David Hume between moral philosophy and political economy: the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* dependence on the *Political Discourses*

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Abstract: This paper discusses the relation between David Hume's (1711-1776) "Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals" (EPM, 1751) and the "Political Discourses" (1752). Previous discussions of the relation between Hume's moral philosophy and political economy have often disregarded the development of his thought through time and how he changed his ideas in reaction to historical and intellectual developments around him. In this paper, I argue that the relation between the EPM and the "Political Discourses" reflects Hume's increased awareness of moral diversity and the necessity to take it into account philosophically. This awareness was inspired by Hume's trip to continental Europe in 1748 and his reading of the classics during his sojourn in Ninewells (1749-1751); the perception that diversity had to be accounted for came from Montesquieu's De l'Esprit des Lois (1748). The EPM, written during this period, examines morality as it was expressed in historical societies rather than abstractly, trying to find what are the shared foundations of moral experience. Hume's conclusion point to necessity of a shared sentiment of humanity which is not equally fostered by all forms of economic and political organization. The EPM thus depends on the work of the historian and political economist to show how different forms of political and economic organization produce different moral sentiments. The "Political Discourses" answers the moral philosopher's call for historical context, comparing agrarian – chiefly ancient Roman and Greek –and modern commercial societies and showing what moral sentiments they produce. The conclusion of the two works taken together is a historical analysis showing that only modern commercial societies possess economic and political institutions compatible with the shared sentiment that is the true foundation of morality, the sentiment of humanity.

1. INTRODUCTION

David Hume spent his intellectual career in active engagement with political, economic, and intellectual events that happened around him: he corresponded and was friends with the most prominent European men of letters, joined clubs and learned societies in Scotland, took positions in government and was a frequent guest in Parisian salons. Despite his continued engagement with the historical and intellectual events that happened during his life, the interpretation that has prevailed for much of the twentieth century and the current century takes most of his post-*Treatise of Human Nature* to be a simple unfolding of the project laid out before he had reached his thirties (Harris, 2015, pp. 2-14). This interpretation takes the *Treatise* to be the "capital" (T.intro.10[2]) of the Science of Man and Hume's subsequent works as the application of the principles set in the capital to the areas around it, like politics, economics, and history. Such a view of Hume's intellectual achievements seems to ignore that as a member of the Republic of Letters often engaged in practical affairs, Hume followed

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[2] Hereafter, references to the *Treatise* (T) are followed by book, part, section and paragraph numbers; references to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (EPM) are followed by section and paragraph numbers; references to the *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (E) are followed by page number; references to *The Letters of David Hume* (HL) are followed by the volume and letter number; references to Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Lois* (DEL) are followed by book and chapter numbers; references to the *History of England* (HE) are followed by book and page numbers.

closely his context and thus risks to affirm that he had nothing to learn from it or was not influenced by it.

This paper discusses the relation between the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) and the *Political Discourses* (1752) taking into account the influence of Hume's engagement with his practical and intellectual context. It thus seeks not to incur in the mistake of conjuring a "agent in the philosophical scenario" that has little resemblance to the historical David Hume (Pocock, 1985, p. 24) as the prevailing interpretation of his works seems to do. The main thrust of the paper is to show that these two works, when considered together, display the effects of Hume's experiences in the period during which they were written, most notably his increased awareness of the moral, political, and economic differences existent among nations and through time – inspired by his trip to Europe in 1748 and the reading of the classics at Ninewells after his return – and the necessity of including the discussion about difference in his arguments – inspired by Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Lois* (1748). The key difference in Hume's ideas that seem to have been inspired by these events is the change in his moral philosophy: it became a chiefly a *historical* enquiry on morality and, as such, it became more dependent on the study of society and their political, economic, and social practices than on the principles of the human mind, as had been the case in Book III of the *Treatise*. If, on the one hand, Hume's moral philosophy become more historicized, on the other hand, he provided the historical analysis it now depended on in the *Political Discourses*. Thus, I first discuss the key developments in Hume's life in the period he wrote the EPM and the *Political Discourses*. In the second section, I analyze how the EPM reflects those developments in its method and conclusions. Finally, I show in the third section how the three essays that form the backbone of the *Political Discourses*, "Of Commerce", "Of Refinement in the Arts" and "Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations"[3], provide a historical discussion of the factors the EPM places as relevant to an enquiry about morality.

The interpretative literature has already suggested that the relation between the EPM and the *Political Discourses* is an important part of the understanding of Hume's thought. Wennerlind (2011) discusses this relation, focusing on the relation between justice and the development of commerce. However, he does not discuss these two works with reference to the period in which they were written and considers the EPM as basically a repetition of the *Treatise*[4]. If Wennerlind neglects the particularities of the EPM and their relation to the context, Harris (2015, pp. 252) has already noted

[3] E-Co, E-RA and E-PAN hereafter.

[4] For instance, Baier (2010, p. 229) highlights that Hume no longer adopted in the EPM the sequential theory of justice he had argued for in the Treatise, where the distinction of property is followed by the conventions that allow transfer by consent and establish the obligation of promises. Wennerlind (2011, p. 47) attributes this sequencing to the EPM. He acknowledges (p. 45, n. 8) that he has avoided the discussion of the similarities and differences between the *Treatise* and the EPM by picking the latter, since it was written around the same time as the Discourses, but ignoring the differences leads him into treating the two works as similar.

that the EPM "needed to be supplemented and deepened by more particular and localized histories of morals and manners", as I suggest here. However, he affirms that even though Hume pointed out a direction to further enquiries in moral philosophy, he did not follow the path he had opened, a task that would later be pursued by some of his friends such as Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith. While Harris is certainly correct saying that Hume never wrote a work explicitly dedicated to those localized histories, my point is that the *Political Discourses* provide at least partial histories of morals and manners of ancient and modern commercial societies.

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE EPM AND THE *POLITICAL DISCOURSES*

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: first, there Hume's trip to Europe in 1748. In that year, Hume received an invitation from Lieutenant-General James St. Clair to join him in 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 [his] 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, p. 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, p. 131). 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 than the more abundant Styria; the Politician – who believed the form of government was the most important cause of a people's life standard – would

find it hard to explain how those two regions, ruled by the same government, could differ so strongly[5]. As Baumstark (2008, p. 39) puts it, Hume is here rejecting "monocausal" explanations of social phenomena: neither natural causes nor political causes could, by themselves, explain the different characters of each people.

Hume had already sketched in "Of National Characters", published in 1748 and written before his departure to the continent[6], the idea that a variety of moral causes – shared language, form of government, commercial relations – worked together to form a "national character" by "contagion" (E 202-203). This essay articulates the idea of national characters as localized uniformities caused by the general uniformity of human nature especially our propensity to absorb "as it were, by contagion" (E 202) the characteristics of those under the effects of the same moral causes as us (Sebastiani, 2013, pp. 28-31). Notwithstanding Montesquieu's praises (HL I:65), the essay is better understood as an argument against physical causes as determinants of a nation's character than full exposition of an argument that could be an alternative to either the naturalist or the politician's way of thinking.

In the same year of the publication of "Of National Characters", Montesquieu published *De l'Esprit des Lois* in Geneva, a book in which he develops at greater length the idea that a multitude of causes work into the making of a people's "*ésprit*". Oz-Salzberger (2003, p. 170) places the concept of *ésprit* and the "anthropological-cultural analysis of politics" behind it as the "*pièce de résistance*" of the Frenchman's work to the Scottish men of letters (to the point of boosting his wine sales to Scotland[7]). Montesquieu discusses two different concepts of *ésprit*: in the first book, he presents the "spirit of the laws" [*esprit des lois*] which refers to the relation of the laws to

> the *physical aspect* of the country; […] to the degree of liberty that the constitution can sustain, to the religion of the inhabitants, their inclinations, their wealth, their number, their commerce, their mores and their manners; finally, the laws are related to one another, to their origin, to the purpose of the legislator, and to the order of things on which they are established. They must be considered from all these points of view. (DEL I.3)

Thus, the "spirit of the laws" amounts to the way laws relate to natural phenomena and the social, political, and economic practices of a society. In the same chapter, he argues that "the government most in conformity with nature is the one whose particular arrangement best relates to the disposition

[5] The politician's view is, to some extent, similar to what Hume himself had argued for in "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences", published in 1742. In this essay, he attempts to argue that monarchical and republican governments shape the development of the Arts and Sciences differently. As Sakamoto (2003, p. 88) argues, Hume seems to reach a dead-end when he tries to explain how "civilized monarchies" such as the British monarchy could adopt the general laws of a republic, something he himself denies in the essay (E 118). According to Sakamoto, Hume would solve this problem in the Political Discourse exactly by abandoning the monocausal explanation of "Of the Rise and Progress…".

[6] 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 DEL, but rather in response to previous works sponsoring this view.

[7] Cf Baumstark (2008, p. 49, n. 106).

of the people for whom it is established", that is, the measure of a good government is not its conformity to, say, a transcendental or teleological reference, but to the people and their characteristics. Montesquieu emphasizes at a later point (DEL XVIII.8), that "the laws are closely related to the way the various peoples procure their subsistence", as is clear from his inclusion of commerce and wealth as parts of the characteristics of a nation in relation to which the spirit of the laws is defined. In DEL XIX.4, Montesquieu presents the notion of "general spirit" as what results from the many things that "govern men: climate, religion, laws, the maxims of the government, examples of past things, mores, and manners", thus while the spirit of the laws is the relation of the laws to the characteristics of a society, the general spirit is the whole that governs men, that direct their conducts. Laws are only part of what makes the general spirit, and wise legislator will know their limits: like Solon she will give the people "the best laws they could endure" (DEL XIX.21).

Sher (1994, pp. 369-370, 389-390) observes that Hume was not as influenced by Montesquieu as some of his younger Scottish friends: he did not fully adhere to the latter's "sophisticated historicism" (Harris (2015, p. 252) as Adam Ferguson did when he considered a government's "fit", neither did he develop a stadial theory based on the relation of modes of subsistence and property relations as Adam Smith did[8]. But he did engage with the Frenchman's work and this engagement, as Silvia Sebastiani (2013, p. 20) highlights, was the basis of the historicized study of society developed by Scottish thinkers from the 1750s until the 1780s. Neither Hume's letters to Montesquieu nor the answers to them (HL I:65,85) mention the concepts of general spirit and spirit of the laws I highlighted above. He does say in his first letter to the *Président*, sent in 1749, that the many detailed comments he sent support the principles upon which the system is founded (HL I:65, p. 133), and even though he seems not to have discussed the core principles in correspondence, the notion of a general spirit (which included material subsistence) influenced both the EPM and the *Political Discourses*, as I argue below.

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 writing of E-PAN, 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 a "fragments of a coherent whole, a comprehensive survey of classical civilisations encompassing politics, society and culture as well as moral and religious beliefs" which, as I argue below, were necessary to complete Hume's mature moral philosophy, most notably by allowing him to compare this

[8] Cf. Sebastiani (2013, ch. 3, especially pp. 46-55)

"fragmentary history" to the conclusions about the commercial societies of his time he reached in the *Political Discourses*.

Overall, what I take to be relevant from the three aspects of the context of the late 1740s and early 1750s is the fact that Hume was confronted both with the wide differences existent among different societies, as his trip to Europe and his reading of the classics suggest, and with perhaps one of the most influential works of the eighteenth-century that attempted to offer a way to think about these differences. Baumstark (2008, p. 113) claims that, in response to his experiences of this period, Hume "built an elaborate case for the relativity of moral standards" and that the moral philosopher now required "the expertise of the historian in order to explain the origins of customs and moral standards". As the next section argues, taking the whole EPM into account (rather than "A Dialogue" alone), the second claim is certainly true, but it is hard to make a case for moral relativism.

3. THE MORAL SENTIMENT AND ITS CONTEXT IN THE *ENQUIRY CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS*

Hume begins the EPM affirming that "those who deny the reality of moral distinctions" are "disingenuous disputants" who cannot really believe what they claim (EPM 1.2). It seems a plain matter of fact that people distinguish between right and wrong, that, when presented to two different characters, there's no skepticism "so scrupulous […] as absolutely to deny the distinction between them". The attack on moral skepticism and on selfish moral systems gains considerable space in the recasting of his moral philosophy: until the last edition Hume saw in print, his enquiry on the catalogues of virtues and vices began with what became, in the 1777 edition (the last he supervised, though he did not see it published), the second Appendix to the EPM, "Of Self-Love". In this appendix, Hume argues, in the same spirit of the opening paragraphs of section 1, that benevolence is undeniably a part of the human constitution as are vanity, ambition or hunger (EPM A2.12) and that "self-love" or the pursuit of what we desire, should be considered as the drive to attain the objects of those various affections, not what creates them in the first place. Against the excessive and misguided love of simplicity displayed by selfish moral theorists like Locke and Hobbes (EPM A2.3, A2.6), Hume considers it a simpler and more satisfactory hypothesis to admit that the human frame is composed by a multitude of often contrary passions – in moral philosophy, "the simplest and most obvious case, which can there be assigned for any phaenomenon, is probably the true one" (EPM A2.7). He divides the undeniable benevolence of the human frame into two categories, general and particular benevolence: the latter refers to our benevolence towards those with whom we have a particular connection; the former – which he equals to "humanity, or sympathy" and which will "we shall have occasion frequently to treat of in the course of this enquiry" – is founded only in a "general sympathy" with others' pleasures and pains, regardless of connection and Hume "assume[s] it as real,

from general experience, without any other proof" (EPM A2.5 n. 60). General benevolence or, as I shall have the occasion to discuss below, the moral distinction, is simply "assumed as real".

Hume's choice of beginning both the introductory section of the book and, for almost all his life, the actual enquiry on the virtues with the positive statement that moral distinctions are undeniable and that the sentiment which is the basis of moral distinctions must be assumed as real due to general experience contrasts with the question with the way he began the third book of the *Treatise*: instead of an attack on the skeptics, the first part (T 3.1) is an attack on moral philosophies founded on reason alone; most importantly, the beginning of his enquiry on the virtues starts with a question about the motive to repay a loan, that is, a question about the motive to act justly, only to find that there is none, at least in the "rude and more natural condition" of humankind (T 3.2.1.9). The point I'm making here is *not* that the *Treatise* does not attack moral skeptics or that it denies the existence of benevolence[9]; what I intend to stress is that his choice of where to start is related to the method he adopts. In the final paragraphs of section 1 of the EPM, Hume outlines his method of enquiry:

> We shall analyze that complication of mental qualities, which form what, in common life, we call PERSONAL MERIT; We shall consider every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; […] The very nature of language guides us almost infallibly in forming a judgement of this nature; and as every tongue possesses one set of words which are taken in a good sense, and another in the opposite, the least acquaintance with the idiom suffices, without any reasoning, to direct us in collecting and arranging the estimable or blameable qualities of men. (EPM 1.10)

Instead of beginning with the basic springs and motives in the human mind and then finding out how they interact with each other in order to produce moral judgments, the EPM's method begins with moral judgments as already given and enquiries what is related to it, what a person feels when she has such or such epithet attributed to her. In other words, the EPM begins with "our actual experience of moral evaluation as a social process grounded in language and discourse" (Taylor, 2009, p. 315). To reach the "foundation of ethics" (EPM 1.10) means, first, to take moral distinctions as they are found in the world and to find what is common among those qualities considered praiseworthy and among those considered blamable; then, it means to find the "universal principles" which react positively to the former and negatively to the latter qualities.

Hume's choice to begin the EPM with moral language as it is found in the world inverts the order of explanation that was presented in the *Treatise*: as King (1976, p. 356-357) argues, in the latter work, the moral distinction was the *explanandum* whose *explanans* were the "springs and motives" in the human mind; in the former, the actual moral distinction, represented in human

[9] Hume argues against the moral skeptics (T 3.2.2.25-26) and acknowledges benevolence as natural virtues, that is, independent of an artifice (T 3.3.3).

practices and institutions (such as moral language) becomes the *explanans* of the sentiments that make the human constitution, that is, the common experience of moral practice discloses characteristics of human nature[10]. In the search for the ultimate principles subjacent to moral judgments, moral language can be an almost infallible guide because it is "an historical fact about men in society, something *positive* and unproblematic" (King, 1976, p. 344). Moreover, because moral practice becomes the starting point from which the moral philosopher can ask questions about the human constitution, it is now possible to also ask what variations observed in the former reveal about the latter and also to ask how other practices, the institutions related to them, and the passions that are fostered by them influence moral practice. In other words, in the EPM, it is possible to ask, for instance, how the political system or the economic setting and the passions fostered by each of them affect moral practice and moral sentiments. The political system and the economic organization, like moral practice and the its characteristic language, are together the *explanans* that allow the philosopher to reach the *explananda* that has now become human nature.

Most of the EPM considers "moral language" in the singular: Hume is looking for the principle that underlies moral distinctions and which, therefore, must be the basis upon which moral language is built. He begins with the "social virtues" of justice and benevolence (sections 2-3). His survey of these two virtues concludes that "the circumstance of *utility*, in all subjects, is a source of praise and approbation: That it is constantly appealed to in all moral decisions, concerning the merit and demerit of actions"; it is the only source of the approbation of justice and always part of the source of the approbation of benevolence (EPM 5.44)

The answer to the question of why we approve of what is useful to society leads to the "universal principles" of morals. Here, Hume emphasizes repeatedly[11] that every person, howsoever selfish, will approve of what is useful to society and that this propensity is sufficient to produce a moral distinction:

> Let these generous sentiments be supposed ever so weak; let them be insufficient to move even a hand or finger in 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)

Whether it be the cool approbation which a selfish person dispenses or the "real passion" of more generous minds (EPM 6.3 n. 26), this distinction in favor of what is useful to society, i.e., the moral

[10] In this sense, Hume's rejection of selfish theories in the second appendix and in the first part of section five means that, to make sense of moral distinctions as they are found in common experience, the selfish moral philosopher must perform a "philosophical chymistry" to establish the connection between his preferred principle (self-interest) to the observed moral phenomena.

[11] EPM 5.39-40, 5.42, 6.3-4, 9.4.

sentiment, is the same as the sentiment of humanity, since "The same endowments of the mind, in every circumstance, are agreeable to the sentiment of morals and to that of humanity" (EPM 6.5). Indeed, it must be so because the sentiment of humanity is the only sentiment which "the notion of morals implies": a moral judgement implies a sentiment that is 1) shared with all humankind (EPM 9.5) and which covers all humankind in its judgements (EPM 9.7); my ambition, avarice, or vanity is not shared with others (indeed, it is quite often contrary to theirs) and does not comprehend every other person in its preferences, since most people will not affect any of them.

Because the sentiment of humanity is the only one which is universally felt and which can consider all humankind in its judgments, it is the only sentiment which can be the basis of moral language, since the latter, "being formed for general use, must be moulded on some general views, […] in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community" (EPM 5.42). The very fact that people utter their moral judgments to each other coalesces such judgments into a socially constituted standard which, while reflecting the views of the many individuals that speak such language, is not the mere sum of their individual positions: "The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general unalterable standard, by which we approve or disapprove of characters and manners" (EPM 5.42). Thus, moral language stands to each of its individual speakers as both an objective standard, that is, a standard of moral judgment that lies beyond her own private sentiments, and as the reflection, in some measure, of her own sentiments.

Hume acknowledges that we will not always act out of this standard, for our other passions may make us incapable of "moving a finger" in other to actualize this standard, but the general notions it expresses, because they are molded from "social and universal" principles (EPM 9.9), exert a considerable influence and are "sufficient, at least, for discourse, serv[ing] all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools" (EPM 5.42). Hence, when a person calls another "virtuous" or "vicious" instead of calling her an "enemy" or "rival", that is, when he uses epithets associated with moral language instead of those associated with his individual position, he "expresses sentiments, in which, *he expects*, all his audience to concur with him" (EPM 9.6), emphasis mine) because his judgment is a sentiment which is shared with the audience and which "recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree" with it (EPM 9.5)[12]. The same is true in case where we do act out of a character which is in accordance

[12] As an example, if a British soldier says a French soldier was his enemy in the War of the Austrian Succession, he is speaking from his individual point of view and does not expect a Spanish soldier to concur in his judgment and say that the Frenchman was his enemy as well. From the point of view of the Spanish soldier, the Frenchman was an ally. But if the British soldier says his French counterpart was vicious and cruel in battle, he does expect everyone, including the allies of the French soldier, to concur with his judgment because he is now using a moral term designating a bad personal quality and expects everyone to understand that "he has chosen this common point of view, and has touched the principle of humanity, in which every man, in some degree, concurs" (EPM 9.6).

to the general notions that mold moral language: we also expect to touch others' sentiment of humanity and expect them to judge approvingly of our character as displayed by our actions.

It would be no surprise, given that moral language is seen by each individual agent as a standard expressing general preferences and that we sometimes fail to act in accordance to it, if Hume related the way we correct our sentiments to acquaintance with moral language. Without correcting our sentiments, which may be affected by private factors (such as our relation to the agent we are judging, distance in time and space to her) we would "never think or talk steadily on any subject" (EPM 5.41). As Taylor (2015, ch. 4) and King (1976, p. 354 n. 20) notice, instead of relying as the *Treatise* does on our extending our sympathy to encompass the agent's immediate circle (T 3.3.1.17-18), the EPM places conversation as the means to correct our sentiments:

> 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)

Thus, each agent faces an already established moral practice whose characteristic language expresses the general preferences of those who take part in it (including herself). Because moral language appears to each member of the community where it is practiced as expressive of a moral standard, each of them will both expect that her audience knows the standard and will correct her own sentiments taking that standard as the parameter of the corrections.

But how does "moral language" in the singular becomes moral languages in the plural? That is, how does this seemingly universal moral standard opens itself to variation, including historical variations? The key to variability is the context – other existing practices and institutions – within which the moral standard expressed by moral language is formed. Different contexts may change especially the outlook of the social virtues of justice and benevolence.

All human communities develop rules that "preserve peace and order" which "depend entirely on the particular state and condition, in which men are placed" (EPM 3.12): as humankind evolves from families to primitive small societies and then to large nations that develop relations between themselves, the "boundaries of justice still grow larger, in proportion to the largeness of men's views, and the force of their mutual connexions" (EPM 3.21). In an explicit reference to Montesquieu – "a late author of genius, as well as learning" – Hume lists under the heading of circumstances to which laws attend or ought to attend "the constitution of government, the manners, the climate, the religion, the commerce, the situation of each society" (EPM 3.34). As it is evident from the list, the circumstances include more than the *natural* circumstances[13]: social, political, and economic

[13] Which would influence, for instance, whether there are distinctions of property in land or in water (according to the relative scarcity of these goods, EPM 3.4-5)

institutions shape the particular laws a society has and, consequently, also shape the approbation of those who respect them.

If justice may be compared to a vault because each individual just action would, like each individual stone in a vault, be useless if it were not supported by other just actions, benevolence can be compared to a wall, where each individual action adds to the height of the wall (EPM A3.5). Notwithstanding this distinction, what counts as benevolence also has a reference to the context around: a prince's liberality may be benevolent because it may be useful to its recipients, but only when it is not offered at the cost of "the homely bread of the honest and industrious" (EPM 2.20). In the same manner, luxury "may be ruinous and pernicious in a native of Switzerland", but it "fosters the arts, and encourages industry in a Frenchman or Englishman" (EPM D41). In the latter countries, moral writers were "regulat[ing] anew our *moral* as well as *political* sentiments" (EPM 2.21) because their societies had become commercial ones, contrasted to the agricultural nature of Switzerland, that is, their circumstances were changing and the general notion of a benevolent action was changing along with it.

In section 6, Hume again refers to context when he discusses the qualities useful to oneself. Here, different forms of government introduce different utilities and thus alter the qualities that allow a person to make a figure in life and to be approved of: honour and authority are qualities suited to monarchies, industry and wealth to republics "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 6.5).

Therefore, considering only the virtues approved of because of their utility (to the possessor or to the public), there may be variations in context, and the "boundaries of moral good and evil", which always point to public utility, are adjusted according to the evolution of the circumstances (EPM 2.17). The variations in the social virtues however, may be attributed to humans' reason, insofar as they are the response to varying contexts. Hume makes his point comparing justice to house-building: all houses have the same parts (roofs, walls, windows) and the different ways these parts are combined reflect house-builders' reasoned response to the circumstances, so that the house fully achieves its purpose of making human life convenient; the particular laws of each society also reflect the fact that they are (or should) made with a convenient life in mind (EPM 3.44-46)[14]. Hence, so far the variations may not constitute "moral languages" (and standards) in the plural; these variations can easily be considered in light of the method outlined in the beginning of this section: particular laws of justice become the *explanans* by means of which the moral philosopher can reveal the *explananda*

[14] Since I have argued that benevolence, like justice, depends on context, I believe this argument can be extended to the former as well. Indeed, in the passage mentioned in this paragraph (EPM 2.17), Hume says the boundaries of good and evil are adjusted "as soon as farther experience and sounder reasoning have given us juster notions of human affairs".

"natural justice" which is common to all of them. Indeed, every person, once she arrives in a community, will understand that the variations in the social virtues found in that community are simply responses to the different circumstances.

To be sure, there is another level of variability, which Hume discusses mostly in "A Dialogue", annexed to the EPM, and in section 7, and it is at this level that "moral language" become "moral languages". Besides the virtues useful for the public discussed above, there are virtues useful to their possessor and the virtues approved of because they are immediately agreeable. In the EPM, these virtues, though approved of sympathetically as the useful virtues, draw their approbation from sentiments other than the sentiment of humanity: sympathy is "the source of several *varieties* of sentiments of admiration and approval, uneasiness and blame" (Taylor, 2015, pp. 125-129. The relative merit attributed to useful and agreeable virtues creates more radical differences between different catalogues and the moral languages molded after them.

These more radical moral differences are the object of "A Dialogue". Hume begins it by drawing attention to the apparent incommensurability of different moral languages: the narrator's friend, Palamedes, begins the account of his travels to Fourli commenting his "double pains" to learn the morality of its inhabitants; he first had to learn the meaning of each word, but then discovered he often did not know what value the quality it described possessed in Fourli (EPM D2). That is, for speakers of Fourli's language, its words expressed both a descriptive content and a normative content, which would not be known to someone who was not educated in that language – they had a different moral language from Palamedes'. His description of the moral practices existent in that society, which turns out to be a representation of ancient Roman and Greek moral practices[15], leads him to ask "How shall we pretend to fix a standard for judgements of this nature?" (EPM D25).

> By tracing matters, replied I [the narrator], 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, by the *same* principle of gravity. The different inclinations of the ground, on which they run, cause all the difference of their courses. (EPM D26)

The "principle of gravity" turns out to be the fact that every quality which is recommended as a virtue is so "on account of its being *useful*, or *agreeable* to a man *himself*, or to *others*" (EPM D37). The ground which directs these principles of approbation and censure are the different practices which, once they become custom, "by giving an early biass to the mind, may produce a superior propensity, either to the useful or the agreeable qualities" (EPM D42): different forms of government, differences

[15] Among the names Palamedes employs to disguise ancient Roman and Greek characters we find an Uzbek, the same name Montesquieu gives to the main character of his *Lettres Persanes* (1721), which was at that time one of the most popular works discussing the variability of morals. Baumstark (2008, pp. 104-114) affirms that disguising ancient values allows Hume to create a distance between his readers and the often cherished classic values, thus creating the possibility to discuss what they took to be their own ancestors in terms of the moral variations existent among different societies.

proceeding “from general riches or poverty, union or faction, ignorance or learning” (EPM D51) and the differences created by the state of war and peace, which "produces the greatest variations in moral sentiments" (EPM D39), give each society a different “ground” which will lead to different moral sentiments expressed in their own moral language. The relative merit attributed to useful qualities often comes at the cost of the agreeable and vice-versa: “we must sacrifice somewhat of the *useful*, if we be very anxious to obtain all the *agreeable* qualities; and cannot pretend to reach alike every kind of advantage” (EPM D47). Thus, as Abramson (1999, p. 179-180) argues, "A Dialogue" makes the moral standard of the EPM open to difference, since it "does not set a fully determinate standard of value".

Should we then conclude that the EPM, by leaving the standard of value indeterminate in some measure[16], does not offer any hint on how to navigate between these possible standards and the moral languages that express them? Taylor (2015, pp. 148-152) suggests that a careful reading of section 7, where Hume discusses the virtues approved of "without any utility or any tendency to farther good" because of the "immediate sensation" they infuse sympathetically in the observer (EPM 7.2), shows that he is not willing to survey moral standards that incline to the useful or to the agreeable as neutrally as he does in "A Dialogue". Taylor distinguishes the agreeable virtues between those approved of because of their sublimity and because of their charm. The former – greatness of mind, courage, and philosophical tranquility, all of them virtues praised in the ancient world – usually end up overrunning the social virtues of benevolence and justice: Alexander's greatness of mind made him regard every man as a subject (EPM 7.6) and the Scythians' and Romans’ courage and martial bravery made them cruel and inhumane against their enemies (EPM 7.14).

Why should we read this as a statement in favor of the social virtues praised in modern societies against the sublime virtues (for they are still virtues) of ancient societies? As Hume says, these are considered the most praiseworthy virtues "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). They have not yet learned that "human society, or even human nature could not subsist, without the establishment" of justice (EPM 3.39). Where the ancient, sublime virtues — and the practices that make them the most important virtues — prevail, the sentiment of humanity, "a virtue much more useful and engaging", is "destroyed" (EPM 7.14).

In conclusion, we have seen that Hume beings the EPM with a different method, taking moral practice and moral language as already existent. This allows Hume to enquiry about what is common

[16] Hume does write off what Palamedes calls "artificial lives and manners" (EPM D52) such as those of Pascal and Diogenes, the cynic. As King (1988, pp. 74-83) argues, these manners and lives are not the product of the living standard of value expressed in each *community*'s moral language; they are rather the product of the religious superstition and philosophical enthusiasm of their *individual* proponents (EPM D57). Because they are not "historical moralities", in King's terms, I will not further discuss them here.

to moral practices: that they imply a sentiment that is felt universally and which judges universally. It also allows him to discover how moral practices and their languages differ from each other: because each community's moral practice exists in the world along with political, economic, and social practices, they will express the effects of the latter. Most notably, political, economic, and social practices and their institutions shape how particular virtues develop according to the circumstances and whether the general preferences of a society incline to the useful or to the agreeable. "A Dialogue" suggests that the useful and the agreeable virtues may often be praised at the cost of the other; indeed, Hume says in section 7 that the sublime virtues praised in the ancient often took the place of the virtues approved of by our sentiment of humanity. He does not, however, discuss at length why the sublime virtues encroach on the sentiment of humanity, the only sentiment which can be universally shared, and on the virtue of justice, essential for life and society, that is, he does not fully explore the connection between the moral practice of ancient and modern societies and their specific political, economic, and social practices. As such, Hume's apparent preference for the moderns' catalogue in the EPM, as I showed above following Taylor's (2015) analysis of section 7, also remains to be fully explained. This task is done, albeit partially, in the *Political Discourses*, to which we turn now.

4. THE MORAL CONSEQUENCES OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PRACTICES IN THE *POLITICAL DISCOURSES*

The *Political Discourses* certainly did not have the direct aim of making an extensive comparison between the political, economic and social practices of modern commercial societies and their ancient and feudal predecessors. As Rotwein (1955, p. xxiv) argues, "Hume was interested in dealing with specific economic problems" and "his organisation is shaped primarily by the requirement of these" problems; thus, "historical sequences do not appear in a conspicuously systematic form". But the problems Hume sets as his objects of enquiry in the *Political Discourses* are discussed in a very long historical frame: regarding Hume's monetary thought, for instance "it might be more accurate to ascribe 300 years as the short run […] and over 1,500 years as the long run" (Schabas, 2008, p. 137). Within these frames, social, political, and economic practices change and as such Hume's topical analysis of political economic matters becomes a historical analysis of the rise and fall of particular practices and their contexts.

The most important factor in the historical analysis of the rise of commercial societies that undergirds Hume's topical essays is the increased economic productivity – or, in Hume's parlance, the rise of industry, understood as the human attribute of working assiduously and diligently – caused by the growth of commerce. Its effects relevant to the moral discussion of the EPM may be divided in two parts: first, it opens the material possibility of a new sociability based on our common humanity; second, the rank of men who collects the fruits of the increased productivity in commercial

societies change the political landscape of the nation, thus inclining it especially to the respect of the social virtue of justice. An appropriate consideration of Hume's analysis of these two changes shows that his preference in the EPM for the more "engaging" sentiment of humanity and the social virtues is not simply a preference of one among many catalogues, but rather the consequence of a comprehensive understanding of moral practices as part of a historical development which came, as we shall see, mostly for the better.

The explicit aim of "Of Commerce" (E-Co), the first essay of the *Political Discourses*, is to argue that the happiness of the subjects and the greatness of the sovereign are inseparable regarding commerce (E 255). However, in making that argument, Hume sets the frame of his whole historical analysis, namely, the comparison between a state where the manufacturing sector is developed and a state where it is not. The population of a country is employed chiefly in husbandry and manufacturing, the former producing the necessaries of life and the latter applying themselves to the "arts of *luxury*" (E 256). The share of the population that can be employed in the production of manufactures or luxuries depends on the productivity of the agricultural sector: as agriculture becomes more productive less people need to be employed in it to feed the whole population and these available hands may work either in the manufacturing sector or be claimed by the sovereign to work in armies or fleets and in the public service. In a state where manufactures and the "mechanic arts" are not cultivated, there's nothing for which the agricultural surplus can be exchanged, thus, the farmers will have no incentive to produce beyond what is sufficient to maintain themselves: "A habit of indolence prevails. The greater part of the land lies uncultivated. What is cultivated yields not its utmost for want of skill and assiduity in the farmers" (E 261). If, on the contrary,

> a nation abounds in manufactures and mechanic arts, the proprietors of land, as well as the farmers, study agriculture as a science, and redouble their industry and attention. The superfluity, which arises from their labour, is not lost; but is exchanged with manufactures for those commodities, which men's luxury now makes them covet. By this means, land furnishes a great deal more of the necessaries of life, than what suffices for those who cultivate it. (E 261)

Thus, it is the existence of a manufactures that makes the agricultural sector productive, not the contrary as, for instance, Adam Smith would later propose in the first chapter of Book III of the *Wealth of Nations*[17]. But one may ask "if manufactures introduce higher productivity, how did the manufacturing sector was created in the first place?"[18]. "If we consult history", Hume says, we find

[17] Cf. Brewer (1998) and Marshall (2000) for a discussion of the differences between Hume and Adam Smith on path of economic development and the role of luxury. Davis (2003) links the differences between the two authors to their diverging economic psychologies.

[18] Cf. MacFarlane (2001) for a discussion about how Hume, Montesquieu, and Adam Smith present the way out of the agricultural "stage".

that foreign commerce often precedes the creation of the manufacturing service (E 263): foreign manufactures first entice farmers and landowners to increase their productivity; they discover in foreign commerce a myriad of desires they did not even know they had (E 264); the opportunity created by this newly found demand for luxury leads to the creation of the domestic manufacturing sector by imitation[19], which absorbs the increasing agricultural surplus.

Returning to the opening question of E-Co, in an agricultural society, because farmers will produce only enough to maintain their families, the sovereign has no surplus to tap from in a public exigence. He must raise the productivity of agriculture by force so that the free hands and the surplus output can be used in the war (E 262). Increasing productivity is a long process that requires the instillation of a habit of industrious work and cannot be done "on a sudden" (E 261)[20]. If the method of extracting a surplus in an agrarian society is violent "and in most cases impracticable" because the sovereign must force the agriculture workers to produce beyond what they would naturally do, in a manufacturing society farmers and workers will raise their productivity by themselves to purchase the luxuries made available by foreign commerce or domestic production (E 262). Once they are "accustomed to industry", they may continue to work hard even if the sovereign seizes a part of their surplus to maintain armies and fleets, which can be manned by the hands employed in the more superfluous manufactures that will not be produced in exceptional circumstances. "The more labour, therefore, is employed beyond the mere necessaries, the more powerful is any state", Hume concludes (E262).

However, the "violent method" employed in ancient agricultural societies seemed to work well and sustained the greatness of city-states like Sparta. In an argument similar to Montesquieu's, Hume acknowledges that

> 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. (255-256)

Ancient societies had very different circumstances – they were free, small states in almost perpetual war – which made "every citizen a soldier", "addicted to arms" (E 259). "Sovereigns must take mankind as they find them", Hume says, "and cannot pretend to introduce any violent change in their principles and ways of thinking" (E 260): in ancient societies, the sovereigns of Sparta and other city-states found themselves in circumstances where their "less natural" principles could maintain the greatness of the sovereign. Nevertheless, as Hume does not, as I mentioned above, fully embrace the "fit" argument from Montesquieu, he deems these principles uncommon and dependent on passions "difficult to support" (E 263) – if historical evidence was "less positive and circumstantial", we would

[19] Hume would later say in "Of the Jealousy of Trade", added to the *Political Discourses* in 1758, that every improvement made in both the agricultural and mechanical arts in England arose from imitation of foreigners (E 328).
[20] Berry (2006) discusses the habitual character of the changes discussed by Hume in E-Co and E-RA.

hardly believe a city-state like Sparta ever existed (E 259). The economic organization of commercial societies, whereby sovereigns can seize the part of the surplus without violence, is "the most natural course of things" (E 260) and if we are not supposed to "try a GREEK or ROMAN by the common law of ENGLAND" (EPM D18), we might as well not impose on eighteenth-century England maxims that worked in the ancient world only because of their peculiar circumstances. Furthermore, commercial societies, given their higher productivity, can afford even greater armies and fleets than the ancient maxims of policy could (E 273) without giving up the material affluence of their subjects. These properly economic effects of higher productivity can, by themselves, be read as a moral argument in favor of the practices of modern commercial societies: they promote greater material affluence without taking away the nation's capacity to defend itself and assert its greatness in the society of nations.

However, Hume does go beyond mere economic affluence in the *Political Discourses*. "Of Refinement in the Arts" (E-RA) and "Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations" (E-PAN) bring to the discussion the effects of commerce to social, political and moral practices. In E-RA, titled "Of Luxury" until 1760, Hume discusses the consequences of the luxury consumption (or refinement, as he prefers) that sparked the increase in economic productivity discussed in E-Co. A significant part of the interpretative literature[21] takes Hume's position in E-RA to be a "de-moralization" of luxury consumption, that is, an affirmation that luxury *per se* is not a moral phenomenon and that the relevant discussion in the essay are the economic consequences of luxury. Admittedly, Hume claims right at the beginning of the essay that "to imagine, that the gratifying of any sense […] is of itself a vice, can never into a head, that is not disordered by the frenzies of enthusiasm" (E 268), but as our reading of the EPM suggests, moral evaluation lies not on individual acts alone, but takes into account a broader study of the practices that "mold" the sentiments that prompt us to act and to judge the actions of others. Indeed, as Susato (2006, pp. 172-174) argues, Hume builds a causal chain showing that the arts of luxury create a new moral practice characterized by "industry, knowledge, and humanity", an "indissoluble chain […] peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the more luxurious ages" (E 271).

The causal chain of E-RA resumes the argument of E-Co: there, Hume affirms that commerce, by acquainting men with the "*pleasures* of luxury and the *profits* of commerce" "rouses [them] from their indolence" (E 264); in the second essay of the *Political Discourses*, he adds that luxury and commerce create a "quick march of spirits" and puts men in "perpetual occupation" (E 270). The application in "honest industry" that now makes man perpetually occupied gives the mind a new

[21]Berry (1994, ch. 6), Brewer (1998), Marshall (2000), and Cunningham (2005), for instance. Berry later argued (1997, pp. 140-143) that luxury *is* a moral phenomenon insofar as it is important in the overall moral evaluation of a commercial society.

"vigour" which affects not only the mechanical arts, but the liberal as well: where one finds skillful weavers and ship-carpenters one will often find great poets and philosophers because "the minds of men, being once roused from their lethargy, and put into a fermentation, turn themselves on all sides, and carry improvements into every art and science" (E 271). These people, enriched in both material and intellectual terms, will not live distant from each other; rather, they desire to live together, showing their wit and riches to their fellow citizens, rather than distant from each other as "ignorant and barbarious nations" live. Thus they "flock into cities", where they form clubs and societies and a create a new sociability that allows "both sexes to meet in an easy and sociable manner" and to refine men's tempers and behaviors,

> So that, beside the improvements which they receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but they must feel an encrease of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other's pleasure and entertainment. (E 271)

Thus, the introduction of manufactures by foreign commerce and the subsequent imitation by the domestic manufacturers create a habit of industrious work which diffuses itself through other spheres of human activity, it changes the various practices that make up a society or, as Hume says with a vocabulary reminiscent of Montesquieu, it affects the "spirit of the age" as a whole (E 271).

While Hume paints this process with rather colorful brushes in E-RA, it must be understood as the social and moral consequences of a change in economic practices[22]. For instance, in other essays of the *Political Discourses*, "men flock into cities" becomes a migratory movement to the large cities, especially to the capital, because merchants and manufactures find there trading advantages, because wealth is concentrated in cities and because the taxes collected in the country flow to the seat of government (E 354). In the *History of England* (HE IV:384), Hume further complements the analysis of E-Co affirming that the enclosures and improvements made by the proprietors of land – which began to study agriculture as a science – made them dismiss their redundant dependents, who could only move to the cities where they could find employment. That is, people do not simply decide they would like to have a new sociability founded on their desire to display their knowledge, good-breeding and equipage; rather, economic changes, by introducing people to luxuries they learn to be proud of and by making them more knowledgeable and polite, creates in them both the awareness of a new, humane sociability and the desire to engage in it. Indeed, the humanity and civility of commercial societies may be considered as the product of the constant interaction with other, unknown persons in the market environment (Boyd, 2008). Further, Sebastiani (2013, p. 51) argues that, since the satisfaction of material needs is better satisfied by the market in commercial societies,

[22] Stockton (1976, p. 313) argues that Hume's essays do not have a materialist connotation as the *History of England* has. My reading of the essays suggests that the materialism – or indeed the "pioneering historical materialism" Pocock (1981, p. 195) in the Scottish Enlightenment – of the HoE *is* present, in some measure at least, in the *Political Discourses*, despite Hume's often romanticized view of commercial society displayed in the latter.

there will be more time left for non-instrumental relationships, i.e., for intercourses like those one finds in the "clubs and societies" of Edinburgh or in the Parisian salons.

The very material causes of the "indissoluble chain" do not diminish the fact that they satisfy the "received notions" of happiness, which always comprise some measure of "action, pleasure, and indolence" (E 269). As Rotwein (2007[1955]) explores at length, the "quick march of spirits" created by industry and diffused to other spheres of life caters to our "desire for action", a universal feature of human nature: "there is no craving or demand of the human mind more constant and insatiable than that for exercise and employment", Hume says in "Of Interest" (E 300). Where there is no possibility of catering to this craving in a productive fashion, one "runs restless from one amusement to another", dissipating wealth rather than creating it. In a commercial society, in contrast, the desire for action finds itself fulfilled in lucrative activities (E 301) which, as we have seen, create consequences well beyond themselves. Besides action, pleasure is also better catered to in commercial societies: first, the very "perpetual occupation" is itself a source of pleasure; second, the refined pleasures of European courts are less excessive and destructive than its counterparts, such as the Tartars' "beastly gluttony" (E 271-272). Even indolence, the pernicious habit that kept agrarian societies in their state of low productivity, becomes an ineliminable part of happiness in commercial society: repose can only be agreeable "when it succeeds to labour, and recruits the spirits, exhausted by too much application and fatigue" (E 270).

If commercial societies, because of the kind of economic practice it relies on, create the space and the conditions for a happier and, more importantly, a more humane sociability, their predecessors' economic practices produce the opposite effect. 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 that essay is to support the view that the world was more populous in the modern than in the ancient era. The question of population, however, served as a proxy discussion for an overall judgement 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)[23].

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 us bound to obey certain rules if we desire to either find an employment or an employee,

[23] Cf. Tomaselli (1998) for the debate on population and their moral consequences within the "ancient-modern controversy".

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)[24]. 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 miniature version of Alexander, the Great, as Hume describes him in the EPM (7.6): every inferior 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 in the American colonies, we can learn that it "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).

Economic practices also affect the political practices of each society, which, in turn, bear on moral practice especially through the effects of peace and war and of the constitution of government. The extensive commerce and manufacture production of commercial societies causes two relevant changes in political practices: first, the "indissoluble chain" changes intercourse in the public sphere as much as it changes private relationships. Knowledge in the liberal arts, created by the expansion of commerce, "instructs men in the advantages of humane maxims above rigour and severity" and make them discover better laws and policies. Under these humane maxims "factions are then less inveterate, revolutions less tragical, authority less severe, and seditions less frequent. Even foreign wars abate of their cruelty" (E 274). Hume adds that these changes towards more humane political maxims can never happen "before human reason has refined itself by exercise, and by an application to the more vulgar arts, at least, of commerce and manufacture" (E 273). The habit of industrious work is itself further strengthened "by knowledge inseparable from ages of art and refinement"[25].

Commerce also rearranges the balance of power between the different ranks of persons within the nation, that is, it creates a new constitution of government that promotes security of property and political stability. Agrarian societies, notably the feudal societies that preceded modern commercial societies, are divided in two classes, "the proprietors of land, and their vassals and tenants", Hume affirms (E 277). The latter possess no wealth and are thus dependent on their lords, making them "fitted for slavery and subjection"; the former, "erect themselves into petty tyrants" and must either

[24] Taylor (2015, pp. 179-181) adds that there is an additional "epistemic cost" to the inhumanity of ancient slavery: based on the discussion of prejudice Hume makes in "Of the Standard of Taste", she argues that those accustomed to inhumanity learn to "essentialize" social differences (such as that between slave and master), thus neglecting the fact that they are historical products. Those accustomed to more humane maxims will learn that their difference towards people in different ranks or cultures should not suspend their need to respect certain rules.

[25] Sakamoto (2003, p. 94) highlights that even though industry is the first causal element of the indissoluble chain, it creates a virtuous cycle where industry is further promoted by the knowledge it creates.

submit to an absolute monarch that can keep the peace among the barons or fall into anarchy caused by their unending quarrels. Commercial societies bring a third element to the class division of society:

> 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 the 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 creates a check on absolute power because they are strong enough to resist the tyranny of an absolute monarch or aristocracy and yet have a lot to gain by submitting to a limited authority instead of trying to enforce their rule as the Gothic barons used to do in medieval England, for instance. They can only "covet equal laws, which may secure their property" (E 278) and thus they become, by force of their economic interests, the bastions of the social virtue of justice[26].

Again, E-PAN offers a stark account of ancient politics, setting the contrast between ancient and modern societies. As Hume mentioned in E-Co, ancient republics were almost always at war, whose maxims "were much more destructive": the smallness of the republics meant that "the whole state is frontier, and is all exposed to the inroads of the enemy" (E 404) and their battles were bloodier than modern battles based on fire-arms (E 405). In times of peace, ancient republics seemed to have some advantages over feudal and commercial societies, notably their equality of fortune and their "love of civil liberty" (E 406-407). However, even those advantages turned out for worse: the equality of fortune, chiefly attributed to the equal division of inheritance among brothers, "must, by a necessary consequence, contribute to unsettle and disturb the state" (E 413). Even though the rise of the middling rank of men contributed to reduce the gap between feudal landowners and serfs, Hume decried excessive (or perfect) equality: "perfect equality of possessions, destroying all subordination, weakens extremely the authority of magistracy" (EPM 3.26). In the ancient commonwealths, the equality among freemen made them feel entitled to "every power and privilege of the commonwealth" and the low census to take public office usually confirmed that feeling. Most ancient commonwealths thus swung between a "severe, jealous Aristocracy, ruling over discontented subjects; and a turbulent, factious, tyrannical Democracy" (E 416), each swing marked by the slaughter of the vanquished faction with "no form of process, no law, no trial, no pardon" (E 407):

> 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)

[26] The rise of merchants and manufactures in the political arena changes even the way of theorizing about politics: Cheney (2008) argues that Hume's discussion of commerce and its effects on the constitution of government blurs the classical distinction between monarchies and republics with the introduction of the "civilized monarchies" like Britain, which have their origins in the rise of commerce. Hume's discussion of commerce and its consequences to monarchies had an important role in French discussions about their own monarchy.

In those circumstances, it is not surprising that property was very precarious. Among the Athenian people, putting the rich to death only to forfeit their riches was such a common practice, that "it seems indeed requisite, either that [a citizen] should impoverish himself, or that the people would impoverish him, and perhaps kill him into the bargain" (E 411-412). The ancients were, Hume concludes, "extremely fond of liberty; but seem not to have understood it very well" (E 408). We may add, given Hume's analysis, that the ancients' misunderstanding of liberty was reinforced or perhaps caused by the lack of a class that had an interest in supporting security of property and moderation in government.

In conclusion, Hume makes an elaborate argument in the *Political Discourses* to show that the rise of commerce brought with it a more humane sociability and a more stable political constitution that preserved liberty and made property secure. Schabas (2014) argues that the EPM and the *Political Discourses* set the "honourable merchant" as the model of virtue, placing Hume, in this matter at least, in the mercantilist tradition of economic discourse. While this is certainly a correct argument, the present section sought to show that more than a model, the merchant (and the manufacturer, for that matter) is the individual embodiment of an economic practice that sustains new moral and political practices. These new practices did not come at the cost of cherished ideals such as the greatness of the state, which were supposed to be dependent on the ancient maxims of policy; quite the contrary, they were capable of attaining that goal while promoting material abundance and a better sociability. Indeed, Hume's praise of the achievements of eighteenth-century British commercial society in "Of the Protestant Succession" show how the changes that happened in the century before 1752 were changes in all parts of the "spirit of the age":

> Public liberty, with internal peace and order, has flourished almost without interruption: Trade and manufactures, and agriculture, have encreased: The arts, and sciences, and philosophy, have been cultivated. [...] 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)

5. CONCLUSION

Hume's *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* presents to the reader a moral philosophy that analyzes moral practices as historical products: it takes the varying moral catalogues, expressed in each society's particular moral practices, as given and tries to find what they share and what makes them different from each other. As I showed above, a moral practice implies a common sentiment that unifies their members' judgements, which Hume identifies as the sentiment of humanity. However, moral practices also bear the influence of the other practices that make the whole life of the community, such as the forms of economic and political organization, inclining the community to a specific catalogue and to a set of weights attributed to the different kinds of virtue.

The EPM, markedly in section 7, hints at the fact that some virtues may not be compatible with others: the sublime virtues praised in the ancient world seemed to encroach on the sentiment of humanity, the sentiment that a shared notion of morals imply, and on the virtue of justice, which is the basis of coexistence in society. However, the EPM does suggest that this incompatibility is caused by other practices, chiefly political and economic practices, of each society without giving much detail on *how* this happens.

This task is done in the *Political Discourses*. In the fourth section of this paper, I sought to show how Hume attributes to commerce the rise of a sociability based on humanity and the existence of stable and free political constitutions. Commercial societies promote both the sentiment that was the basis of a shared morality as discussed in the EPM and the virtue of justice that makes a peaceful coexistence possible. Moreover, commerce could promote this practices while at the same time ensuring material affluence and the nation's capacity to assert its power in the society of nations. Therefore, in these two works, Hume builds a comprehensive analysis of the interactions between economic, political, and moral phenomena; further, this analysis takes a historical form, studying how these phenomena occurred through time and space and how they relate to each other. As such, the works discussed here, when read together, take a perspective similar to Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Lois*, that is, they seek to study the different practices and institutions of each historical society as part of a whole, which Hume usually names the "manners" of a society, once using the term "spirit of the age" that resembles Montesquieu's "general spirit".

Sure, we should be careful not to attribute an excessive resemblance between the two thinkers: Hume did not fully embrace the historicized view that the best government is that which fits its people's character; for him, some forms of economic and political organization are more natural than others and morality implies some specific sentiments which can have their development fostered or hindered by particular political and economic practices and institutions[27]. But even though Hume did not accept ancient maxims on an equal footing with modern commercial maxims, he did acknowledge that they worked in their own time, albeit due to the ancients' unlikely circumstances. Even in moral terms, Hume still regarded courage and the other sublime virtues as virtues, that is, useful or agreeable qualities; he only considered it dangerous to have those virtues promoted to the top of the catalogue.

Nevertheless, the common choice Hume and Montesquieu took for a comprehensive analysis is clear. Moreover, this choice seems to have been an adequate answer to the puzzle Hume attributed to the naturalist and to the politician in his travels in Europe: we must conjugate moral, political, and economic studies, all in a historical perspective, to understand why Styria and Tyrol were so different.

[27] I have not discussed this topic here, but Hume further disagrees with Montesquieu in the EPM concerning the latter's "rational" foundation of the study of laws. While the shared the call for contextual analysis of morals, Hume's relied on sentiments rather than on reason alone (EPM 3.34, n.12).

Finally, as I have suggested here, this comprehensive method of study of human society is not present (or at least not fully present) in the works prior to the EPM and the *Political Discourses*. Therefore, it remains as an open question to show how these works relate to the two books discussed here. However, as I argued in the introduction, it is better to remain with an open question about the evolution of Hume's approach to the study of society than to assume from the start that his approach was set in stone in the introduction of the *Treatise*.

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