit of the age, hence people

Flock into cities; love to receive and communicate knowledge; to show their wit or their breeding; their taste in conversation or living, in clothes or furniture. Curiosity allures the wise; vanity the foolish; and pleasure both. Particular clubs and societies are every where formed: Both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behaviour, refine apace. (E 271)

Instead of believing that “enormous cities are [...] destructive to society, beget vice and disorder of all kinds” (E 401) as the defenders of ancient agrarian commonwealths did, Hume regards the close contact of large cities as capable of “refining” men’s behavior and temper. As Boyd (2008) argues, Hume considers the constant contact with persons of varied backgrounds displaying different beliefs and customs than one’s own as an important element in developing awareness of what one has in common with them *despite* the differences. Accordingly, “from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other’s pleasure and entertainment”, Hume says, “it is impossible but they must feel an increase of humanity” (E 271). Humanity complements the increased knowledge and industry, creating “an indissoluble chain [...] peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the more luxurious ages” (E 271).

In E-RA, Hume describes the transition from rude agrarian societies to polished commercial ones in rather colorful brushes. People “flock into cities” to satisfy their fermenting spirits and to show their possessions and knowledge, that is, the movement towards a more urban society happens because people seek a new sociability that supports their newly discovered desires and capacities. Later in the decade, Hume describes the same transition towards a commercial society in the third volume of his *History of England*, dedicated to the House of Tudor⁵⁸, with a much more “materialistic” tone. Luxury again stands as the causal origin of the change, but this time, instead of inspiring a new habit of work that spills over and

⁵⁸ The third in the order they were originally published. This is the fourth volume if the history is arranged chronologically, as in the Liberty Fund edition quoted here.

creates a new, urban sociability, Hume attributes the change to the revolution in agriculture caused by the introduction of luxury:

The habits of luxury dissipated the immense fortunes of the ancient barons; and as the new methods of expence gave subsistence to mechanics and merchants, who lived in an independant manner on the fruits of their own industry, a nobleman, instead of that unlimited ascendant, which he was wont to assume over those who were maintained on his board, or subsisted by salaries conferred on them, retained only that moderate influence, which customers have over tradesmen, and which can never be dangerous to civil government. The landed proprietors also, having a greater demand for money than for men, endeavoured to turn their lands to the best account with regard to profit, and either inclosing their fields, or joining many small farms into a few large ones, dismissed those useless hands, which formerly were always at their call in every attempt to subvert the government, or oppose a neighbouring baron. By all these means the cities encreased; (Hume, 1983, vol. IV, p. 384)

In other words, people “flock into cities” not because they were pursuing a new sociability but because they were displaced in the country by the changes in the form of agricultural production. The change in habits in the “more opulent part of the nation” causes the enclosures of fields, forcing those who relied on them to find a new way of living in the cities that now prospered as the suppliers of the luxury of the barons. To be sure, Hume still regards this process as essentially positive, since he says immediately after that “the same causes begat a new plan of liberty” in England, but the cheerfulness of E-RA is replaced by an earthlier account in the *History of England*.

Nevertheless, even in the *Political Discourses* we can find some instances of this down-to-earth account of the process of urbanization that creates the kind of sociability where humanity prevails. First, as the trade of merchants becomes more complex due to the growing networks they establish, they begin to accumulate stock, either in kind or in money, in the capital (E 300). Large stocks allow them to trade on lower margins as well as to supply the market for loanable funds, lowering both the price of commodities and the interest rate, thus creating economic advantages in the capital relative to the country (E 303). Second, the practice of mortgaging future revenue adopted by modern governments, i.e., the growth of the national debt, means large sums of money are collected as taxes in the country to be payed to debtholders who live mostly in the capital, thus creating a continuous flow of resources from the country to the seat of government (E 354). These circumstances along with the opportunities for

employment and profit that the growth of commerce and manufacturing create in the urban environment, creates a very material basis to the growth of cities and to their humane sociability. As Sebastiani (2013, p. 51) observes, the fact that commercial societies can satisfy basic material needs more easily than agrarian societies means the former have more resources, people, and time available to non-instrumental relationships; where opulence is not present, people are more often concerned with their subsistence and do not have time for the kind of non-instrumental intercourse such as those one could find in the clubs and societies of Edinburgh.

Indeed, Hume had already argued in “Of the Middle Station of Life”, an essay that appeared only in the 1742 volume of the *Essays*, that the middle station of life – the station of merchants and liberal professionals that predominate in the urban environment – is the most suitable rank of society to the exercise of virtue and wisdom. Those in the higher ranks of society, Hume argues, are often “too much imers’d in Pleasure” while the poor are “too much occupy’d in providing for the Necessities of Life” (E 546); only those in the middle have ample opportunity to exercise virtue:

Those, who are plac’d among the lower Rank of Men, have little Opportunity of exerting any other Virtue, besides those of Patience, Resignation, Industry and Integrity. Those, who are advanc’d into the higher Stations, have full Employment for their Generosity, Humanity, Affability and Charity. When a Man lyes betwixt these two Extremes, he can exert the former Virtues towards his *Superiors*, and the latter towards his *Inferiors*. (E 546)

Furthermore, in the middle rank of society, virtue receives “the fullest *Security*”, assuring those who practice it that their actions will be received and understood as a genuine expression of virtue: the poor are often “subject to have their Proffers of Friendship rejected”, even when they are genuine, because they may be taken for expressions of flattery and of a narrow interest in climbing the ranks of society; in the same manner, those at the higher ranks can never be completely sure that their expressions of virtue will be received by genuine gratitude and kindness. Contrastingly, those in the middle rank, especially when they have intercourse between themselves (which happens more often as this rank enlarges), can be assured of the sincerity of good-offices since they are often bound to each other by obligations and favors running both sides (E 547).

If modern economic practices and the urban sociability it creates foster humanity, the case is quite the opposite in ancient societies (not to speak of feudal societies, towards which Hume feels an almost absolute reprobation). In E-PAN, Hume addresses the “chief difference between the domestic oeconomy of the ancients and that of the moderns”, the practice of slavery (E 383). The purpose of the discussion of slavery in this essay is to support the view that the world was more populous in the modern than in the ancient era. However, the question of population served in the eighteenth century as a proxy discussion for an overall judgment on each era’s social, economic, and political practices: “if every thing else be equal, it seems natural to expect, that, wherever there are most happiness and virtue, and the wisest institutions, there will also be most people” (382). Indeed, the population question “commonly determines [the choice between ages or kingdoms] concerning the preference of their whole police, their manners, and the constitution of their government” (E 381)⁵⁹. Hume opens his discussion of ancient slavery arguing that the plain fact that a large share of the population of the ancient world was enslaved meant “that human nature, in general, really enjoys more liberty at present, in the most arbitrary government of EUROPE, than it ever did during the most flourishing period of ancient times” (E 383). However, the defenders of the ancients often argued that, because slave-owners had an interest in the reproduction of their slaves, they must surely have treated them more softly than a modern manufacturer treated his laborers, since the latter could fire the laborer and hire another one at his will.

Hume refutes this argument in two parts: first, he shows that slave-owners would not be very accustomed to being humane to their slaves. Slavery accustoms the slave-owner to exercise unlimited authority over its slaves and “to trample upon human nature” without any consequences whatsoever because “all checks were on the inferior, to restrain him to the duty of submission”. In opposition to the modern practice of free labor, which makes persons bound to obey certain rules of conduct if they desire to either find an employment or an employee, masters living in a household with slaves are accustomed “from infancy” with that unrestrained behavior and will feel no need to engage in the “reciprocal duties of gentleness and humanity” (E 383-384). Indeed, Hume concludes, there cannot be assigned a more likely reason “for the severe, I might say, the barbarous manners of ancient times, than the practice of domestic slavery” (E 384). In other words, we may say that ancient slavery turns every slave-owner into a petty version of Alexander, the Great, as Hume describes him in the EPM (7.6): every inferior

⁵⁹ Tomaselli (1998) discusses the moral relevance of the eighteenth-century debate on population.

person becomes a subject bound to obey her superior without any checks. In the 1777 edition of the *Essays*, the last Hume supervised, he would further add that slavery is an economic as well as a moral hindrance: from the experience of the American colonies, we learn that it is “as little advantageous to the master as to the slave, wherever hired servants can be procured” since “the fear of punishment will never draw so much labour from a slave, as the dread of being turned off and not getting another service, will from a freeman” (E 389 n.23).

Second, the idea that slave-owners had an interest in the reproduction of their slaves and, consequently, in providing them with at least a tolerable living standard was simply a misconception of the economic dynamics of slavery. In an admittedly “shocking” comparison (E 387), Hume shows that slave breeding worked in the same way as cattle breeding: in all capitals and great cities, breeding cattle is very expensive because it requires provisions, labor and space that can be employed to higher profits in other activities, whereas these resources do not find many other employments in the country. This reasoning applies equally to slave management; since raising a child in a city such as ancient Rome or modern London is very expensive, it would not be profitable to the slave-owner to feed, clothe and lodge a child for a handful of years before it can become of any use (and even more until she becomes profitable). It is much more profitable to simply buy new adult slaves from the distant provinces where they could either be raised cheaply or bought or taken from other nations (E 387). Hume then proceeds to a ten-pages long exposure of ancient Roman and Greek practices concerning slavery, showing that, though they did sometimes encourage the propagation of slaves (E 396), the usual ancient practice was to enslave conquered peoples in the borders of the empire, sell them to the large urban centers and treat them very inhumanly (E 397). Therefore, he concludes, the main form of production in ancient societies did not promote humanity both because there were no economic incentives to doing so and because it accustomed the superiors to not being obliged to do so.

Before I conclude, a qualification must be made concerning the indissoluble chain concerns the meaning of the term “humanity” in the indissoluble chain. According to the interpretation of the EPM I offered in the previous chapter, the “sentiment of humanity” acquires a very precise meaning as the “sentiment implied by the notion of morals”, despite the somewhat loose conceptual rigor of the work, with Hume often using “sympathy”, “general benevolence”, “humanity” and “sentiment of humanity” interchangeably. As Taylor (2015, pp. 160-161) notices, the humanity that is part of the indissoluble chain has a broader meaning, referring to the gentle treatment of others, the desire to engage in conversation and exchange

rather than to subject others to one's command. In the third chapter, I will argue that, for Hume, it is in this environment where broader humanity can flourish that the sentiment of humanity may become the sentiment that commands our judgments concerning moral matters. For now, it is sufficient to conclude that the sociability created by the growth of commerce creates the space, time and resources for non-instrumental relationships based on mutual obligation and interdependence. In this situation, virtue in general and humanity in particular (in its broader sense) can flourish.

However, Hume takes his argument further in the *Political Discourses* and shows that the rise of commerce also changed the constitution of government by changing the balance of power among the ranks of society, so that, more than just the *opportunity* to exercise virtue in general (and humanity more particularly), commercial society also enlarges the rank of man with an *interest* in preserving the social, economic, and political practices that sustain humanity. The next subsection explores this political side of the rise of humanity.

2.4.2 – Commerce and the constitution

In the first section of this chapter, I explored the “economic content” of the conventions of justice in the *Treatise*. There, the causality in the relationship between justice – the creation and observance of property rights – and the economic organization of society runs always from the former to the latter, that is, as the conventions are successively implemented, the existing form of economic organization poses a problem which is solved by a convention of justice which, in turn, makes possible further developments in the way society produces and consumes goods. Indeed, Hume considered the difficulties to the *establishment* of society to be proportional to the difficulty of redirecting the interested affection through the conventions of justice. Wennerlind (2011, pp. 44-48), in one of the recent attempts to analyze the connection between Hume's moral philosophy and political economy, argues that this basic relationship is maintained in the narrative built in the EPM and in the *Political Discourses*. In his view, Hume's theory of justice, more than just a theory of property, can be seen as the basis upon which the development of commerce is built and, following the connection between commerce and humanity, the basis upon which a better morality can be developed. Wennerlind's paper quoted above (2002) reinforces this reading of his interpretation, because taking Book III of the *Treatise* to be the philosophical elaboration of his historical works implies that the analytical

relationship established in the former, with causality running from justice and government to economic practices, actually occurs in the history of commercial societies.

While I certainly agree with the overall view that economic, moral, and political practices are connected, Wennerlind's emphasis on justice, the conventional redirection of the interested affection, as prior to the development of commerce and of the humane sociability the latter entails seems to ignore the complexity that the historical approach of the EPM and *Political Discourses* adds to Hume's analysis of the relationships between these practices⁶⁰. In these two works, the relationship becomes a dual relationship⁶¹: in the previous chapter, I have already argued that Hume acknowledges in the EPM that what specific rules of property a society has will be determined by its particular historical circumstances; but, he still regards justice as necessary to sustain life in society (EPM 3.48) and to promote industrious labor (EPM 3.13).

In the narrative of the transition to commercial societies put forth in the *Political Discourses*, Hume is mostly concerned with the causality running from economic practices to respect to property rights and liberty⁶². Indeed, in the first two essays of the *Discourses*, causality running from property rights to economic organization is simply absent. Instead, the emphasis lies on how the changes in economic organization affect the balance of power between ranks of men *and* the kind of intercourse that takes place in public spaces. We saw above the effects of luxury and the growth of commerce in "private life" (E 269), but Hume claims they also affect "public life". He divides his argument in two parts: on the one side, he argues that luxury promotes a new class to power. In "rude unpolished nations", the people is divided into two classes, the landowners and their vassals or tenants. The latter struggle simply to reproduce themselves and possess no riches, their knowledge of agriculture is not praised and they are thus necessarily dependent, "fitted for slavery and subjection". The landowners, on the other side, are absolute masters of their vassals and "naturally erect themselves into petty tyrants", as

⁶⁰ At stake here is the relation of the EPM to Book III of the *Treatise*, discussed in the previous chapter. Wennerlind (2011, p. 45n) acknowledges that this matter is relevant, but does not take it into account in his discussion of the relation between Hume's moral philosophy and political economy. Consequently, he ends up ignoring differences between these two works that are, in my interpretation, relevant when we discuss the relation between Hume's political economy and moral philosophy.

⁶¹ Interpreters such as Berry (1997, pp. 122-133) and Skinner (2009) have argued for the presence of this dual relationship, but they do not differentiate, as I do in this work, between the *Treatise* and Hume's later historical works. Berry (2013, pp. 74-93) gives an account of the causality running from commerce to justice focused in the *History of England*.

⁶² I have also argued in the previous chapter, following Baier (2010), that Hume enlarges his conception of justice in his later works. In the *Political Discourses*, Hume is concerned with the broader notion of "liberty" than merely with respect to property rights.

was the case with ancient slave-owners used to unchecked behavior; thus, either the lords must submit to an absolute master or they will fight each other into anarchy, as was the case of the barons of medieval England (E 277). In this situation, the lower rank of men can do nothing to preserve liberty and those who wield power have no interest in doing so. The situation is different in commercial societies:

But where luxury nourishes commerce and industry, the peasants, by a proper cultivation of the land, become rich and independent; while the tradesmen and merchants acquire a share of property, and draw authority and consideration to that middling rank of men, who are the best and firmest basis of public liberty. (E 277)

The middling rank of men does not need to submit to slavery, because they are not dependent on the rank of landowners and are not used to “poverty and meanness of spirit”; but they are also incapable of “tyrannizing over others”, so they neither tyrannize over the poor nor need an absolute king to impose peace and order on them. Further, commerce and manufacturing, the middling rank’s source of power, is a gainer where there is liberty (though, as Hume admits, there is not a necessary connection between liberty and commerce, E 265), making these men “covet equal laws, which may secure their property, and preserve them from monarchical, as well as aristocratical tyranny” (E 278). In England, Hume says, the lower house of parliament – increasingly representative of the middling rank of men and widely acknowledged as the source of the country’s liberty since the 1688 revolution – had “owed its chief influence and consideration to the encrease of commerce, which threw such a balance of property into the hands of the commons” (E 278).

On the other side, Hume argues that the growth of commerce refines the treatment political actors dispense to each other. The knowledge promoted by the “fermentation” of the spirit of the age also affects the liberal arts, thus enabling the public to make a better use of its subjects’ industry:

Laws, order, police, discipline; these can never be carried to any degree of perfection, before human reason has refined itself by exercise, and by an application to the more vulgar arts, at least, of commerce and manufacture. Can we expect that a government will be well modelled by a people, who know not how to make a spinning-wheel, or to employ a loom to advantage? (E 273)

But not only do the policies of a refined government become better and supported by a more knowledgeable society, the refinement also changes the political disputes between parties and factions to implement their preferred policies: the knowledge in the “arts of government”, Hume says, “begets mildness and moderation” and instructs men “in the advantages of humane maxims above rigour and severity” (E 273). When governed by more humane maxims, the subjects refine their tempers and their “humanity appears still more conspicuous” (E 274), thus becoming less inclined to rebellion and sedition. Even when harsher disputes happen,

Factions are then less inveterate, revolutions less tragical, authority less severe, and seditions less frequent. Even foreign wars abate of their cruelty; and after the field of battle, where honour and interest steel men against compassion, as well as fear, the combatants divest themselves of the brute, and resume the man. (E 274)

If commercial nations fight less cruel wars, that does not mean they are incapable of defending their territory. Quite the opposite, the “storehouse of labor” created by commerce and manufacturing allowed eighteenth-century sovereigns to maintain armies often twenty times as numerous as their predecessors could do four centuries before (E 273). Furthermore, these armies, drawn from an industrious and polite society, did not depend on courage, which, besides being that “most precarious” of the national qualities, since it can “only be exerted at intervals and thus cannot become the character of a whole people (E 212), also needed to be accompanied by martial skill and discipline, often lacking in rude and barbarian societies. Rather, modern armies in refined societies were manned by soldiers with a “sense of honour” – a much “more constant, and more governable principle” (E 274) – that made them willing to defend their government. Even among modern refined nations, this sense of honor could be a differential: Hume attributes the advantages of the British army over the French in the eighteenth century to his country’s riches as well as to the national spirit that animated its people, “so fully sensible of the blessings of their government” (E 338).

If politics and even war in modern commercial societies were characterized by moderation and humanity, ancient societies – even the celebrated Romans and Greeks – constantly displayed their rudeness and barbarity in public affairs. Again, E-PAN offers a stark account of ancient politics, setting the contrast between ancient and modern societies. As already mentioned in the second section of this chapter, ancient republics were in almost perpetual war, “a natural effect of their martial spirit, their love of liberty, their mutual emulation, and that hatred which generally prevails among nations that live in close

neighbourhood” (E 404)⁶³. Not only war was continuous, their maxims were also much more “destructive” than their modern counterpart. The battles were bloodier, first, due to the nature of the weapons: the predominance of close combat meant it was much harder to disengage the enemy, often leading to battles where one side won over the other absolutely; in contrast, modern battles based on firearms meant engagements were often partial engagements with the losing side seeking a more advantageous position to fight (E 405). Only the “hopes of profit” in enslaving the vanquished army could make ancient combatants give quarter, but since a faction could not take the free citizens of the other as slaves, civil wars in the ancient world were often carried to the point where one of the sides was totally decimated (E 405).

Even in times of peace, the maxims of ancient politics proved much more inhumane and barbaric. Hume admits that every free government is subject to some degree of factionalism, but the “inveterate rage between the factions, and such bloody maxims” as were found in the ancient commonwealths only prevailed among the religious parties of the modern era (E 407). Every time one party prevailed over the other in the ancient world,

whether the nobles or people (for I can observe no difference in this respect) [...] they immediately butchered all of the opposite party who fell into their hands, and banished such as had been so fortunate to escape their fury. No form of process, no law, no trial, no pardon. A fourth, a third, perhaps near half of the city was slaughtered, or expelled, every revolution; and the exiles always joined foreign enemies, and did all the mischief possible to their fellow-citizens; till fortune put it in their power to take full revenge by a new revolution. (E 407)

Hume attributed the extremism of ancient party politics to what may seem apparent advantages: their equality of fortune, created by the custom of dividing the inheritance among all brothers, and their love of liberty. As he says, “these people were extremely fond of liberty; but seem not to have understood it very well” (E 408): since one was either a freeman or a slave, “the very quality of *freemen* gave such a rank, being opposed to that of slave, that is seemed to entitle the possessor to every power and privilege in the commonwealth” (E 415), with the ensuing result that the government was as chaotic as one can get, with mob behavior frequently swinging its direction. In the case of the Athenian democracy, Hume says it

⁶³ Notice that in this passage from E-PAN, it is the “martial spirit” that causes perpetual war, while in the passage quoted in section 2.2, the “spirit” was a consequence of the historical circumstances of those societies (E 259). I will return to the relation between the manners and the historical circumstances in the third chapter.

was such a tumultuous government as we can scarcely form a notion of in the present age of the world. The whole collective body of the people voted in every law, without any limitation of property, without any distinction of rank, without controul from any magistracy or senate; and consequently without regard to order, justice, or prudence. The ATHENIANS soon became sensible of the mischiefs attending this constitution: But being averse to checking themselves by any rule or restriction, they resolved, at least, to check their demagogues or counsellors, by the fear of future punishment and enquiry. (E 368-369)

That is, the liberty the ancients seemed to love was the liberty eighteenth-century political thinkers attributed to salvages and barbarians, it was the unbridled liberty to do as one pleased that the Troglodytes of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* enjoyed in their first stage. However, as the *Lettres* themselves warn, that liberty had to be supported by perfect virtue⁶⁴. Hume considered it rather a misunderstanding of what liberty meant, since relying on perfect virtue was the same as relying on a chimera. Even where there were strict laws punishing the kinds of barbarous actions Hume attributes to ancient revolutions, as he says was the case of “the later period of the ROMAN commonwealth, the laws were often so strict that the head of the parties had to have recourse to “extremities” outside of the law to punish citizens that might indeed be dangerous to the commonwealth (E 414). As a result, “in those days, there was no medium between a severe, jealous Aristocracy, ruling over discontented subjects; and a turbulent, factious, tyrannical Democracy” (E 416). Indeed, Hume says

the maxims of ancient politics contain, in general, so little humanity and moderation, that it seems superfluous to give any particular reason for the acts of violence committed at any particular period. (E 414)

Further, in such a situation, property became very precarious. As I mentioned in section 2.1 above, the Athenian citizens, for instance, had a practice of seizing a person's money “whenever they wanted”, a practice the orator Lysias mentioned without the least sign of reproach (E 411-412). These practices often made a person more secure when she was poor than when she was richer, since the poor could threaten the rich and “look big” while the latter had to walk in fear and refrain from travelling and absenting from the city (E 411).

In conclusion, commercial societies had more moderate and humane maxims in politics and that was owing to the refinement promoted by luxury and to the presence of the “middling

⁶⁴ The story of the Troglodytes appears in the *Lettres Persanes* (Montesquieu, 1999, pp. 45-56). Cf. Sher (1994) for a discussion of the relation of Montesquieu's story of the Troglodytes to the Scottish Enlightenment.

rank of men”, whose power relied on the stability of laws and of property, thus making it a rank of persons simultaneously interested and capable of guaranteeing the stability of politics. Ancient politics, in contrast, were bloody and inhumane, swinging between unstable forms of government that could not achieve a balance between the different parties and ranks of people. The very greatness of ancient commonwealths, as Manzer (1996) observes, depended on this barbaric situation: the “*amor patriae*” or public spirit upon which they depended to man and supply their armies and fleets was simultaneously cause and effect of the inhumanity that pervaded their political, economic and social practices. “War-inducing conditions”, as Manzer (1996, p. 375) call them, were a defining element of the “spirit” of the ancient age.

Moreover, it is relevant to observe that commerce becomes a very important element in Hume’s *political* thought⁶⁵. As I have alluded to above⁶⁶, instead of looking only to the form of government (aristocracy, democracy, monarchy, etc.), Hume is concerned with wider questions such as the balance of power within the nation, whether there is a rank of people interested in stabilizing political factions and what is the refinement of interactions in the public space. These matters add economic, social and moral depth to political questions and, as we have seen in this section, commerce is at the center of Hume’s analysis of the complex interactions between these different spheres of human life.

2.5 – CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I attempted to offer an interpretation of Hume’s account of the transition from predominantly agrarian to manufacturing and commercial societies as it appears in the *Political Discourses*. Throughout the argument made here, two features of those essays stand out: first, that the analysis of human interactions must be made in historical terms, for how and what passions, motives and actions individuals feel and do change according to the historical circumstances they find themselves in. Second, that in building a comparison between ancient and modern circumstances, Hume reaches the conclusion that eighteenth-century society neither *could* nor *should* attempt to return to “ancient maxims”.

⁶⁵ Cf. Cheney (2008) for a discussion of how commerce changed the way Hume and other eighteenth-century political thinkers regarded traditional political thought based on the form of government alone. “Civilized monarchies”, the limited monarchies of European commercial societies, had begun to blur the distinction between republics and monarchies crucial to earlier (classical and even renaissance) political thought.

⁶⁶ Cf. the beginning of section 2.2, especially footnote 45.

The first feature, which we could sum up as Hume's acceptance of a degree of historicity in social theory, appears when we contrast what I called the "economic content" of the *Treatise* with the *Political Discourses*. In the former, Hume's discussion of the passions and the way they interact producing collective practices or institutions is eminently a-historical, that is, there is no attempt to place the interactions he discusses within a precise historical framing, discussing, for example, how the possibility of dedicating one's life to a specific occupation that is created by the development of an economic practice or institution affects the way one satisfies – or fails to satisfy – one's desire for action and liveliness. As we have seen, in this particular case, the presence of a developed manufacturing and commercial sector allows one's desire for action to be satisfied in an active habit that is self-sustaining and that creates the objects to satisfy one's desire for pleasure; in contrast, in the absence of these economic institutions, those who are powerful will vainly attempt to amuse themselves in pleasures that fade with repetition and those who are not powerful will fall in a habit of indolence, producing only as much as is necessary to reproduce themselves and to pay what the powerful oblige them to pay. In the other example worked out in this chapter, we saw how Hume's account of justice in the *Treatise* must be understood as either not based in a particular historical period, referring to the very establishment of society in a primitive setting placed before history, or as the abstract formulation of the commercial societies that developed from the sixteenth century onwards. Either way, that account contrasts with the discussion of the relation between stability of property and commerce in the *Political Discourses*. Though these two elements remain closely connected to each other, the *Discourses* add a lot of complexity to the discussion: Hume no longer treats individuals as homogeneous, focusing instead on how a community is divided in ranks and how each rank relates to stability of property; instead of an abstract process of trial and error, he offers an account of how the rank interested in the stability of property rises to economic and political power at the cost of the rank that promoted disorder and instability. Furthermore, in the *Political Discourses* the history of the expression of certain passions become integral to the history of political, economic and social institutions: the way love of gain is expressed as money becomes the universal object of economic pursuits, how it satisfies the desire for action and how it creates the material basis for the satisfaction of sensual pleasures are integral parts in the explanation of the rise of the merchant and manufacturing classes that compose the middling rank of men, which, in turn, are the cornerstone of the explanation of the stability of property in commercial societies.

The recognition of historicity is also the reason, it was not possible to return to ancient maxims of policy. The circumstances that created the “spirit” of the ancient age were long gone and, as I emphasized in this chapter, they were very specific and depended upon a series of economic and political practices and institutions that were very hard, if not altogether impossible, to reproduce and to sustain. Whether the defenders of the ancient world (or, more precisely, of its emulation in modern times) drew an accurate picture of Greek and Roman societies or not – and Hume’s essays argue that they were not correct –, the matter is that the world had changed and historical events cannot simply be “undone”, returning society back to ancient republics with their slave-owning, free citizens working on a small tract of land and serving the country in war.

Furthermore, even if it were possible, Hume would not advocate a return to ancient maxims. Quite the opposite, the *Political Discourses* stand as a staunch defense of modern commercial societies. By the end of “Of Money”, Hume says that

were the question proposed, Which of these methods of living in the people, the simple or refined, is the most advantageous to the state or public? I should, without much scruple, prefer the latter, in a view to politics at least; (E 293)

But Hume’s preference goes beyond the political, as we saw above: commercial societies fulfilled the “received notions” of happiness, had a stable political environment and were capable of defending themselves due to the “storehouses of labour” they could accumulate. In contrast, he offered a dim view of ancient Greek and Roman societies. Looking back at the 36-pages long enumeration of cases of political violence and inhumanity in ancient commonwealths, he asks

If such was the disposition of men’s mind among that refined people, what may be expected in the commonwealths of ITALY, AFRIC, SPAIN, and GAUL, which were denominated barbarous? Why otherwise did the GREEKS so much value themselves on their humanity, gentleness, and moderation, above all other nations? (E 413)

Thus, the *Discourses* can be read as a comprehensive moral, economic, and political defense of the transformations modern European societies were undergoing against the critiques levied by the civic tradition resisting them, which were based on an inaccurate view of the ancient world. In this sense, the *Discourses* were – along with most of the social and economic thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, for that matter – not a predecessor of the (supposedly)

descriptive social sciences that became paradigmatic (in a Kuhnian sense) in the nineteenth century, but the continuation of the language of the tradition it attacked. As Robertson (1983) and Hont (2005, ch. 3) argue, though standing in opposition to the civic tradition, Hume must be regarded as the last part of it, since what he offers, especially in the *Political Discourses*, is not a “neutral” description of the historical changes of the three centuries that preceded him, but the defense of a project with moral, political and economic dimensions that favored the “spirit” of the modern age. Indeed, the most relevant “policy prescription” of the *Discourses* has nothing to do with fine-tuning the monetary supply, as most of the literature on Hume’s economic thought would have us believe⁶⁷; rather, as Caffentzis (2001) shows, the *Discourses*’ policy prescription could be understood as a call for civilization and refinement, a prescription Hume advocated to the Scottish highlands after the Jacobite rebellion that started among his more unrefined Scottish fellows and almost managed to reach London in 1745. Enforcing the monetization of the Highland economy and encouraging commerce, Hume thought, was the best way to defeat the Jacobites, since it would root out the institutions and manners that kept their movement alive and leave the path open to the humanity that commerce was bringing upon the rest of Britain.

⁶⁷ Cf. Paganelli (2009) and Schabas (2001, ch. 4) for a position that plays down the “policy prescription” character of Hume’s monetary thought.

CHAPTER 3 – HISTORY, COMMERCE AND THE SENTIMENT OF HUMANITY

INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I try to combine the interpretations of the EPM and the *Political Discourses* proposed in the first and second chapters. In the first section below, I link the “loose thread” of the EPM, the need for “localized histories of moral”, with the analysis of modern European commercial societies Hume offers in the *Political Discourses*. I restate summarily what we can understand as the EPM’s method according to the analysis made in the first chapter and why it calls for a historical social theory, that is, the study of the economic, political and social practices and institutions of historical societies. In the following subsection, I develop the connection between commercial societies and the *sentiment* of humanity, the shared moral sentiment that is implied by the notion of morality, that we want and expect others to feel when we act morally. As I discussed in the second chapter, this connection is not straightforward because the “humanity” that is part of the indissoluble chain that characterizes refined commercial societies is the virtue of humanity, *i.e.*, the virtue of those who treat others humanely, not the sentiment of humanity. The connection between modern commercial societies and the sentiment of humanity requires us to go over the question of equality and justice and the kind of sociability that is developed in these societies, asking whether they create the space for a sentiment that is universally felt and that comprehends every person in its judgments.

In the second section, I look at the interpretations of the EPM and the *Political Discourses* from another perspective, closer to that of a historian of social thought, and ask what is the role of a historical approach in social theory according to them. I use Hume’s position in the luxury debate of the eighteenth century to showcase the relevance of the use of a historical approach in moral philosophy: in the statements concerning luxury in the EPM and *Political Discourses*, Hume places the morality of luxury in the larger context of politics and of history; whether luxury consumption is innocent or vicious – and whether a society must even tolerate vicious luxury – depends on the policies and historical context of each society. In some societies, luxury turns out to be indeed counterproductive, as in modern Switzerland, because their pattern of development has been such that luxury may not have the positive effect it had in Great Britain. In this sense, in his position on luxury consumption, Hume is willing to take historical diversity seriously, acknowledging the effect of historical circumstances on

morality as well as in economic and political institutions. Even though, the works analyzed here show this openness to history, historicity has its limits and Hume's acknowledgement of historical diversity and of the necessity to study it does not lead to relativism. Rather, historical enquiry becomes in the EPM and *Political Discourses* the very source of our knowledge of what is part of the human constitution. In the second part of section 3.2, I use Pocock's argument that there is a "pioneering historical materialism" in Scottish stage-theories, which appeared in the decades following the books analyzed here, and ask to what extent we can observe traces of historicism and materialism in the EPM and *Political Discourses*. It turns out that even though they have materialist tones, neither of these works are materialist in the sense that later Scottish stage-theories may be. And although they are indeed historical works, their historical approaches produce a picture of human nature that serves as the basis for the normative judgment Hume makes in favor of modern commercial societies, their manners, institutions and moral standard.

3.1 – COMMERCE AND THE SENTIMENT OF HUMANITY IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

I finished the first chapter of this thesis claiming that the EPM leaves a "loose thread" to be pursued, namely, the "localized histories of morals" that would show how the practices and institutions related to the political and economic organization of each society (war and peace, wealth and poverty, the constitution of government) shape the moral sentiments of that society. In the last chapter, I argued, first, that the *Political Discourses* can be regarded as an extensive comparative study of two forms of economic and political organization, agrarian and commercial societies, and, second, that Hume clearly supported the latter form, arguing that eighteenth-century Britain and Western Europe should not and could not attempt to return to the maxims of the agrarian form of organization. In this section, I connect the comparison and the project Hume defends in the *Discourses* to the EPM. First, I discuss how the method of the EPM opens the way to the *Discourses*. I then discuss the connection between commerce (and the humane sociability and more stable political structure it creates) to the sentiment of humanity that is implied by the notion of morals.

3.1.1 – The EPM's method and the *Political Discourses*

In the first chapter, I argued that the *Treatise*'s conjectural history of the conventions of justice attempts to explain simultaneously how humans come to unite in society and establish property right as well as the foundation of the moral approbation of justice, the virtue of those who respect such conventional rights. Using Gill's terms (2006, p. 239), Hume tries to explain simultaneously the *chronological* and the *foundational* origins of justice. The EPM, in contrast, gives up any attempt to explain the process by which human beings come to form a (moral) community, it simply looks at already constituted communities and studies their catalogues of vices and virtues. However, even in their foundational perspectives, these two works take different paths. King (1976, p. 356-357) argues that the *Treatise* adopts a "causal-generative" perspective, that is, it begins with the basic "springs and motives" of the human constitution and work out the consequences of the interactions among these springs and motives within a single human mind and among the springs and motives of different human minds. The two examples I discussed in section 2.1 of the previous chapter showcase the analytical process of the *Treatise* very clearly: the normative expectation that the poor should not approach too closely the rich is a causal consequence of wealth being a source of pride, of spectators sympathizing with the wealthy, and of the mirroring process that occurs between the possessor of wealth and the spectators; similarly, justice begins with our interested affection and works out its consequences to find the successive conventions of justice. In the imagery of the *Treatise*'s introduction, philosophy begins in the capital, human nature, and then makes its way outwards to the country, the different branches of knowledge among which human interactions are divided.

The EPM inverts the relation between human nature and institutions. Human nature becomes the *explanandum* and historical institutions and practices become the *explanans*: the moral philosopher looks at the qualities that are approved of in actual moral communities in search of what they have in common and what makes each practice different. The commonalities reveal the foundations of morals: that every quality is approved of because of its utility or agreeableness, to self or to others; that truly moral judgments imply a specific sentiment that is universally felt and that judges universally. The differences among moral communities reveal that there are many possible connections between the institutions and practices and the universal features of human nature: do the practices elicit other-directed passions more often than self-centered ones? Do they make sublime qualities such as magnanimity more relevant than the useful social virtues? In the imagery of the introduction to the *Treatise*, the EPM starts in the country and discovers that in each historical circumstance,

the roads that lead to the capital are shaped differently and may each arrive at a different “gate” of the capital. The EPM considers human nature as a large complexity of springs and motives that are combined according to the way practices and institutions are structured, allowing even for the possibility that persons located in different parts of the social, economic, and political structure of the same community display their “springs and motives” interacting in different ways because they are exposed to different habits, interact with others from different positions, which may require different sentiments and even vocabularies.

Language and moral discourse are the philosopher’s guide to the relation between the practices and institutions and the morality of a society. War and peace, wealth and poverty, the constitution of government, climate, religion, etc. change the utility and agreeableness of personal qualities, making some more important than others. The relative weight of personal qualities coalesces into general terms employed by the speakers of the community’s language, thus giving them a normative character, that is, language, with its positive and negative appellations, expresses the moral standard of a community. However, if language expresses the moral standard, it also expresses the non-moral passions of other economic, political and social practices. These different registers of language may be mixed to varying degrees, again dependent on the circumstances of each community: as I discuss in the next subsection, where basic subsistence is the most pressing concern for the greatest part of the members of a community, the focus on self-centered passions may make the private or selfish register of language so overwhelming that a properly moral register does not arise and people are always judging others from their private, self-centered, point of views. By relying on language as the means to investigate the origins of morality, the EPM shows how daunting the task of the moral philosopher is: it requires extensive knowledge of each societies practices and institutions, the way they determine the relevance of particular qualities and the way they produce different registers of language which are juxtaposed and sometimes mixed with each other. If the moral philosopher wants to avoid taking the effects of a particular historical circumstance as an element of human nature, she needs to be a well-trained historian and social theorist, so she can understand how the moral language of a community is formed and how it relates to the other registers of language.

The moral philosopher of the EPM is not very far from what it describes as a good moral judge. Although the former must surely refine the farthest her reasoning about moral sentiments and their relation to moral language, the practices and the institutions of different communities to a much larger extent than the latter, both face similar challenges. The good moral judge is

aware that the precise boundaries of virtue and vice change, that reasoning and public discussion – especially in the case of justice – enters into their delimitations and that, if she wants to judge adequately as well as act virtuously, she must be able to identify the changes and understand (or join) the moral discussion. Further, though she may not need to know whence comes the different registers of language and how such or such institution or practice shapes language, the good moral judge must understand in practical terms what kind of discourse is appropriate to the situation around her: is she expected to express approbation because the person talking to her is situated higher in the social hierarchy? Or is she in a situation where a genuinely shared sentiment can (and is expected to) be expressed? Does she know how to distinguish flattery from genuine moral approbation directed to her? Finally, the good moral judge must be aware – at least to the extent that she is exposed to other moral communities – that moral sentiments of her own community may not be universally accepted, that other communities will direct utility and agreeableness according to their own customs and circumstances. If she is living close to members of another community, she may have to put her understanding of moral language and moral sentiments and her capacity to sympathize with others to work in an effort to establish a connection to these people’s sentiments, perhaps even molding a new moral vocabulary based on the moral sentiments she comes to share with the people from other communities in the process of living close to them.

The *Discourses*, in this sense, serve a double purpose: they are simultaneously the continuation of the moral philosopher’s enquiry and a continuation of the “moral education” of the EPM. On the one side, the essays continue the discussion opened in the EPM about the effects of economic and political practices and institutions on moral discourse and moral sentiments: they discuss in what kind of economic setting people are used to treat others humanely, how the passions that move economic activity are expressed and their relation to other passions, and even whether a society’s political institutions afford enough stability for people to develop non-instrumental relationships. On the other side, if the good moral judge must be capable of understanding the general appellations of the moral language of her own community as well as, to some extent, the history of localized moralities, so that she can understand her own situatedness and the differences and similarities between her moral sentiments and those displayed by other communities, the *Discourses*, thanks to their author’s vast erudition, serve as a book that contributes to the moral – as much as economic and political – education of his contemporaries by giving readers a historical depth to their understanding of their own as well as of other historical moral communities.

Furthermore, according to this reading, the moral-philosopher-cum-social-theorist inevitably ends up producing a moral judgment out of her own studies. I concluded the second chapter arguing that, more than just an account of the social, economic, and political practices and institutions of agrarian and commercial societies, the *Political Discourses* were a defense of the project in favor of the transformations that had taken place in the couple of centuries before its publication. This should not come as a surprise: the history of refinement, industry, knowledge and humanity presented in the *Political Discourses* should give the author as well as the readers an understanding that theirs is a time where moral agents were perhaps best equipped to judge morally and to compare different moralities. In the following subsection, I establish the link between the sentiment of humanity, the sentiment implied by the notion of morals and the practices and institutions of a commercial society.

3.1.2 – Commerce, humanity and the sentiment of humanity

The relation between the sentiment of humanity (the moral sentiment, not to be confused with the *virtue* of humanity) and commercial societies can be drawn from the interpretation of the EPM and the *Political Discourses* presented in the first two chapters of this thesis. I divide the relation between commercial societies and the sentiment of humanity in two parts: first, in commercial societies, political and economic practices and institutions create the *possibility* of judging morally from the point of view of the sentiment of humanity, that is, within this historical setting moral agents are not constrained from adopting a shared point of view. In contrast, in the agrarian societies that preceded modern commercial societies, economic and political institutions did not create the appropriate conditions for a shared moral sentiment to flourish. Second, commercial sociability made it more likely that people will actually adopt shared points of view in their judgments, while the sociability of agrarian societies made people more likely to keep to their own private point of view.

In section 2.1, I argued following Baier (1991) that Book III of the *Treatise* seemed to assume a tolerable degree of equality existed among the covenants of justice, since if their situation was such that part of the covenants did not possess any property and could not reasonably expect to acquire any property, they would have no interest in adhering to the conventions that created property rights and interest was, as I argued in section 1.1, the natural or original motive to justice. In the EPM, the implicit assumption of equality became an explicit concern: as I showed in section 1.2.2, Hume argues that justice includes all beings that are

capable of “mak[ing] us feel the effect of their resentment” (EPM 3.18). Being capable of making one’s resentment felt means one can stand against offenders of one’s rights, thus establishing a minimum degree of equality among the members of a community. An intercourse characterized by a complete inequality means the stronger side would reap no advantage in respecting the weaker side’s rights, since it could simply impose its will at the cost of the weaker side’s interest. The oppressors would still be bound “by the laws of humanity”, but would not be bound by the rules of justice, for there would be no conventional agreement establishing the oppressed side’s rights. In this case, Hume affirms we cannot even say the relation between the stronger and the weaker sides is a “society”, because the very notion of society “supposes a degree of equality”. If the inequality is not so absolute, the weaker side is able to express and perhaps resist the imposition of the stronger side’s interest and therefore present to the latter some advantage in respecting their rights. This, Hume thinks, is the case of women, who, though weaker than men and incapable of freeing themselves completely from the yoke of the “severe tyranny” men united could impose on them, “are commonly capable to break the confederacy” (EPM 3.19). If a shared sentiment of humanity is implied by the notion of morals, how can something worthy the name “moral standard” exist in a community where inequality makes the stronger agents not bound to respect the weaker ones’ most basic rights, except by their own good-will? It may be the case that the stronger agents will indeed feel themselves bound by the laws of humanity and thus create an environment where both sides can share a moral sentiment, but it will always be a sentiment that hinges on a good-will that could be terminated at any moment.

If we take this perspective on equality from section three of the EPM and read the differences in the balance of power within the political constitutions of agrarian and modern commercial societies, we can see how the latter kind of society creates an environment where a shared sentiment can flourish whereas the practices and institutions of the former kind most likely inhibit genuine moral sentiments. First, Hume describes both ancient and feudal society as extremely unequal in the sense he discusses the issue in the EPM. Although the ancient societies that served as the paragon of virtue to the civic tradition had less economic inequality *among free citizens* (E 401), they were characterized by a large gap between the free rank and the slaves, a gap also found between the feudal barons and their vassals and serfs. But more than just economic inequality, the distance between the two ranks of agrarian societies, either feudal or ancient, was supported by the power that the higher rank had over the lower ranks of people: in section 2.4.1, I presented Hume’s argument that ancient slaveowners were

accustomed from infancy to behave with no kind of obligation to show gentleness and humanity towards the slaves in their household, making them capable of and used to “tramp[ing] upon human nature” without any checks. In the following section, I also showed that the feudal barons behaved as “petty tyrants” in their dominions, where they exerted “unlimited ascendant” over their inferiors, and used their local power to quarrel with the neighboring barons and even with the king, which was often just a slightly stronger baron himself. In these situations, every person who wields power becomes a petty version of Alexander, the Great, seeing in all his inferiors a subject bound to obey his demands without any checks. Every person who is able to place herself in a situation of power has ample opportunity to abuse her inferiors and society becomes organized around its “pecking order”: the king can abuse every other person, the barons abuse their vassals and these, at the bottom of the hierarchy have no way to fight back.

Furthermore, the bloodiness and instability of ancient politics (not to speak of the eternal quarrels among the feudal barons) made it unlike that there would be an environment where people could share sentiments. In section 1.3.2, I gave the example of a British soldier talking to a French audience about the Seven Years’ War to showcase the contrast between different registers of language: if the British soldier called his French counterpart an “enemy”, he most likely means that they were in opposite sides in the field, that is, they had opposite interests in that particular occasion; but if he called his counterpart “cruel”, even a French audience should understand that the British soldier is making a moral judgment, disapproving of a personal quality of his French counterpart from a point of view that can (and that he expects to) be shared even by his French audience. Hume admits that in the heat of battle, most people will mistake their private position for a genuine moral judgment, if anything because believing our enemy to be vicious helps us fight the battle ahead; only “rude, untaught savages” carry this mistake from the field and continue to judge from their private stance. However, we may ask what happens if we can never leave the field of battle, if our political organization resembles a perennial civil war. In his description of ancient politics, discussed in section 2.4.2 above, Hume painted it as much more factious and unstable, with the winning side often butchering the whole opposite faction; in the case of the Athenian democracy, a single orator’s eloquence could swing the opinion of an assembly and bring about exile, dispossession and perhaps even death to the opposite side. In a Dialogue, discussed in section 1.4, Palamedes describes the naturalness with which his Fourlian host narrated plots to betray and kill even friends and family. Moreover, internal political instability and bloodiness were combined with perpetual war with other nations that made “every citizen a soldier, [...] addicted to arms”. As I argued following Manzer

(1996), the very “spirit” of the ancient age depended on men living as if their cities were fortified camps, because “war-inducing conditions” were at the heart of the political and economic institutions that sustained the martial spirit of the ancient age. In such a dire and barbaric situation, where masters are absolute masters, where political actors may attack the opposing faction with impunity, and where people live as if they were in a perennial fortified camp, how can we expect people to develop a shared moral sentiment? Keeping to one’s private point of view and judging personal qualities from it may even be salutary and help keep one alive.

The case is absolutely different in commercial societies. It certainly isn’t a matter of absolute equality, something Hume even argued against; rather, it is a matter of checks on the power of each rank of person. In commercial societies, the “middling rank of men” brings stability to the political arena: first, their situation neither throws them in total subjection, as was the case of ancient slaves and feudal serfs and vassals, nor puts them in a condition where they can exert absolute dominion over others. In the perspective of the EPM, the middling rank can make their resentment felt and, with their rise to power, in Great Britain at least, they managed to establish a system of checks and balances where they, the king and the nobility would not “butcher” each other in their political disputes – indeed, one may even argue that the revolutionary process by which this constitutional system was established was far from “bloody” if measured by ancient standards. In addition, the chief activity of the middling rank, manufacturing and merchandize, depends on the existence of independent artisans and laborers to be hired, of consumers to buy their goods and of stability of property to assure them that they will not be dispossessed. We may even argue that the relations between the peaceful and warring sentiments change: rather than taking their blind courage that made enemies as the epitome of vice from the field to their normal life, eighteenth-century British soldiers brought their common-life “sense of honour” to the field, fighting “so fully sensible of the blessings of their of their government”, that is, fighting for the world where checks and balances exist. In this world where most people were at least formally free and somewhat independent, developing a shared moral sentiment becomes at least a possibility: all ranks of people in the British constitution, except for the king (E 375-376, 492), were under the same laws and even the king was restrained by established, albeit not formal, political practices; in such a situation where one’s life and possessions are not constantly in danger, it is easier to establish a common discourse molded from shared sentiments founded on the knowledge that the strong are always bound to respect the rights of the weak.

The economic institutions and practices of modern commercial societies also contributed to create the space and resources that the kind of non-instrumental relationships involved in moral practice require. While Sparta's greatness depended on its people living as if they were in a perpetual fortified camp, commercial societies created "storehouses of labor" that were their source of strength and greatness. As I argued in section 2.2, the stored labor, both in the form of goods and in the form of the laborer's greater capacity to produce, supplied the state in times of war, but were redirected to the ease and comfort of the population during peaceful times. The wealth of commercial societies, which Hume believed reached at least to some extent the lowest ranks of society, make it possible for people to develop non-instrumental relationships instead of having to constantly worry about the one's survival and material subsistence. As in the case of the soldier, it is easier to detach from one's private, self-interested point of view and to express emotions and share sentiments with others when one has resources to do so⁶⁸.

Therefore, the political and economic institutions of commercial societies at least create the *possibility* of people not having to behave constantly according to a private point of view. However, Hume further argues that in this kind of society people will also be *inclined to* develop shared sentiments that are the basis of morality. As I argued in section 1.3.2, conversation is a key element of the moral philosophy of the EPM: it is through conversation, and intercourse more generally, that moral sentiments are molded, that is, when people converse with each other, they get to know other person's sentiments, sympathize with them and, in the process, created a moral vocabulary that embodies their shared preferences; it is in conversation that moral agents correct their own sentiments, learning the general preferences of their community and adopting them (at least in discourse, if they happen to not actually feel that shared sentiment); and "society and conversation" make the moral sentiment, initially "somewhat small and delicate", acquire "the force of many sympathies" (EPM 9.11). As Hume summed up in the conclusion of the EPM:

As the benevolent⁶⁹ concern for others is diffused, in a greater or less degree, over all men, and is the same in all, it occurs more frequently in discourse, is cherished by society and conversation, and the blame and approbation, consequent on it, are thereby

⁶⁸ Paganelli (2017) makes a similar argument about Adam Smith. Sebastiani (2013, p. 51ff.) discusses the relation between wealth and non-instrumental relationships in the social thought of the Scottish Enlightenment.

⁶⁹ We must recall here the distinction between "general" and "particular" benevolence (EPM A2.5, n. 60). Hume probably means here "general benevolence", "which we shall have occasion frequently to treat of in the course of this enquiry".

roused from that lethargy, into which they are probably lulled, in solitary and uncultivated nature. (EPM 9.9)

If we look to the description of E-RA of the increased humanity observed in the luxurious or refined societies, we find even a coincidence of words: in these ages, persons possess “a fund of conversation” and cannot remain in solitude, as they do in “ignorant and barbarous nations”; they “communicate knowledge”, show their breeding, possessions and taste in conversation; both sexes meet in “an easy and sociable manner” (E 271). Thus not only their humanity (the virtue) increases “from the very habit of conversing together”, in commercial societies the *sentiment* of humanity, that general benevolence we all possess in some measure, finds ample incentives to flourish, because persons in commercial societies are constantly exposed to close social intercourse and conversation, compare their qualities and possessions and thus learn what is the general preference of their society, as expressed in a common moral language they often have occasion to use.

Moreover, the practices and institutions of commercial societies place as the most valuable qualities the kind of “more solid” qualities that are the basis of life in society (integrity, humanity, ability, knowledge). An unequal society such as that of Alexander the Great, praises, on the one side, the magnanimity, courage, and greatness of its leader, since wealth or poverty, victory or defeat, depend on his other-worldly qualities (or those of his immediate counselors) guiding his choices wisely; on the other side, this society values the submission of subjects to the person or rank of persons who have the opportunity to exert their sublime qualities. Commercial sociability promotes the more solid qualities because its equality and interdependence puts the useful or solid qualities over the sublime ones: commercial societies depend on the integrity of all its members, on a capacity to treat others humanely (since one is in close contact with others), and on each person’s ability and knowledge to produce the “storehouse of labor” upon which they depend.

Therefore, the economic and political practices and institutions of modern commercial societies simultaneously promote to the highest merit qualities that are approved of by the sentiment of humanity – that is, the social virtues, those Hume called the “more solid” qualities of humanity, knowledge, integrity – *and* that moral sentiment itself, by giving their members the opportunity, in terms of time, resources and even inclination, to develop a moral sentiment that is felt by every person and judges universally. In a commercial society people have ample opportunity to develop the crucial ability of a good moral judge: being capable of understanding

moral language and the sentiments that mold it. A moral judge living in a commercial society converses with different persons, changes her “register” from self-interested to moral perspectives depending on the situation she finds herself in, becomes acquainted with multiple perspectives – from her own experience as much as from those she reads in books like the *Political Discourses* or from the latest news a merchant tells when arriving from America – and sympathizes with that multitude of sentiments expressed in varied forms under different political, economic and social circumstances. This constant “movement”, if we may call it so, makes people learn when judging and expecting to be judged by the sentiment implied by the notion of morals is adequate and when judging from that point of view requires one to discount the differences created by custom. That “quick march of spirits” stirred by the habit of industrious work spreads itself to the moral sphere and becomes, in a historical perspective, the foundation of a true moral standard.

In the conclusion of the previous chapter, I argued following Robertson (1983) and Hont (2005), that the *Political Discourses* must be seen as a continuation of the civic tradition (although being critical to it) rather than a precursor of political economy as it came to be shaped in the beginning of the nineteenth century, since Hume is defending a project with political, economic and moral aspects, rather than *just* describing a historical process. In this section, we can once again observe this relationship: whereas the civic tradition saw the virtue of citizens as the foundation of the economic and political status of a society, thus attacking the supposed moral decay of modern commercial societies, Hume inverts the relationship, arguing that it is the political and economic status of a society that makes a genuine shared moral sentiment an ineliminable part of it⁷⁰. Notwithstanding the inversion of causality, in the EPM and the *Political Discourses*, Hume is still taking the kind of comprehensive and historical approach from that tradition, for deciding one’s moral judgment about modern commercial societies is not merely by-product of an economic and political science, it is rather the question that makes such science necessary, the question whose answer that science aims to provide.

3.2 – THE LIMITS OF HUME’S HISTORICITY

⁷⁰ Robertson (1983, p. 159-160) makes a similar argument in political terms, that is, thinking about the relation Hume establishes between the liberty *from* authority created by commercial societies and the liberty *to* be a full political agent in one’s community. My argument studies a parallel line in Hume’s work, that linking commerce and the sentiment of humanity, but the present work could (and should, I would argue) be integrated to Robertson’s perspective.

In the final section of this thesis, I discuss the extent of the historicity of the EPM and the *Political Discourses*. In the first subsection below, I show how Hume adopts a historicized position in the luxury debate, that is, a willingness to admit that different historical circumstances create different moral sentiments and moral obligations. The position about luxury is particularly relevant because Hume regards modern Switzerland as a place where his own position in favor of luxury may not be the correct reaction to that country's historical situation. However, Switzerland and the ancient small republics must be taken as exceptions rather than a case for relativism. In the second subsection below, I argue that Hume has some firm limits to historicism, that the very historical enquiry on the foundations of morals and on the effects of economic, social, and political practices and institutions that makes us acknowledge diversity is also the source of the discovery of universal aspects of the human constitution that make only some moral standards truly shared and some institutions and manners more "natural" than others. Historical enquiry, in the end, reveals its own limits.

3.2.1 – Hume's historicized position on luxury

Hume's position within the eighteenth-century debate about luxury is probably the third most commented issue of the *Political Discourses*, following his ideas about monetary economics and the balance of trade. In the last thirty years, interpretations have normally followed one of two paths: they either argue that Hume is attempting to "de-moralize" the debate about luxury, that is, he tried to dismiss moral categories (such as sinfulness) in order to discuss luxury consumption in economic and political terms⁷¹, or that Hume's argument about luxury *is* a moral argument, since luxury has a prominent role in creating the morality of modern commercial societies⁷². Obviously enough, the present thesis follows the second interpretative line, since I have argued extensively that luxury is *the* cause of the rise of commercial practices and institutions which have a profound impact on morality. While I do not intend to offer here a new account of Hume's position on luxury in the EPM and the *Political Discourses*, I would

⁷¹ "It is clear then that Hume's main point of concern was human welfare rather than morality" (Marshall, 2000, p. 635). Brewer (1998) and Berry (1994, ch. 6) also follow broadly this line of argument.

⁷² Susato (2006) argues in favor of this reading, although he places the "sense of honor" I discussed in section 2.4.2 as the main moral matter of the debate about luxury. My reading agrees with Susato's, but emphasizes humanity and the sentiment of humanity, rather than the sense of honor. Wennerlind (2011) also places luxury prominently in the causal origins of the morality of commercial societies, though I expressed disagreement about particular points of his reasoning in the previous chapter (see sections 2.1 and 2.4.2). When discussing eighteenth-century Scottish social theory, Berry (1997, pp. 140-143) approaches the reading of luxury as a moral matter in Hume's works.

like to draw attention to the question of historicity within his position in this topic. The historicity of Hume's position on luxury showcases neatly the role of history in his moral philosophy and social thought, which is the reason why these two branches of human enquiry, as Hume frames them, are inevitably linked to each other.

Hume begins "Of Refinement in the Arts" (E-RA) questioning the very possibility of defining an isolated *act* of "gratifying of any sense, or the indulging in any delicacy in meat, drink, or apparel" (E 268) as a vicious or virtuous action. Standing up simultaneously against the "men of libertine principles", who "bestow praises even on vicious luxury", and the "men of severe morals", who "represent it as the source of all the corruptions, disorders, and factions, incident to civil government" (E 269), he argues that luxury consumption, *qua* moral phenomenon, must be understood within its context, that "the bounds between the virtue and the vice cannot here be exactly fixed, more than in other moral subjects" (E 268). This position is very similar to that of the EPM as shown in section 1.2.3 above, where Hume argues that the "circumstance of public utility is ever principally in view" in setting "the boundaries of moral good and evil" (EPM 2.17). However, we must ask more precisely what context or circumstances are those that determine the viciousness of virtuousness of luxury consumption.

We can extract three contexts from the EPM and the *Political Discourses*. First, there is the immediate, personal context of the person relishing in sensual pleasure. Hume calls "vicious luxury" that which is "pursued at the expence of some virtue, as liberality or charity" or that which keeps a person from attending to her duties (E 269, 279). Thus, if a person's luxury makes her incapable of, for instance, providing for her family and friends, paying her taxes or being generous to other persons, we may deem that person vicious and her luxury consumption becomes "vicious luxury".

However, even if an individual may be deemed vicious because her luxury consumption makes her personally incapable of performing duties or other virtuous actions, vicious luxury may be considered good if it has positive effects as a practice in a society. Thus, while Hume calls the first context a "philosophical question", that is, to determine (if possible) what precise degree of luxury consumption sets the boundary between personal vice and virtue, there is a "political question" (E 280) that is ampler than the personal context of the luxury consumer. The problem magistrates face rarely relies on choosing between vicious and virtuous practices; they must often have recourse to a kind of vice in order to solve the problems created by another. If magistrates could simply ban vicious luxury, forcing people to employ their money in generous and virtuous projects instead of spending it in excessive sensual pleasure, their task

would be a rather simple one. However, in E-RA, Hume acknowledges that this is not the common case and that vicious luxury, despite its viciousness, may serve as a remedy to other vices, such as the sloth and idleness “which would commonly succeed in its place, and are more hurtful both to private persons and to the public” (E 280).

This is the point at which the interpretations mentioned above split. The “demoralization” interpretation sees the “political question” as a non-moral matter, that is, in distinguishing between the philosophical and the political question, Hume is treating political phenomena (which should be understood as including economic phenomena) as beyond the scope of the moral philosopher. The alternative interpretation understands that the political question has very relevant moral consequences and is thus part of the comprehensive moral evaluation of a society’s practices and institutions. Though the present work adheres to the latter interpretation, I would further add a third “context”, the historical context, that despite passing unmentioned in E-RA, is a crucial part of Hume’s position in the luxury debate, as expressed in the works analyzed in this thesis.

As I have already quoted, “man is a very variable being” (E 255) and the principles and rules of conduct that work in a certain historical situation may not work in others. The existing practices of a particular time and space may be such that vicious luxury can be used as a cure to the problem of sloth and idleness or they may be such that vicious (and perhaps even innocent) luxury simply does not produce the desired effect. The magistrate, “who aims only at possibilities” (E 280), may face different possibilities under different circumstances. In the previous chapter (especially sections 2.2 and 2.4), I argued that Hume admitted that ancient commonwealths had very unique “possibilities” due to their particular context: since their citizens lived as if they were in a perennial fortified camp, “it would then be advantageous, as in camps, to banish all arts and luxury” (E 263). And if we could convert modern European cities to a similar situation, “these affections might now, as in ancient times, prove alone a sufficient spur to industry, and support the community” (E 262-263), with all the entailing benefits of a habit of industrious work. However, in most cases we cannot convert them into fortified camps and this is one of the most important messages of the *Political Discourses*. Notwithstanding, Hume repeatedly singles out Switzerland as an exception in modern Europe, highlighting the fact that even coeval societies may find themselves in different historical situations: the degree of luxury that “fosters the arts, and encourages industry in a FRENCHMAN or ENGLISHMAN” may be “ruinous and pernicious” in a Swiss (EPM D41), as I mentioned in section 1.2.3. Why does such a difference exist? E-PAN says Switzerland developed its

agriculture without first developing “manufactures and arts”, hence it had a historical development at odds with the “most natural way” that runs in the opposite direction (E 419). In this sense, the Swiss politician’s possibilities are different and we should not expect “either the same sentiments, or the same laws in BERNE, which prevail in LONDON or PARIS” (EPM D41). The exceptionality of Switzerland should not be read as a proof of its not yet having “progressed” to a commercial stage where luxury would have the same effects it has in London or Paris, rather, Hume considers that country’s policy as successful, citing the fact that it is able to furnish European armies with mercenaries and still be a populous country, “prov[ing] sufficiently the advantages of their political institutions” (E 403). Indeed, in “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth”, the last essay of the *Political Discourses*, the Swiss militia is singled out as the example for that perfect commonwealth’s military organization (E 520-521).

The case of Switzerland reveals the connection between the different contexts, which runs mostly from the ampler to the more immediate context. The historical circumstances of a society establish what would be the outcome of the interaction among practices and institutions, thus determining whether a policy has a salutary or detrimental effect. In its turn, as I have argued extensively in this thesis, the practices and institutions of a society, immersed in its historical context, have a mighty influence on the moral sentiments of its members. In the case of luxury, for instance, an eighteenth-century Englishman relishing in the myriad pleasures available to him to the point where he is no longer able to fight a close-combat war may not be incurring in “vicious luxury”, since he lives in a country where magistrates opted for a standing army that fights wars for him, which, in turn, is a policy related to the fact that Great Britain is not a small nation continuously in war with its neighbors in a martial age. In contrast, a citizen of ancient Sparta (or a Swiss living in the modern age) may be faulted for “vicious luxury” if he incurs in the same acts, since his historical context and the policies of his society make it a duty for every able man to be prepared to fight wars.

In conclusion, Hume’s position about luxury in the EPM and the *Political Discourses* is marked by his acknowledgement of the historicity of moral sentiments and by the dependence of the moral philosopher who analyzes those sentiments on a robust knowledge of the history of political, economic and social practices and institutions. Further, his historicized position has a clear implication to the overall defense of modern commercial societies: if anything, luxury and the whole train of consequences it created in modern commercial Europe must be accepted as the material eighteenth-century political reformers must work with, regardless of whether they approve or disapprove them. Surely, there are limits to historicism as I discuss in the

subsection below, but in the EPM and the *Political Discourses*, as John Dunn (1983, p. 122) brilliantly put it, Hume worked under the maxim that “history [...] must be taken as it comes”.

3.2.2 –Pioneering historical materialism? Materialism, historicity and their limits

In his study of the stage-theories of the Scottish Enlightenment, Ronald Meek (1976, ch. 1) concluded that that kind of theory had no “pre-history”, that is, he could not find in the history of European thought any kind of theorizing about the historical stages of human societies similar to those developed by enlightened Scottish thinkers such as Adam Smith, William Robertson or Adam Ferguson. He acknowledges that surely there had been many attempts to theorize the development of human societies in terms of stages, cyclical or linear, but what made Scottish stage-theories unique and without a pre-history was the distinct connection they established between the mode of subsistence of a society (often divided in four types occurring consecutively: hunter-gatherer, shepherd, agricultural and commercial) and the social, political and legal practices they developed. The centrality of the causality running from the mode of subsistence to the practices and institutions of a society was famously summarized by William Robertson in the *History of America* (1777):

In every inquiry concerning the operations of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence. Accordingly as that varies, their laws and policy must be different. (quoted in Berry, 1997, p. 93)

Meek’s argument about the absence of any antecedent to this mode of Scottish social thought has been abandoned, because the kind of “pre-history” he was looking for amounts basically to asking whether someone had written before what Scottish thinkers wrote from the 1750s to the 1780s. The “building blocks”, if we may call it so, of Scottish stage-theories – *i.e.*, the notions of evolution in stages that historically succeed each other in a determinate order, on the one hand, and of some kind of causality running from economic organization to the practices and institutions of other spheres of life, on the other – can be found in earlier thought⁷³. Notwithstanding, the perception that Scottish stage-theories were indeed innovative in their combination of “materialism” – an approach to history that looked primarily at material

⁷³ Pocock (1985, chapters 5 and 6), for instance, discusses the “modes” of historical time in early eighteenth-century English political thought (ch. 5) and the relation between economic organization, modes of property and the making of human personality (ch. 6) in the rising eighteenth-century “sociology”.

subsistence – and “historicism” – the hypothesis that the relationship between economic reproduction and the other spheres of social life evolved historically in stages – into what Pocock (1981, p. 195) termed a “pioneer historical materialism” remains alive⁷⁴. Along with that perception, the task of finding the antecessors of the innovative stage-theories also remains open.

Being slightly older than the three Scots mentioned above and having published most of his works by the early 1760s, Hume is certainly one of the obvious candidates to the post of immediate antecessor of the “pioneering historical materialism” of the Scottish Enlightenment along with Montesquieu⁷⁵. It is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss the influence Hume might have had in his fellow Scots, because that would require, first, that one tell the history of “historicism” and “materialism” in his works, from the *Treatise* to “Of the Origin of Government”, the last essay he wrote, and, second, that one relate this history to the history of the stage-theories. But I would like to discuss briefly what the interpretation offered in this thesis says about a possible “pioneering historical materialism” in the EPM and the *Political Discourses*, works written in the late 1740s and early 1750s and so placed immediately before the rise of stage-theories. As the previous chapters argued, both historicity and concern with the effects of economic organization play a very important role in these two works, hence warranting the present discussion.

Let us first ask to what extent, if any, we can call of the EPM and *Political Discourses* “materialist”, meaning works that understand economic subsistence or reproduction as the causal origin of a society’s political, moral and social practices and institutions. From chapter two, we learned that the object of the essays devoted to the study of social relations, broadly understood, is often what Hume calls “manners”, “customs” or the “spirit of the age”. I emphasized the primacy of “industry” in the indissoluble chain that represents the manners of modern European commercial societies: the introduction of luxury via foreign commerce and the subsequent growth of the domestic manufacturing sector created a habit of industrious work related to the new motives created within this branch of the economy and by its interactions with the agricultural branch. The habit of industrious work, in turn, causes the other two elements, knowledge and humanity, which mean changes in the social, political, and moral

⁷⁴ Silvia Sebastiani’s (2013) award-winning book being perhaps a recent and prominent example.

⁷⁵ Cf. Oz-Salzberger (2003) and Sher (1994) on the influence of Montesquieu on Scottish thinkers. Adam Ferguson stands out as the Scot that embraced most fully the doctrines of the *Président*. Hume himself was influenced by Montesquieu, as I have argued in this thesis, and one could indeed argue that he had a relevant role in bringing his works to Scotland.

spheres. In this chapter, I even argued that the existence of material resources is a relevant condition to the creation of a truly shared moral sentiment, since it allows agents to interact with others in non-instrumental relationships. In this sense, the *Political Discourses* has a “materialist” tone to it. Notwithstanding, I have argued that the social theory of the *Discourses* often identifies multiple causalities going back and forth from the economic sphere to the political or moral: commerce does not flourish in absolute governments because it is less “honourable”; the relation between property rights and the development of commerce is two-sided, because respect to property favors commerce and the growth of commerce promotes a rank of persons to power that is interested in securing it; similarly, the “martial spirit” of the ancient age appears sometimes as one of the causes of political and economic practices and institutions, sometimes as their effect. In other words, Hume’s notion of “manners” (or other similar terms) may be better understood as an ensemble of practices, institutions, shared sentiments and language, and expectations within which causality may take many (often simultaneous) directions, not always going from the mode of subsistence to the other elements. Economic changes did play an important role in the transition to commercial society in Western Europe, but there is no reason to see economic changes as the *sole* – or perhaps even the most important – element in *every* major historical change, as later Scottish stage-theories would have the reader believe.

Stockton (1976, p. 313-315) argues that the *Discourses* would sound very “idealist” to a Marxist historian, while the *History of England* offers “an almost Marxist dialectic” of the origins of modern European commercial societies. It is not the business of this thesis to meddle in interpretations of the *History of England* and it may be the case, as I suggested when I compared Hume’s accounts of the process of urbanization, that the account of the *History* is more “down-to-earth” than that of the *Discourses*, in the sense that the latter describes the process from the point of view of desires –brought about by economic changes – while the former emphasizes the economic changes themselves, but there is a large gap from that distinction to calling the *Discourses* “idealist”. That the *Discourses* are less materialist than the *History* and perhaps more materialist than the essays published up to 1748 is probably a true statement, but sustaining it would require exactly the kind of history of which this thesis covers only a (rather short) part. What we can conclude from the arguments presented here is that economic factors are mightily important in Hume’s account of the transition to commercial societies, indeed that they are the primary cause of it, but it is not possible to extrapolate from

that transition alone a materialist account of the development of human societies like that of later stage-theories.

What about the “historical” of the pioneering historical materialism? Pocock’s term refers to Scottish thinkers’ affirmation of the necessity of studying human relations as they happened in history, for the kind of relation human beings establish with each other varies according to the circumstances they find themselves in and to the circumstances and relationships established in the past that created the present circumstances. Sebastiani (2013, pp. 30-32) further distinguishes Hume’s “historical way” of discussing diversity and Smith’s “complete historicization”, the latter being complete because it proposes a pattern of development by which human societies develop.

In this sense, the moral philosophy and the social theory of the EPM and the *Political Discourses* are, according to the interpretation proposed in this thesis, clearly “historical”. As I have argued extensively, the historical character of these two works appears everywhere we look. First and foremost, the sentiment of humanity, the shared moral sentiment, only flourishes in certain historical circumstances that favor the kind of social interactions that allow people to judge (and expect to be judged) according to it, such as some degree of equality, close intercourse and conversation among the members of a society, and the absence of circumstances such as war and poverty that make a person constantly concerned with basic reproduction and thus incapable of departing from her private position. There are also other instances of historicized analysis, such as those I proposed in section 2.3: the desire for action is expressed in agrarian societies as a pointless and self-frustrating search for pleasure combined with a habit of indolence, while in commercial societies it finds an object to apply itself that is a self-sustaining active habit which is itself a source of pleasure and which produces the luxury objects that cater to our desire for pleasure; love of gain or avidity also finds a different object in modern commercial societies and one can make one’s fortune grow by applying oneself to industrious work, instead of having to play the zero-sum game of fighting for a place at the local landlord’s table. Indeed, the history of the rise of commercial societies can be read from the point of view of the passions, since their forms of expression also have a history related to the history of manners, practices and institutions.

However, according to Sebastiani’s distinction, Hume’s way of dealing with diversity in human relations is not completely historicized as, for instance, Adam Smith’s. Needless to say, my interpretation agrees with hers that neither the EPM nor the *Political Discourses* propose a stadial theory of the development of society; we further agree that there is no hint of

a *necessary* pattern of historical development linking, for instance, agrarian and commercial societies in these works. The fact that England had experienced a decline in the power of the barons and the rise of a urban middling rank caused by foreign commerce does not mean Switzerland, an agrarian society, would experience a similar development in the future. Indeed, Hume had his reasons not to advance a general pattern of historical development: as he says in the opening paragraph of “Of Some Remarkable Customs” (1752),

irregular and extraordinary appearances are frequently discovered in the moral, as well as in the physical world. The former, perhaps, we can better account for, after they happen, from springs and principles, of which every one has, within himself, or from observation, the strongest assurance and conviction: But it is often fully impossible for human prudence, before-hand, to foresee and foretel them. (E 366)

Establishing a pattern of development may be possible only after it actually happens, for hindsight might be essential in the understanding of what initially seems “irregular and extraordinary appearances”. For this reason, Hume says, “all general maxims in politics ought to be established with great caution” (E 366). Proposing a general pattern of historical development would likely seem to him the kind of maxim that requires more experience than two and a half millennia of written history could afford, as I mentioned in section 2.2.

However, I would argue that the absence of a clear pattern of historical development through which societies had to progress in order to reach the refined “commercial” stage makes Hume’s social theory more, not less, historical or historicized. The piece of advice quoted above may indeed have kept him from the kind of troubles Adam Smith found himself in in Book III of the *Wealth of Nations*. Because he believed there was a “natural order of development”, Smith was led to say that the development of Europe, whose account he borrowed partially from Hume, was “anti-natural” because “human institutions” had “thwarted those natural inclinations of man (cf. section 2.3). However, his model of “natural development” were the North American colonies, a society that did not develop historically its institutions, manners, and practices – they were inspired by, or in many cases imposed by, European institutions that developed over centuries before the colonization of North America. Hence, the foundation of the natural order of accumulation of capital in North America was the “unnatural” development of its institutions in Europe. In his attempt to find a place where society developed naturally, Smith could only point to a place that was created (from a European perspective, of course) in the final stage of his stage theory, that is, to a place that had comparatively no history at all

when he was writing the *Wealth of Nations*. The attachment to a definite pattern of historical development actually made Smith less inclined than Hume to take history “as it comes”, we may say.

Instead of discussing historical change from the point of view of a progression through stages, Hume instead worked with historical comparisons. Although I disagree with her concerning who is more “historicized” (a disagreement which may not be so relevant for present purposes), I agree with Sebastiani (2013, p. 30) when she argues that Hume works, in the EPM and in the *Political Discourses* at least, in terms of “localized uniformities” created by the interaction of the universal uniformity of human nature and varying historical circumstances. In this thesis, I have chosen to work with two broad uniformities in the EPM and the *Discourses*, which I have called “agrarian” and “commercial societies”. Admittedly, if the thesis had a larger scope, including Hume’s earlier political essays and the *History of England*, this binary distinction could be unfolded in more specific localized uniformities: on the one side, “agrarian societies” could be divided into diverse “localized uniformities” such as the ancient republics of Greece and Rome, the Roman empire, and feudal societies; on the other side, “commercial societies” could be divided perhaps according to their political organization, such as a “commercial civilized monarchy” like Great Britain, and the commercial republics like modern Holland or the renaissance city-states.

The suggestion that Hume works with localized uniformities against the background of a universal human nature points to the limit of historicism in the works discussed here, that is, a limit at which simply relating the manners of a society to its circumstances becomes insufficient. There has been a long debate about the concept of human nature in Hume’s works, centered chiefly around some passages of section 8 of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748). Again, entering this debate goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but the debate might be summarized as gravitating between positions roughly similar to those expressed by Forbes (1975) and Berry (2007): Forbes regards Hume’s position as admitting human nature is “plastic”, that is, though there are universal passions such as pride, avarice, love, etc., they are caused by different motives related to the historical circumstances. Berry reads Hume as assuming an universal, invariable human nature, which includes definite connections between motives, passions and the actions they produce in reaction to the external circumstances. It could be argued that this thesis implicitly accepts the position expressed by Forbes (as many works cited here do, such as Taylor (2015), Baumstark (2008), McArthur (2007) and Harris (2015)). However, I would rather say the outcome of the debate does not

matter as much to the present interpretation as it may seem; both sides of the debate disavow the reading of Hume's position on human nature as making him incapable of accounting for historical diversity⁷⁶. The discussion centers on the definition of the precise limit between "human nature" and the "circumstances" whose interactions create historical diversity: interpreters inclined to Forbes's position argue for a more minimalist concept of human nature in Hume's works, whereas Berry tends to enlarge what is part of the human constitution. In my view, it becomes easier to account for Hume's account of human diversity the less we assume human nature is rigid, but even a more universalist reading such as Berry can get by with the aid of a few epicycles.

Nevertheless, what matters is that human nature, plastic or not, is the limit of Hume's historicism. First, it excludes what I have called fringe, lopsided attributions of merit such as those of Pascal and Diogenes and the sociability that would exist around it. Theirs are moralities created out of the follies of a "particular innovator" rather than from an actual historical process, as King (1988, pp. 60-65) observes, and Hume does not believe the human constitution makes it possible for a whole society to live according to their proposals, at least according to the evidence furnished by written history and first-hand experience⁷⁷. Those moral systems go against what even the "plastic" interpretation of human nature considers the basic elements of the human constitution in Hume's works, such as the approbation of utility and agreeableness, the desire for action and activity, etc. But one could argue that this exclusion is not a limit on historicism: it simply takes ideas such as those of Pascal and Diogenes to be the expression of a single individual's follies and enthusiasm, not of an actual consequence of human nature interacting the historical circumstances.

The limits of Hume's historicism, at least in the works analyzed here, is exactly what allows him to adopt a normative position regarding the kinds of society he compares. As discussed in section 3.1.1 above, the EPM adopts a perspective that starts from the actual moral experience in different historical situations to find both what is common among all of them, thus showing the moral philosopher what is the foundation of morality, and what makes societies take different routes to those common elements. It is the universal uniformity reached through a historical enquiry about the "localized uniformities" that makes Hume's preference

⁷⁶ Moreover, it seems much more interesting and relevant to discuss Hume's capacity to account for historical diversity from the texts where he actually tries to do that than from the text where he is discussing the issue abstractly. For a defense of Hume's capacity to account for historical diversity, see Cohen (2005).

⁷⁷ Which does not exclude the possibility of a historical process producing attributions of merit where people like Pascal are *praised*, but not imitated.

for commercial societies possible, rather than forcing him to admit some kind of relativism (or forcing him into some kind of neutral, descriptive, social theory). The EPM finds many universal aspects of moral relations in the course of its analysis of different moral languages: the fact that human beings sympathize with others, that they will inevitably approve of what is useful to others (at least in a situation where their own good is not at stake), the fact that moral sentiments are expressed in a common language that refers to general preferences of the moral community, the existence of the capacity to feel the universal sentiment of humanity, and finally the capacity of departing from one's private point of view and judging from the point of view of the sentiment of humanity. Once the moral philosopher reaches the conclusion that humans have the capacity of judging in such a way, he looks back to the actual moral practices whose study revealed such universal capacity and asks whether the circumstances of a particular moral community make it possible or likely for its members to actually use that capacity, to actually feel the sentiment of humanity. Societies where people are able to overcome their natural partiality and judge out of the sentiment of humanity are, in moral terms, preferable to those where people always remain in their private points of view.

A person's ability to judge from a shared point of view and to feel a shared moral sentiment is related to the economic, social, and political practices and institutions of the society of which she is a member, as I argued in the first section of this chapter. Thence, the other limit of Hume's historicism appears in his social theory. As we have seen in chapter two, Hume does not deem it impossible for a society like Sparta to exist (though if evidence of its existence were not as strong as it is, there would be reasons to be skeptical about it) and he even praises Switzerland, the modern society that most resembles ancient republics; he just considers it very hard to sustain a society based on those principles, since they require very particular circumstances and policies to work. By the eighteenth century, history had furnished a form of social, economic and political organization that relied on institutions, practices and manners that give vent to basic principles and desires of the human constitution (desire for action, desire for pleasure, love of gain) in a "more natural way", without depending on very specific historical circumstances, on unreliable passions and desires that express themselves only at irregular intervals, or on the personal qualities of a single, very powerful person. In this sense, this second limitation may not be a reason to say that ancient republics – or modern Switzerland – were "wrong", it limits the political possibilities faced in the present, it is the reason why Hume argues against his contemporary civic moralists that sought to return to "ancient maxims" of policy. If modern commercial societies can create the space for a humane sociability where

people can adopt a shared moral sentiment, guarantee the greatness of the state in the society of nations, and provide many sensual pleasures even to the lower classes without risking the other benefits, why attempt to return to a long gone past?

In conclusion, the present interpretation of the EPM and the *Political Discourses* regards these two works as historicized to a very large extent, that is, they acknowledge that their task is to discover the localized uniformities that existed throughout history, finding the causal relations that connect manners, institutions, customs and sentiments in a particular historical setting. The historicism of the EPM and *Political Discourses* also has a materialist tone to it, even if we may refrain from calling these works “materialist”: economic phenomena are often at the core of Hume’s account of the different forms human societies take, but the economic sphere does not determinate the other spheres of life; rather, causalities are often multiple and run simultaneously in many directions, to and from economic phenomena.

However, there are limits to historicism: the existence of some universal principles and desires in human nature related to the moral realm –the ability to sympathize with others, the inevitable approbation we feel towards qualities that promote our or others’ good, the existence of a sentiment that can be shared universally and is capable of judging universally – as well as related to other aspects of human life – a desire for action and pleasure, our avidity – make it possible, indeed necessary, to go beyond the mere comparison of the historical forms life in society has taken to the normative stance of preferring one over the other. But although there may be historicism and some materialism in the EPM and in the *Political Discourses*, they certainly do not deserve the label of “pioneering historical materialism”, perhaps not even “*proto* historical materialism”. The sum of the parts is, in this case, certainly different from the whole. What we *are* capable of concluding is that the historicism and the limited materialism, if we may call it so, this interpretation sees in the *Political Discourses* and in the EPM warrants, first, an inquiry about the presence of these elements in Hume’s thought, since in the first two chapters of this thesis I argued that the *Treatise* does not display the historicity of the later works; and, second, an inquiry into the relation between the evolution of these elements in Hume’s thought and their evolution in the Scottish Enlightenment as a whole, since this subsection suggests that Hume had an important role in creating the possibility of combining historicity and materialism together into stage-theories.

3.3 - CONCLUSION

Since the present chapter connects the interpretations of the EPM and the *Political Discourses* advanced in the first and second chapters, I will briefly recapitulate the arguments made there before concluding the thesis. In the first chapter, I argued that the EPM adopts a different approach to moral philosophy than that of the *Treatise*. Instead of trying to account simultaneously for how humans leave their “rude and more natural condition” to enter a “civiliz’d state” (T 3.2.1.9) *and* to find the foundation of moral approbation, the EPM simply looks at actual, historical moral practices and asks what are the qualities approved of and why they are so in order to find what is common to human moral experience. That is, instead of providing a chronological and a foundational origin of morality, the EPM simply looks at its foundational aspect. It finds, as discussed in section 1.2, first, that selfish theories are not good explanations of moral practices because even the most selfish person will approve of what is good for others, however coolly and limitedly; second, it finds that the social virtues are context-dependent, that even though respect for property and the rule of law are the basis of human life of society, what and whom is part of justice varies according to the circumstances of each society; even benevolence, which does not depend on a “scheme”, is approved of because benevolent actions have a propensity to be useful, thus making them related to their contexts. The emphasis on actual moral practices also places language and conversation at the center of moral philosophy: the study of moral language and its contrast with other registers of language reveals what the general preferences of society are, so making an understanding of language and close contact with moral agents a fundamental part of being a good moral judge as well as a good moral enquirer. Moral language reveals that the notion of morality implies a sentiment that is shared by every moral agent and that judges comprehensively, the sentiment of humanity, which is the sentiment we want and expect other moral agents to feel (or to express judgment according to it, if they do not actually feel it) when they observe us acting morally. However, as discussed in section 1.4, the EPM has an acute historical awareness and Hume uses the *Dialogue* to challenge his own ideas to account for the diversity of moral practices observed in history. Although he argues that such a diversity can still be reduced to the approbation of qualities useful and agreeable to the possessor or to others, Hume admits that the historical circumstances can produce moral practices that emphasize, for instance, sublime qualities, approved of because of their immediate and strong impression on the observer, at the cost of the social virtues, which are approved of by the sentiment of humanity. Nevertheless, the EPM does not provide the “localized histories of morals” that would show what kind of

institutions, practices and manners cause a particular moral community's standard to incline to such or such kind of qualities at the expense of other personal qualities. In this sense, it is open-ended, calling for the aid of the historian and social theorist (or what Hume would call "politician" or political writer).

In the second chapter, I argued that the *Political Discourses*, written in the same period of the EPM and published a year after it, provide an extensive comparison between agrarian and commercial/manufacturing societies, explaining how European nations transitioned from the former to the latter in the couple of centuries before Hume's time. In section 2.2, I presented Hume's account of the transition from the point of view of the economic structure of society, arguing that foreign luxury creates the domestic manufacturing and commercial sectors of the economy, which creates "storehouses of labour" represented in the laborers habit of industrious work. In the following section, I presented the same transition from the point of view of the passions: in the *Discourses*, passions that Hume treats a-historically in the *Treatise* such as the desire for action and love of gain reappear and receive a historical treatment: the changes in the economic structures change how passions are expressed and what passions predominate; the human desire for action finds an application in the habit of industrious work which in turn creates the material possibility of satisfying the desire for pleasure in a self-sustaining way, in this process, the desire for gain also finds an object that makes it a productive passion, rather than a destructive one.

The transition from agrarian to commercial societies had political and moral consequences. In section 2.4, I first explored the "indissoluble chain" of "industry, knowledge, and humanity", arguing that Hume regards the habit of industrious work created in the rise of commercial societies as the source of the greater knowledge and more humane sociability of these societies. In contrast, ancient societies, even the more civilized Romans and Greek, had a sociability characterized by inhumanity, which he relates to slavery, the most important economic institution of antiquity. The rise of commerce also brought political changes, represented by the rise of the "middling rank of men", chiefly merchants and manufacturers, to power. First, the relative position of this rank made them simultaneously capable of resisting the tyranny of the nobility and incapable of becoming "petty tyrants" themselves, which contributed to the internal stability of commercial societies. This rank of men also had an interest in maintaining liberty and stability of property, since their source of power flourished under such conditions rather than in war-inducing conditions. Finally, the knowledge characteristic of modern commercial societies led to more humane political maxims that

checked the bloodiness and aggressiveness of factious disputes and political relations in general. Again, Hume pitches this picture of the politics of commercial societies against the politics of ancient societies, which were bloody, instable and inhumane to the point that Hume considered it superfluous to try to find the particular reasons for any single brutal political action. Hence, if people in commercial societies were inclined to a humane sociability, political and economic institutions assured that this sociability had the resources – the material affluence as well as the appropriate environment – it needed to flourish. In conclusion, chapter two reads the *Political Discourses* as a historical account of the rise of commercial societies and a comparison with the preceding forms of social, economic, and political organization. Beyond a mere comparison, the *Discourses* are a defense of the transformation that European societies were undergoing against a position that sought to reinstate the “ancient maxims” of policy; they argue that this position was based on a mostly inaccurate understanding of ancient societies and that it did not take into account the fact that the historical circumstances under which the ancient maxims flourished were long gone, thus making an attempt to return to them not only undesirable but also unlikely to turn out well.

In this final chapter, I first looked at how the first two chapters can be connected together. I interpreted the discussion about the material affluence and the political institutions of agrarian and commercial societies in light of the discussion of equality made in the EPM to conclude that the latter are a more fertile ground for a shared moral sentiment to flourish. In commercial societies people have the time, space, and resources to adopt a point of view different from their private position, something that may not have been possible before. Further, if commercial societies afforded the *possibility* of a shared moral sentiment, their sociability made people likely to *actually* adopt it, since it promoted the key characteristics of a good moral judge, namely, close intercourse and conversation with others, acquaintance with different point of views – from historical accounts as well as from personal experience – and with the preferences of society in general. By reading the *Political Discourses* and the EPM together, we can conclude that the former provides the “localized histories of morals”, albeit in a fragmentary fashion, particularly the history of the practices, institutions and manners that shaped the moral standard characteristic of modern commercial societies. Their joint conclusion is that commercial societies are the most likely ground for the sentiment of humanity, that sentiment every person is capable of feeling, to flourish.

In the final section of this chapter, I looked at the historicity that was emphasized in the two previous chapters. I used Hume’s position in the luxury debate to show how he admitted

that the defense of a particular moral position had to be connected with the historical circumstances one finds oneself in: what counts as vicious luxury is related to what are the duties and expected behavior in a particular time and place; further, even vicious luxury, though immoral from an individual's point of view, must not only be tolerated, but fomented, if it has beneficial political and economic consequences in the particular historical context of a society. Defending luxury may not be the correct instance in modern agrarian Switzerland, but it certainly was in the United Kingdom. While Hume was willing to acknowledge the diversity historical circumstances produce, his historical approach to the study of human relations becomes, in the *EPM* and *Political Discourses*, the source of the knowledge about human nature. These works admit that what is universal about human beings must be found through the study of its historical expressions, because the multitude of causes running to and from every part of the practices, institutions and manners of societies shape what passions, springs and motives of the human constitution predominate and how this predominance expressed. It is this disposition to take history as it comes, to analyze and scrutinize it, that leads the moral-philosopher-cum-social-theorist to the knowledge of human nature, which, in turn, affords her the possibility of judging which of the many expressions human nature has taken historically better suits its dignity. In "Of the Protestant Succession", the final essay of the *Political Discourses* before Hume left the historical realm and entered the "artificial contrivances" that could create a perfect commonwealth, he concluded Hanoverian England was a situation where the dignity of human nature was fulfilled to an extent without precedents in the whole history of humankind:

But during these last sixty years, when a parliamentary establishment has taken place; whatever faction may have prevailed either among the people or in public assemblies, the whole force of our constitution has always fallen to one side, and an uninterrupted harmony has been preserved between our princes and our parliaments. Public liberty, with internal peace and order, has flourished almost without interruption: Trade and manufactures, and agricultures, have increased: The arts, and sciences, and philosophy, have been cultivated. Even religious parties have been necessitated to lay aside their mutual rancour: And the glory of the nation has spread itself all over Europe; derived equally from our progress in the arts of peace, and from valour and success in war. So long and so glorious a period no nation almost can boast of: Nor is there another instance in the whole history of mankind, that so many millions of people have, during such a space of time, been held together, in a manner so free, so rational, and so suitable to the dignity of human nature. (E 508)

FINAL REMARKS

In these final pages, I would like to look back at the process of writing the present thesis and discuss some issues that need to be addressed as the research project it proposes unfolds. The three issues I address here are related to the fact that the thesis is much closer to collection of sequential frames of an object in motion than to the end-product of two and a half years of accumulated reading, reasoning and writing. In the early years of an academic career, the foundations on which we stand to write almost a hundred and fifty pages of philosophical commentary are very flimsy and it seems inevitable to me that any picture we take in this situation will look somewhat blurry.

First, my understanding of what it means to say that “historicity” is a relevant characteristic of the EPM and the *Political Discourses* evolved with the process of writing the present thesis. The first chapter is based mostly on recent commentaries on Hume’s moral philosophy, among whom the idea that history plays a significant role in Hume’s *philosophical* arguments – in our understanding of “philosophical”, for, as Pocock (1999, p. 179) remembers us what Edward Gibbon, for instance, took to be Hume’s “philosophy” were the *Essays*, not the *Treatise* or the *Enquiries* – is rather eccentric. Although there have been some suggestions, such as those made by Annette Baier (2010, introduction) that Hume, the philosopher, learned a lot from his historical practice, Jacqueline Taylor is one of the few who have discussed Hume’s theory of the passions or moral philosophy as dependent on the study of history. Taylor’s effort was supported by Moritz Baumstark’s (2008) reappraisal of Hume’s intellectual biography in the late 1740s and 1750s, to which James Harris’ (2015) intellectual biography was added recently. This is most likely related to the centrality of the *Treatise* in twentieth-century philosophical interpretations of Hume’s works, since that book is, as I argued in chapters one and two, plainly unconcerned with history. After I wrote the first chapter, I began to read authors related to the history of political thought, among whom the issue of the perception of historical time in the eighteenth century is a live topic of discussion. For this reason, a clear definition of “historicity”, derived from Silvia Sebastiani and Pocock’s works, only appears in the third chapter as the necessity of theorizing human relations in terms of historical development, especially in terms of stages. Although I believe what was my understanding of historicity at the time I wrote the first chapter is consistent with what appears in the third chapter, it would have been better to write from the beginning with a clear and stable definition.

Second, the thesis portrays Hume as a rather optimistic defender of modern commercial societies, to the point one may ask whether Hume was some kind of naïve Whig believer in the progress of society. Despite my claim in the third chapter that we cannot derive a theory of progress (much less a *stadial* theory of progress) from the EPM and the *Political Discourses*, we end up with an interpretation in which the passing of time came, in the United Kingdom at least, only for the better. This appearance should be attributed mostly to my decisions not to discuss the “sensible knave” of the conclusion of the EPM and to subtract from chapter two an intended section dedicated to Hume’s worries about the public debt. In these two topics, Hume discusses how love of gain, which plays a key role in the creation of commercial societies as discussed in section 2.3, could run amok and destroy the political structure, in the case of public credit, and the social structure, in the case of the sensible knave, that supported the manners of commercial societies. While he was rather confident that the sensible knave would not be a problem, he did have some deep concerns about public credit, concerns which were inherited, as Robertson (1983) and Hont (2005) discuss, from the debate that had taken place since the late seventeenth century about the rise of a credit economy that depended increasingly on the fulfillment of promises in the future rather than on the solidity of present virtue to resist the unpredictability of *fortuna*. Drawing a connection between public credit and the sensible knave, running through the political and social structure to its consequences on the sentiment of humanity was a challenge I would not be able to tackle in time for this thesis. However, I still consider it a discussion that must be made and that will add depth to an interpretation of Hume’s historical view of commercial societies: it would show that Hume considered them a form of social, economic and political organization as historical as their predecessors and, in this sense, as subject to a catastrophic ending as the Roman Empire had been.

Third, the thesis assumes that the particularities of the period discussed here, especially those of the EPM, were *intentional* changes in relation to the *Treatise*. Hume did not leave much biographical sources and any interpretation of his intellectual development depends on the biographer inferring intention from what we know of his circumstances. In this sense, I believe there is enough material to uphold the interpretative claim of the present thesis: Hume’s experiences, his travel diary, the reading of Montesquieu and the published works themselves all point to an increased concern about the relation between moral philosophy and political economic factors and about their discussion in historical terms. However, there is not a single expression of awareness of the particularity of the EPM or of an intention to write a work of moral philosophy with a different method. Although I believe this is not a problem for a

synchronic interpretation such as the present thesis, as far as the context and the texts themselves afford enough material for the present interpretation to be upheld, it is a matter that must be discussed if I proceed to a diachronic analysis of the evolution of historicity in Hume's works and of its relation to the historical context. It may be the case that the works analyzed in this thesis were written in a moment when the "language" that would become a distinctive characteristic of the social theorists writing in the historical age and in the historical nation, as Hume described the third quarter of the eighteenth century in Scotland (HL II:449), was still in formation. In this sense, perhaps the EPM must be seen, in a diachronic analysis, as an experimentation with a handful of different languages applied to moral philosophy: for instance, that which could give Hume's moral philosophy the "warmth" Hutcheson said Book III of the *Treatise* lacked; the language of the tradition of Grotius' natural jurisprudence rather than that of Locke which, despite of the critiques directed to it, was still present in the *Treatise*; and the language of Montesquieu's "anthropological-political" analysis.

In conclusion, the three issues discussed here all point to the importance of studying Hume's thought as an *evolving* thought. Only a diachronic study of Hume's works and biography can reveal his genius in learning and adapting multiple sources to interpret and address with philosophical depth issues that were current topics of discussion in his own time. And only a *contextual* diachronic study can reveal how that genius may have been even more important than we currently consider in creating one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Scottish Enlightenment: its willingness to understand human beings not only as social beings, but as historical beings.

REFERENCES

- ABRAMSON, K. (2001). Sympathy and the Project of Hume's Second *Enquiry*. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 83 n. 1, pp. 45-80.
- BAIER, A. C. (1991). *A Progress of Sentiments*. Cambridge-MA: Harvard University Press.
- BAIER, A. C. (2010). *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*. Cambridge-MA: Harvard University Press.
- BAUMSTARK, M. (2008). *David Hume: The Making of a Philosophical Historian* (Doctoral Thesis). Retrieved from the Edinburgh Research Archive available in <<https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/3265>> (last access: June 15th, 2016).
- BAUMSTARK, M. (2010). Hume's reading of the classics at Ninewells, 1749-1751. *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, vol. 8, n. 1, pp. 63-77.
- BERRY, C. J. (1994). *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- BERRY, C. J. (1997). *The Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- BERRY, C. J. (2006). Hume and the Customary Causes of Industry, Knowledge, and Humanity. *History of Political Economy*, n. 38, v. 2, pp. 291-317.
- BERRY, C. J. (2013). *David Hume*. Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers Series, vol. 3. New-York-NY: Bloomsbury.
- BESSER-JONES, L. (2006). The Role of Justice in Hume's Theory of Psychological Development. *Hume Studies*, vol. 32, n. 2.
- BOYD, R. (2008). Manners and Morals: David Hume on Civility, Commerce, and the Social Construction of Difference. IN: WENNERLIND, C. and SHABAS, M (eds.) (2008). *David Hume's Political Economy*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- BREWER, A. (1998). Luxury and Economic Development: David Hume and Adam Smith. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 45, n. 1, pp. 78-98, February.
- CAFFENTZIS, C. G. (2001). Hume, Money, and Civilization; or Why Was Hume a Metallist? *Hume Studies*, vol. 27, n. 2, Novembro, pp. 301-335.
- CHENEY, P. (2008). Constitution and Economy in David Hume's Enlightenment. IN: WENNERLIND, C. e SHABAS, M (eds.) (2008). *David Hume's Political Economy*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- COHEN, A. (2005). In Defence of Hume's Historical Method. *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 13, n. 3, pp. 489-502.
- CUNNINGHAM, A. S. (2005). David Hume's account of luxury. *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, vol. 27, n. 3.

- DAVIS, G. F. (2003) Philosophical Psychology and Economic Psychology in David Hume and Adam Smith. *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 35, N° 2, pp. 269-304.
- DEBES, R. (2007a). Has anything changed? Hume's theory of association and sympathy after the *Treatise*. *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 15, n. 2, pp. 311-338.
- DEBES, R. (2007b). Humanity, Sympathy and the Puzzle of Hume's Second *Enquiry*. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 15, n. 1, pp. 27-57.
- DUNN, J. (1983). From applied theology to social analysis: the break between John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment. IN: HONT, I. and IGNATIEFF, M. (1983). *Wealth & Virtue: the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press.
- FINLAY, C. J. (2007). *Hume's Social Philosophy: Human Nature and Commercial Sociability in A Treatise of Human Nature*. London-UK: Continuum.
- FORBES, D. (1985). *Hume's Philosophical Politics*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press.
- GAUTHIER, D. (1992). Artificial Virtues and the Sensible Knave. *Hume Studies*, vol. 18, n. 2, pp. 401-428, November.
- GILL, M. B. (2006). *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press.
- GRÜNE-YANOFF, T. and MCCLENNEN, E. F. (2008). Hume's Framework for a Natural History of the Passions. IN: WENNERLIND, C. and SCHABAS, M. (2008, org.). *David Hume's Political Economy*. New York-NY: Routledge.
- HANLEY, R. P. (2011). David Hume and the "Politics of Humanity". *Political Theory*, vol. 39(2), pp. 205-233.
- HARRIS, J. (2010). Hume on the Moral Obligation to Justice. *Hume Studies*, vol. 36, n. 1, pp. 25-50.
- HARRIS, J. (2015). *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press.
- HIRSCHMAN, A. O. ([1977]1997). *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- HONT, I. (2005). *The Jealousy of Trade: international competition and the nation-state in a historical perspective*. Cambridge-MA: Harvard University Press.
- HUME, D., GREIG, J. Y. T. (ed.). (1932) *The Letters of David Hume*, vol. 1. Oxford-UK: Clarendon Press.
- HUME, D. (1983). *History of England*. Indianapolis, EUA: Liberty Fund.
- HUME, D. (1985). *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*. Indianapolis-IN: Liberty Fund.
- HUME, D. (1998). *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*. Oxford-UK: Oxford University Press.

- HUME, D. (2007). *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford-UK: Oxford University Press.
- HUNDERT, E. J. (1974). The Achievement Motive in Hume's Political Economy. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 35, n. 1, pp. 139-143.
- JOHNSON, E. A. J. ([1937]1965). *Predecessors of Adam Smith: the growth of British economic thought*. Reprints of Economic Classics. New York-NY: Augustus M. Kelley Publisher.
- KALINOWSKI, F. A. (1993). David Hume on the Philosophic Underpinnings of Interest Group Politics. *Polity*, vol. 25, n. 3, pp. 355-374.
- KING, J. T. (1976). The Place of the Language of Morals in Hume's Second Enquiry. IN: LIVINGSTON, D. W. e KING, J. T. (eds) (1976). *Hume: A Re-Evaluation*. New York-NY: New York University Press.
- KING, J. (1988). Hume on Artificial Lives with a Rejoinder to A. C. MacIntyre. *Hume Studies*, vol. 14, n. 1, pp. 53-92.
- MACFARLANE, A. (2001). David Hume and the political economy of agrarian civilization. *History of European Ideas*, vol. 27, pp. 79-91.
- MANZER, R. A. (1996). The Promise of Peace? Hume and Smith on the Effects of Commerce on Peace and War. *Hume Studies*, vol. 22, n. 2, pp. 369-382.
- MACINTYRE. A. (1988). *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame-IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- MARSHALL, M. G. (1998). Scottish Economic Thought and the High Wage Economy: Hume Smith and McCulloch on the wages and work motivation. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 45, n. 3, pp. 309-328.
- MARSHALL, M. G. (2000). Luxury, Economic Development, and Work Motivation: David Hume, Adam Smith, and J. R. McCulloch. *History of Political Economy*, vol. 32, n. 3.
- MCARTHUR, N. (2007). *David Hume's Political Theory*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- MEEK, R. L. (1976). *Social Science & the Ignoble Savage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- MONTESQUIEU, C. S. Baron de (1999). *Letrres Persanes*. Paris, France: Flammarion.
- OZ-SALZBERGER, F. (2003). The political theory of the Scottish Enlightenment. IN: BROADIE, A. (2003). *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- PAGANELLI, M. P. (2009). David Hume on Monetary Policy: a retrospective approach. *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, vol. 7, n. 1, pp. 65-85.
- PIMENTA, P. P. G. (2011). Entre refinamento e civilização. *dois pontos*, vol. 8, n. 1, pp. 87-96.
- PAGANELLI, M. P. (2017). Boys do cry: Adam Smith on Wealth and Expressing Emotions. *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, vol. 15, n. 1, pp. 1-8.

- POCOCK, J. G. A. (1981). Gibbon and the Shepherds: the stages of society in the Decline and Fall. *History of European Ideas*, vol. 2, n. 3, pp. 193-202.
- POCOCK, J. G. A. (1985). *Virtue, Commerce, and History*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- POCOCK, J. G. A. (1999). *Barbarism and Religion: narratives of civil government*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press.
- ROBERTSON, J. (1983). The Scottish Enlightenment at the limits of the civic tradition. IN: HONT, I. e IGNATIEFF, M. (1983). *Wealth & Virtue: the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press.
- ROBERTSON, J. (2005). *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press.
- ROTWEIN, E. (2007[1955]). Introduction. IN: HUME, D. (2007). *Economic Writings*. Transaction Publishers.
- SAKAMOTO, T. (2003). Hume's Political Economy as a system of manners. IN: SAKAMOTO, T. and TANAKA, H. (2003). *The rise of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*. London, UK: Routledge.
- SAKAMOTO, T. (2011). Hume's "Early Memoranda" and the Making of His Political Economy. *Hume Studies*, vol. 37, n. 2, pp. 131-164.
- SCHABAS, M. (2001). *The Natural Origins of Economics*. Chicago-IL: Chicago University Press.
- SCHABAS, M. (2008). Temporal Dimensions in Hume's Monetary Theory. IN: WENNERLIND, C. and SHABAS, M (eds.) (2008). *David Hume's Political Economy*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- SEBASTIANI, S. (2013). *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- SHER, R. (1994). From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue and Commerce. IN: WOOTTON, D. (ed.) (1994). *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*. Stanford-CA, United States: Stanford University Press.
- SKINNER, A. (2009). Hume's Principles of Political Economy. IN: NORTON, D. F. and TAYLOR, J. (2009). *The Cambridge Companion to Hume, second edition*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press.
- SMITH, A. (1976). *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Indianapolis, EUA: Liberty Fund.
- STOCKTON, C. N. (1976). Economics and the Mechanism of Historical Progress in Hume's History. IN: LIVINGSTON, D. W. e KING, J. T. (eds) (1976). *Hume: A Re-Evaluation*. New York: New York University Press.

- SUSATO, R. (2006). Hume's Nuanced Defense of Luxury. *Hume Studies*, vol. 32, n. 1., pp. 167-186.
- TAYLOR, J. (1998). Justice and the Foundations of Social Morality in Hume's *Treatise*. *Hume Studies*, vol. 24, n. 1, pp. 5-30, April.
- TAYLOR, J. (2002). Hume on the Standard of Virtue. *The Journal of Ethics*, vol. 6, n. 1, pp. 43-62.
- TAYLOR, J. (2009). Hume's Later Moral Philosophy. IN: NORTON, D. F. and TAYLOR, J. (eds). *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*. Cambridge-UK: Cambridge University Press, second edition.
- TAYLOR, J. (2015). *Reflecting Subjects: Passion, Sympathy and Society in Hume's Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- TOMASELLI, S. (1988). Moral Philosophy and Population Questions in Eighteenth Century Europe. *Population and Development Review*, vol. 14, Supplement.
- VITZ, R. (2004). Sympathy and Benevolence in Hume's Moral Psychology. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 42, n. 3, July, pp. 261-275.
- WILLIAMS, R. (1960). *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*. Anchor Books. New York-NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc.
- WENNERLIND, C. (2002). David Hume's Political Philosophy: A Theory of Commercial Modernization. *Hume Studies*, vol. 28, n. 2, pp. 247-270.
- WENNERLIND, C. (2011). The Role of Political Economy in Hume's Moral Philosophy. *Hume Studies*, vol. 37, n. 1, pp. 43-64.