COMMERCIAL SOCIETY, LUXURY, AND VIRTUE IN DAVID HUME'S *POLITICAL DISCOURSES*

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ABSTRACT

This article engages a scholarly literature dealing with David Hume's defense of luxury. Most of that literature has argued that Hume attempted to *de-moralise* the discussion, i. e., to abandon the moral aspects and to focus on the economic and political implications of luxury. I argue that, even though Hume did present economic and political arguments in favor of luxury both in the *Political Discourses* and in *The History of England* (as I show in the first section), this does not comprise the whole of the argument. Hume's final statement on luxury, the essay "Of Refinement in the Arts", beyond the economic and political arguments, was an attempt to replace the classical mora meaning of luxury with a new morality, adequate to commercial society. I present arguments from the *Treatise of Human Nature* to show that this morality had the passion of pride as its foundations and that it evolved together with commercial society (or together with the development of justice). This commercial morality involved the transformation of individuals toward what Hume called the "indissoluble chain" of industry, knowledge, and humanity. The three virtues were the main characteristic of both the individual and commercial society as a whole.

Keywords: David Hume, luxury, commercial society, pride, virtue.

INTRODUCTION

David Hume is most known in contemporary scholarship for his work on philosophical subjects. However, his *A Treatise on Human Nature* and the two attempts to "recast anew" that work, the *Enquires on Human Understanding* and the *Enquiry on the Principles of Morals*, failed to draw the attention he expected during his own lifetime. What made him a well-known writer in Eighteenth Century were his writings in the more popular form of essays, the *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, and his extensive *History of England* (Wennerlind and Shabas, 2008, p. 1-2). The *Political Discourses*, first published in 1752 and which dealt mostly with issues in

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political economy, influenced prominent political economists such as Turgot and Adam Smith and were readily translated into French (Shovlin, 2008, p. 203). Despite the success of these works, there has been a lack of scholarly works that try to understand how Hume's later writings integrate with his earlier philosophical writings. In this paper I intend to engage with a recent literature that has begun to fill the gap. Specifically, I address Hume's position on the Luxury debates of the eighteenth century.

Luxury has been a topic of debate since ancient times. Greek and Roman philosophers already related the consumption of luxury to the decline of empires. The debate became more intense during the Modern Age, when thinkers had to deal with a unprecedented expansion of commerce and access to new markets and products. During the seventeenth and eighteenth Century, the debate was polarized in two positions. In Hume's terms (E-RA, 269[2]), there were the men of "severe morals", drawing on the classical tradition of condemning luxury, and the "libertines", who sought to defend luxury and its consequences.

The defense of luxury in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was described by Christopher Berry (1994, ch. 5) as an attempt to "de-moralise" luxury, *i. e.*, to remove the heavy load of morality that had been put on the concept and to focus on its political and economic consequences. Hume's position on luxury, which had its final statement in the essay "Of Refinement in the Arts" (first titled "Of Luxury"), is usually interpreted as another effort to de-moralise luxury[3].

My objective here is to argue that Hume's position can be understood as an attempt of de-moralization *only* if by de-moralisation we mean the elimination of the *classical* moral meaning of luxury[4]. Hume did not treat luxury as a purely economic matter. What I will try to show below is that Hume's treatment of luxury is aimed at replacing the classical paradigm with a new morality focused on what Charles Taylor (1989, p. 211) called the "ordinary life" and which is better suited to the rise of commercial society. Indeed, Hume's position could be read as a response to a question

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[2] I will adopt some abbreviations in this article. E-Co and E-RA stand for the first two essays in the Political Discourses ("Of Commerce" and "Of Refinement in the Arts") and E-RPA stands for the essay "Of the Rise and Progress in the Arts and Sciences" (all of these are contained in Hume, 1985). HE refers to the *History Of England* (1983), followed by volume and page number. T refers to the *Treatise on Human Nature* (2007), followed by book, part, section, paragraph, and page.

[3] Cf. Berry (1994, chapters 5 and 6) and Cunningham (2005, p. 231).

[4] While Cunningham (2005, p. 231, fn. 4) affirmed explicitly that luxury is "essentially an economic position" to Hume, Christopher Berry probably took "de-moralisation" in the same sense as I take here. This seems to be true specially if we consider his understanding of the concept of "commercial society" in the Scottish Enlightenment (for example, in *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ch. 6). Most of the other papers focusing on luxury dealt only with the political and economic consequences of luxury within Hume's account (cf. Arthmar (2013), Brewer (1998) and Marshall (2000)). I take those papers to have implicitly accepted the de-moralisation interpretation.

Taylor posed on the beginning of his analysis of the importance of ordinary life within modern thinking:

> The transition I have been talking is easy to identify negatively, in terms of the ethics it (partly) displaced. But for my purposes here, it is important to understand the positive new valuation it put on ordinary life. […] Both [the ethics of honour and of contemplation] could offer a positive account of what made their favoured version of the good life really a higher form of existence for man. What was the corresponding account for the various ethics of ordinary life? (TAYLOR, 1989, p. 215)

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, the article is divided in two parts. In the first part I try to show the importance of luxury in Hume's account of the origins and the flourishing of commercial society. Luxury, as it will be seen, played a key role on the decline of feudal nobility and on the expansion of commerce; and these two events were largely responsible for the freedom the people of England enjoyed at Hume's time. In the second part, I try to show that, beyond the beneficial effects caused of greater freedom and expansion of commerce, there is within Hume's position on luxury a statement of what the "higher form of existence" is in a commercial society. This "higher form of existence" evolved together with commercial society and meant a fundamental transformation of the individual.

This article dwells mostly in the first two essays of the *Political Discourses* ("Of Commerce" and "Of Refinement in the Arts"), with occasional support from other essays. I mention some passages of the *Treatise* and the *History of England*; this is not, however, a full treatment of the topic in these works. It is also important to notice that my objective commits me to a reading of Hume as a virtue ethicist, and even though this is not an uncontroversial issue[5], I do not intend to take on it here.

LUXURY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMERCIAL SOCIETY

If we want to understand the importance of luxury in Hume's view of the origins of commercial society, we need first to take on some of his own methodological considerations on the topic. In the essay "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences", first published in 1742, Hume emphasized that "nothing requires greater nicety, in our enquiries concerning human affairs, than to distinguish what is owing to *chance*, and what proceeds from *causes*" (E-RPA, 111). Proper and known causes are usually found on "what arises from a great number" of people because even though some particular individuals may not be subject to the prevailing passions and inclinations,

[5] Cf. Swanton (2007) for a defense of reading Hume as a virtue ethicist.

the multitude "will certainly be seized by the common affection, and be governed by it in all their actions" (p. 112). Also, true causes arise in the multitude because the they are "of a grosser and more stubborn nature, less subject to accidents" (p. 112). These considerations show why it is easier to find genuine causes within the history of "the progress of commerce". Avarice, the passion underlying commerce, "is an universal passion, which operates at all times, in all places, and upon all persons" (p. 113).

These methodological considerations were recalled in the first essay of the *Political Discourses*, "Of Commerce". Hume endorsed the previous reasoning, saying that "[w]hen a man deliberates concerning his conduct in any *particular* affair […] he never ought to draw his arguments too fine", but "when we reason upon *general* subjects, one may justly affirm, that our speculations can scarcely ever be too fine" (E-Co, 254). Further, he added that "it is the chief business of philosophers to regard the general course of things. I may add, that it is also the chief business of politicians" (p. 254).

Thus, if we are trying to understand Hume's view of the rise of commercial society, we must not look for its explanations in the particular actions of great kings and legislators, but in the general and "more stubborn" passions of men[6]. The "chief cause of the secret revolutions of government" that England experienced were not the laws of, say, Henry VII., but "the change of manners" (HE, IV:385). This change of manners was brought about by the expansion of commerce.

In "Of Commerce", Hume presented his thesis that "[t]he greatness of the 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" (E-Co, 255). As societies developed and population surpassed the number of people needed to produce the more necessary goods, society would need to choose where to employ the superfluous hands that were not employed in the production of necessary goods. The argument Hume was denying held that the greatness of the state depended on the choice of where to employ those extra hands. "If these superfluous hands apply themselves to the finer arts, which are commonly denominated the arts of *luxury*", said Hume, "they would add to the happiness of the state" (p. 256). But there could be an alternative employment to these hands. The sovereign could claim them to support armies or fleets. "Here therefore seems to be a kind of opposition between the greatness of the state and the happiness of the subject", he concluded (p. 257).

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[6] Cf. Berry (1997, ch. 2). Scottish social theorists, Hume included, were critics of an accounts of human socialization and history based on individualism and rationalism. Berry concludes his chapter on Scottish accounts of human socialization saying that "[i]ndividuals we certainly are and rational we certainly are but an individualistic rationalism is inadequate as a *social* theory" (p. 48).

This reasoning was mostly based on the history of Sparta, where the greatness of the state "was owing entirely to the want of commerce and luxury" (p. 257). In Sparta, the production of necessary goods was done by the Helotes, and the Spartans themselves were involved in the political activities and in the military. But Sparta was more of an exception than the rule. "Sovereigns", Hume argued, "must take mankind as they find them, and cannot pretend to introduce any violent change in their principles and ways of thinking" (p. 260). Given the violence of the laws with which Sparta was governed, if "the testimony of history [were] less positive and circumstantial, such a government would appear a mere philosophical whim or fiction, and impossible ever to be reduced to practice" (p. 259). In the "most natural course of things", that is, in the course that best complies with "the common bent of mankind", "industry and arts and trade encrease the power of the sovereign as well as the happiness of the subjects" (p. 260). And only in a commercial society, as his thesis quoted above says, the happiness of the subjects could be completely reconciled with the greatness of the state. This occurs because of the aforementioned "change in manners".

In the "rude" state of society, that is, the state that preceded commercial society, men had little security of their possessions and thus, had little interest in increasing their riches. Talking about the Saxon era in Great Britain, Hume said that "there were no middle rank of men, that could gradually mix with their superiors, and insensibly procure to themselves honour and distinction" (HE, I:169). This happened because

> [i]f by any extraordinary accident, a mean person acquired riches, a circumstance so singular made him to be known and remarked; he became the object of envy, as well as of indignation, to all the nobles; he would have great difficulty to defend what he had acquired; and he would find it impossible to protect himself from oppression, except by courting the patronage of some great chieftain, and paying a large price for his safety. (HE, I:169)

Such a state of affairs wasn't the most fertile soil for the seeds of industry and commerce. Without the rules of justice and respect for private property, commerce could not thrive and society would remain in the state of barbarity[7]. In "Of commerce" Hume offered a picture of a society in which industry was not praised and the rules of justice were not observed:

> Where manufactures and mechanic arts are not cultivated, the bulk of the people must apply themselves to agriculture; and if their skill and industry encrease, there must arise a great superfluity from their

[7] Carl Wennerlind (2002) argued that Hume's theory of justice, a pillar of his moral philosophy in the *Treatise on Human Nature*, is better understood as not only a theory of justice alone, but as a theory of commercial modernization: "it is reasonable to conclude that Hume was in fact [in his theory of justice] theorizing the process whereby a unified modern commercial society emerged from the scattered remnants of various medieval social forms" (p. 248)

> labour beyond what suffices to maintain them. They have no temptation, therefore, to encrease their skill and industry*;* since they cannot exchange to their pleasure or vanity. A habit of indolence naturally 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-Co, 260-261)

If indolence prevails, then little could be expected from these labourers when the sovereign need - "[t]he labourers cannot encrease their skill and industry on a sudden" (p. 261). The change in manners promoted through commerce is first advanced by Hume's recalling that "everything in the world is purchased by labour; and our passions are the only causes of labour" (p. 261). Obliging "the labourer to toil, in order to raise from the land more than what subsists himself and family" to maintain the affairs of the state "is a violent method", but "[f]urnish him with manufactures and commodities, and he will do it himself" (p. 262). Thus

> when commerce introduces luxury and refinement, 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 covet. (E-Co, 261)

Luxury is then the spark required to make men leave their habit of indolence and to engage in new habits of "industry and attention". This luxury, "if we consult history" (p. 263), is usually introduced via foreign trade, which allows home manufacturers to copy foreign manufactures and introduce them to the local production. Hume went further on the description of the psychological effects of luxury:

> 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. And this perhaps is the chief advantage which arises from a commerce with strangers. It rouses men from their indolence; and presenting the gayer and more opulent part of the nation with objects of luxury, which they never before dreamed of, raises in them a desire of a more splendid way of life than what their ancestors enjoyed. (E-Co, 264)

Here is the first facet of the new customs and manners. The private life of work and consumption changes. Even though human nature is always the same, commercial society allows a fuller expression of that nature in society (or of the "social nature of human beings")[8]. This change in manners and customs, by making people more industrious, reconciled the greatness of the state and the happiness of the public. The increased consumption and the "more splendid way of life"

[8] Cf. Cohen (2000) for a discussion of the distinction between the "principles of human nature" and what she has called "the social nature of human beings".

that luxury fostered through industry were "a kind of *storehouse* of labour, which, in the exigencies of state, may be turned to the public service" (E-RA, 272). And that storehouse of labour allowed sovereigns to draw resources from them and maintain much greater armies: Hume said that Charles VIII of France had enormous difficulties maintaining a army of twenty thousand men, while Louis XIV could easily keep four hundred thousand men in a much longer campaign thanks to the increased industry of the French kingdom.

But beyond this change in manners, luxury also set a huge change in the political structure of feudal society, a change illustrated in the *History of England*. "In rude and unpolished nations, where the arts are neglected, all labour is bestowed on the cultivation of the ground", Hume said, "an the whole society is divided into two classes, proprietors of land, and their vassals or tenants" (E-RA, 277). Without the refinements in the arts, the proprietors had little to spend his income on, and "erect themselves into petty tyrants; and must either submit to an absolute master […] or [they will] throw the whole society into such confusion, as is perhaps worse than the most despotic government" (p. 277). This typical situation of feudal society was reverted only with the introduction of luxury. Hume explained the process in his *History of England* as follows:

> The habits of luxury dissipated the immense fortunes of the ancient barons; and as the new methods of expence gave subsistance 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; the middle rank of men began to be rich and powerful; the prince, who, in effect, was the same with the law, was implicitly obeyed; and though the farther progress of the same causes begat a new plan of liberty, founded on the privileges of the commons, yet in the interval between the fall of the nobles and the rise of this order, the sovereign took advantage of the present situation, and assumed an authority almost absolute. (HE, IV:384)[9]

Thus luxury eroded the power of the feudal barons, opening a place for "the middle rank of men", who, as Hume mentioned elsewhere, "are the best and firmest basis of public liberty" (E-RA, 277). These men, Hume affirmed, "submit not to slavery, like the peasants, from poverty and meanness of

[9] See Rogério Arthmar (2013, p. 8) for other excerpts in the *History of England* that contain the same thesis quoted above.

spirit; and having no hopes of tyrannizing over others, like the barons, they are not tempted, for the sake of that gratification, to submit to the tyranny of their sovereign" (p. 277-278).

I succinctly presented two aspects of the development of commercial society. They should not be taken apart from each other. Both are part of what Carl Wennerlind (2002) called the "evolutionary" process of modernization that involved the development of commerce and the decline of feudal political forms. Commerce fostered the observance of the rules of justice through the decline of the power of the feudal barons and the rules of justice were themselves necessary to allow the flourishing of commerce. And luxury was indispensable to spark the whole process.

LUXURY AND VIRTUE

Christopher Berry (2006), commenting on the methodological considerations I mentioned on the beginning of the last section[10], remarked that "Hume's differentiation between the general and the particular (read: individual) does not impart to the former any ontological status" (p. 297-298). This means that even though Hume was searching for *general* causes, the agent of social change is still the individual. We must find, therefore, a change in the individual akin to the change observed in society as a whole: commercial society both enabled and required a "commercial man", that is, a "higher form of existence" appropriate to that form of sociality.

In the essay "Of the Refinement in the Arts", Hume aimed at two goals: to prove "*first*, that the ages of refinement are both the happiest and most virtuous; *secondly*, that wherever luxury ceases to be innocent, it also ceases to be beneficial" (E-RA, 269). In order to prove his first point, he said "we need but consider the effects of refinement both on *private* and on *public* life" (p 269). In this section, I'll try to expound how the "effects of refinement" (or luxury) involve a transformation of customs and habits and how this transformation is rooted in Hume's earlier moral psychology. The effects of refinement created that "higher form of existence" that is happier, more virtuous, and also proud of being so.

Before we take on the proper effects of luxury, I would like to take notice of two important aspects of the relation individuals establish with the objects of luxury. First, Hume affirmed in the *Treatise* that the relation of property is the best at producing pride: "[b]ut the relation, which is esteem'd the closest, and which of all others produces most commonly the passion of pride, is that of property" (T 2.1.10.1, 202). Pride and humility have two properties, "*viz.*, their object which is

[10] Berry's (2006) analysis of causality in Hume's social theory is, obviously, much more qualified than the brief mention I made here. I refer the reader to his paper, which has been of great help to me.

self, and their sensation, which is either pleasant or painful" (T 2.1.5.5, 188). The sensation can be derived from a quality of the subject of pride (e. g., the beauty or utility of an external object or the virtue of a person) and the subject of pride must be related to self. In the case of external objects, the relation of property makes us feel pride of something we possess. By a relation of property, Hume meant "*such a relation betwixt a person and an object as permits him, but forbids any other, the free use and possession of it, without violating the laws of justice and moral equity*" (T. 2.1.10.1, 202, italics from the original).

The second aspect of our relation to luxury is the importance of socialization throughout the whole process. Even though pride could be felt in solitude, that is not how we desire to feel it. Hume stated the social nature of our passions when he discussed why we esteem the rich and powerful people:

> In all creatures, that prey not upon others, and are not agitated with violent passions, there appears a remarkable desire of company, which associates them together, without any advantages they can ever propose to reap from their union. This is still more conspicuous in man, as being the creature of the universe, who has the most ardent desire of society. A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer. Every pleasure languishes when enjoy'd apart from company, and every pain becomes more cruel and intolerable. Whatever other passions we may be actuated by; pride, ambition, avarice, curiosity, revenge or lust; the soul or animating principle of them all is sympathy; nor wou'd they have any force, were we to abstract entirely from the thoughts and sentiments of others. Le the sun rise and set at his command: The sea and rivers roll as he pleases, and the earth furnish spontaneously whatever may be useful or agreeable to him: He will still be miserable, till you give some one person at least, with whom he may share his happiness, and whose esteem and friendship he may enjoy. (T. 2.2.5.15, 234-5)

If we possessed everything "useful or agreeable", we could formally feel pride, since the double relation of impressions and ideas would be satisfied: there would be the subject of pride, which must be agreeable, and it would be related to self through the relation of property. But there would be missing someone to share our pride with, to sympathize with us[11].

How do these two aspects of pride relate to the transformation of the individual that comes together with commercial society? The transformation is what Lorraine Besser-Jones (2006) called a *redirection of pride* or, as I would add, a redirection of pride towards the proper virtues and manners of commercial society. The comprehension of this transformation requires two steps.

The first step is to understand that pride of property requires that property rules are already established. Hume noted right before exploring the relation of property (quoted above in italics) that

[11] In the section "of our esteem for the rich and powerful" (T 2.2.5) Hume indeed concluded that we esteem the rich mostly because we sympathize with the satisfaction they obtain from their possessions, that is, possessions they are proud of.

"[t]his relation 'twill be impossible for me fully to explain before I come to treat of justice and the other moral virtues" (T 2.1.10.1, 202). Besser-Jones said that

> The conventions of justice, make it more likely that pride in its most common forms [pride of property] will be developed and properly grounded. The conventions of justice also make possible new forms of pride; namely, the pride in one's character that is distinctive of, and possible only for, the just person. (Besser-Jones, 2006, p. 273)

Before justice has been properly established, we cannot take the uniqueness of our relation to some external object as certain and, therefore, we will likely not feel proud of it. In order to feel proud of some object, I must be the only person able to use that object.

But justice also promotes a deeper transformation of individuals. The rules of justice are derived, according to Hume, from the self-interest of individuals. "In man alone this unnatural conjunction of infirmity and of necessity, may be observ'd in its greatest perfection" (T 3.2.2.2, 312), Hume said, and "'[t]is by society alone he is able to supply his defects". But at the same time man is in need of society, he has only limited benevolence towards others (towards family and close friends). When men become acquainted with the advantages of society, they seek a remedy to their limited benevolence, which

> can be done after no other manner, than by a convention enter'd into by all the members of the society to bestow stability on the possession of those external goods, and leave every one in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry. (T 3.2.2.9, 314)

More than merely accepting our obligation to the rules of justice, we come to attribute the idea of virtue to justice and of vice to injustice (T. 3.2.2). But that, as Besser-Jones (2006, p. 260) pointed, seems contrary to Hume's theory of agency. For, according to it, "DESIRE arises from good consider'd simply, and AVERSION is deriv'd from evil. The WILL exerts itself, when either the good or the absence of the evil may be attain'd by any action of the mind or body" (T 2.3.9.7, 281). However, the acts of justice will not always be directly conducive to greater good or lesser evil, and we would not expect people to follow the rules of justice as inflexibly as Hume required. What, then could motivate just behavior or make us attribute virtue to it? Besser-Jones (2006) argued that we desire to have a just disposition because we desire the consequences of having a just disposition:

> The just person commits herself to the rules of justice, and while on a case by case basis her actions might be best described as following from her commitment to rules of justice, the will underlying this *pattern* of actions aims at a concrete end-state of desire satisfaction and as such is consistent with Hume's theory of the will. (Besser-Jones, 2006, p. 262)

Because of our desire to engage on social relationships, that is, because of the social character of our passions, we have a concern for our character (T 3.2.5.11, 335). Even though the rules of justice (or the obligation to keep promises, which is the proper topic of T 3.2.5.11) may not accomplish good in every instance, having a reputation for the observance of the rules of justice is a desired state. The observance of one's own character goes further: people not only take pride in possessing the virtue of justice, but they also have an interest in other virtues. The establishment of justice is important in creating this environment for people to pursue their social natures:

> In so doing, the conventions of justice not only enable the full production of the most common sources of pride - material possessions; they also create conditions for new forms of pride to be produced, and so for pride to take on a new direction. The result is the development of a new convention-dependent redirection of pride, a pride that extends beyond one's material possessions to one's virtue and character. This redirected pride is marked by a concern for reputation and has the development of a just disposition as its object. (Besser-Jones, 2006, p. 271)

But the establishment of justice does not occur in a vacuum; and this is the second step we need to take before we consider the role of luxury in the transformation of the individual. Carl Wennerlind (2002, p. 248) suggested that we can interpret Hume's theory of justice as an account of a specific historical process: the development of commercial society. Book 3 of the *Treatise*, he argued, "discusses the establishment of justice in an explicitly commercial context", thus, "it is possible to read it as an elaboration on the necessary conditions for the development of commercial society" (p. 249). He went further and argued that

> a close reading of the *Treatise* reveals that Hume specified (i) that the conventions are generated in an evolutionary process, (ii) wherein the middling sorts play the primary constitutive role, and (iii) a system of laws is required to ensure the compliance from those who do not voluntarily conform to the new social order. (Wennerlind, 2002, p. 253)

The plausibility of that approach is reinforced by a comparative reading of the *Treatise* and the *History of England*[12]: "the dynamics of Hume's political philosophy closely resembles that of the actual process of commercial modernization described in the *History*, to the extent that it seems beyond doubt that his political philosophy was developed to illustrate this historical moment" (p. 253-254).

[12] I have shown the "change in manners" of the *History* above. For the comparative analysis, I refer the reader to Wennerlind's paper.

We have thus returned to our point of departure, and that allows us to fully take on the transformation refinement performed on individuals. But let us first recall all we have got. I first presented how luxury operated in society in general, the "aggregate" effect, if we can call it that way. This required a transformation of the individual. The transformation in question involves a redirection of pride towards the proper virtues of commercial society, which, in their turn, depended on the establishment of justice, which is a historical transformation, not an abstract concept. The transformation of the individual is then part of an evolutionary process whose parts could not occur separately. What remains is to "give content to this structure", as Besser-Jones (2006, p. 262) put it. What is a virtuous life proper to commercial society? What can the individual be proud of?

In the essay "The Sceptic" Hume affirmed that a virtuous disposition of mind is

> that which leads to action and employment, renders us sensible to the social passions, steels the heart against the assaults of fortune, reduces the affections to a just moderation, makes our own thoughts an entertainment to us, and inclines us rather to the pleasures of society and conversation, than to those of the senses. (Hume, 1985, 168)

This virtuous disposition is the happiest because it does not depend on the presence of external gratification: a "life of pleasure cannot support itself so long as one of business", and "[t]he amusements, which are the most durable, have all a mixture of application and attention in them; such as gaming and hunting. And in general, business and action fill up all the great vacancies of human life" (p. 167).

Hume reaffirmed this conception of a virtuous life again in a oft quoted passage from "Of Refinement in the Arts". He said that human happiness[13]

> according to the most received notions, seems to consist in three ingredients; action, pleasure, and indolence: And though these ingredients ought to be mixed in different proportions, according to the particular disposition of the person; yet no one ingredient can be entirely wanting, without destroying, in some measure, the relish of the whole composition. Indolence or repose, indeed, seems not of itself to contribute much to our enjoyment; but like sleep, is requisite as an indulgence to the weakness of human nature, which cannot support an uninterrupted course of business or pleasure. That quick march of the spirits, which takes man from himself, and chiefly gives satisfaction, does in the end exhaust, and requires some intervals of repose, which, though agreeable for a moment, yet, if prolonged, beget a languor and lethargy, that destroys all enjoyment. Education, custom, and example, have a mighty influence in turning the mind to any of these pursuits; and it must be owned, that, where they promote a relish for action and pleasure, they are so far favourable to human happiness. In times when industry and the arts flourish, men

[13] It is important to note that the "virtuous disposition of mind" is also the happiest: in "The Sceptic" Hume began the quote above saying: "according to this short and imperfect sketch of human life, the happiest disposition of mind is the *virtuous*; or, in other words, that which leads…" (Hume, 1985, p. 1968)

> 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 power 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. Banish those arts from society, you deprive men both of action and of pleasure; and leaving nothing but indolence in their place, you even destroy the relish of indolence, which is never agreeable, but when it succeeds labour, and recruits the spirits, exhausted by too much application and fatigue. (E-RA, 269-270)

Eugene Rotwein (1953) interpreted the "economic" side of this desire for action making a parallel to curiosity or the pursuit of knowledge, issues Hume dealt with in the last section of Book II of the *Treatise*, "Of Curiosity or the love of truth". Hume set out two circumstances that are required for our obtaining satisfaction from the discovery of truth. The first circumstance is that the discovery requires the employment of genius: "[w]hat is easy and obvious is never valu'd; and even what is *in itself* difficult, if we come to the knowledge of it without difficulty, and without any stretch of thought or judgement, is but little regarded" (T 2.3.10.3, 287). Second, "[t]he truth we discover must also be of some importance" (T 2.3.10.4, 287). But this raises an apparent paradox, because experience tells us that most philosophers seem to have little concern for consequences of their discoveries to public interest. Hume resolved this paradox arguing that "[i]f the importance of the truth be requisite to compleat the pleasure, 'tis not on account of any considerable addition, which itself brings to our enjoyment, but only because 'tis in some measure, requisite to fix our attention" (T 2.3.10.6, 288). Hume compared the pursuit of truth with hunting:

> 'Tis evident, that the pleasure of hunting consists in the action of the mind and body; the motion, the attention, the difficulty, and the uncertainty. 'Tis evident likewise, that these actions must be attended with an idea of utility, in order to their having any effect upon us. A man of the greatest fortune, and the farthest remov'd from avarice, tho' he takes a pleasure in hunting after partridges and pheasants, feels no satisfaction in shooting crows and magpies; and that because he considers the first as fit for the table, and the other as entirely useless. Here 'tis certain, that the utility or importance of itself causes no real passion, but is only requisite to support the imagination; and the same person, who over-looks a ten times greater profit in any other subject, is pleas'd to bring home half a dozen woodcocks or plovers, after having employ'd several hours in hunting after them. (T 2.3.10.8, 288)

In order to complete the parallel, Rotwein showed how Hume treated economic activity in a similar way in the essay "Of interest":

> 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 a 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 forgers the ruin which must follow him from

> his immoderate expences. Give him a more harmless way of employing his mind or body, and feels no longer that insatiable thirst after pleasure. (Hume, 1985b, 300-301)

Economic activity does have its utility in the pleasures wealth can buy, but, in the end, what matters most is the continual occupation of mind and body, so that we can satisfy what we crave most - our desire for action.

Yet, this disposition of mind goes further than the desire for action essential to an industrious life. There are two other aspects of that transformation. First, when people are industrious, they are usually more knowledgeable: "[t]he same age, which produces great philosophers and politicians, renowned generals and poets, usually abounds with skilful weavers, and ship-carpenters" (E-RA, 270). This happens 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-RA, 271).

Second, the virtuous disposition makes people more humane. The whole of their sociability changes into a more polished manner:

> The more these refined arts advance, the more sociable men become: nor is it possible, that, when enriched with science, and possessed of a fund of conversation, they should be contented to remain in solitude, or live with their fellow-citizens in that distant manner, which is peculiar to ignorant and barbarious nations. They 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-RA, 271)

From this change in human sociability promoted by refinement, it is to expect that people become more humane: "[s]o 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-RA, 271).

Thus we have what Hume called an indissoluble chain: "*industry*, *knowledge*, and *humanity*, are linked together by an indissoluble chain, and are found, from experience as well as reason, to be peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the more luxurious ages" (E-RA, 271). Thus, the virtues of what I called "the commercial man" are summed in the three virtues of industry, knowledge, and humanity; and all of the three are both needed and praised in a commercial society. Those virtues satisfy what Christine Swanton (2007, p. 102) suggested are the two criteria of virtue in Hume's moral theory: they i) tend to the happiness of mankind; and, more

importantly, ii) they are agreeable to our moral sense, as the account of the sociability and the capacity of feeling pride of those virtues show (this is especially clear on the quote above - E-RA, 271).

Finally, there is one consequence of the indissoluble chain that needs to be noted: it also promotes changes in politics. "[I]ndustry, knowledge, and humanity, are not advantageous in private life alone: They diffuse their beneficial influence on the *public*" (E-RA, 272):

> 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 manufactures. Can we expect that a government will be well modeled by a people, who know not how to make a spinning-wheel, or to employ a loom to advantage?

I have already explored how luxury contributed to the decline of the feudal barons in the first section. Here, however, there is a focus on the individual: both politics and war become more moderate with refinement because people are more humane. Individuals choose "humane maxims above rigour and severity, which drive subjects into rebellion, and make the return to submission impracticable, by cutting all hopes of pardon" (E-RA, 273-274). "When the tempers of men are softened as well as their knowledge improved", said Hume,

> this humanity appears still more conspicuous, and is the chief characteristic which distinguishes a civilized age from times of barbarity and ignorance. Factions are then less inveterate, revolutions less tragical, authority less severe, and seditions less frequent. Even foreign wars abate 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-RA, 274).

Hume did not worry that the softened tempers promoted by refinement would make men effeminate and incapable of defending the country, a typical concern of other moralists of his time[14]. "Nor need we fear", he said, "that men, by losing their ferocity will lose their martial spirit, or become less undaunted and vigorous in defence of their country or their liberty":

> The arts have no such effect in enervating either the mind or body. On the contrary, industry, their inseparable attendant, adds new force to both. And if anger, which is said to be the whetstone of courage, loses somewhat of its asperity, by politeness and refinement; a sense of honour, which is a stronger, more constant, and more governable principle, acquires fresh vigour by that elevation of genius which arises from knowledge and a good education. (E-RA, 274)

[14] Cf. Berry (1997, pp. 140-143).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I argued that luxury (or refinement), performed an important role in the development of commercial society, according to Hume's account. The development of commercial society was an evolutionary process and luxury played a twofold role in that process. First, luxury was important in creating the political and economic conditions to commercial society. As the first section argued, luxury was fundamental to the expansion of the domestic economy and the greatness of the state. It was also the key factor in the creation of "the middle rank of men", whom Hume called "the best and firmest basis of public liberty", and in the erosion of the power of feudal barons.

The second role of luxury was a transformation of the individual into the "commercial man". In order to understand that transformation, I drew attention to two interpretations of Hume's moral philosophy. First, there was Lorraine Besser-Jones' (2006) account that individuals are most likely to feel proper pride only after the establishment of justice and that proper pride is a fundamentally social passion. Justice also redirects the pride of individuals towards their virtues. Second, there was Carl Wennerlind's (2002) thesis that Hume's account of Justice is best interpreted as an account of the development of commercial society, which, as the first section of the article argued, depended on luxury. Thus, combining this two theses, I argued that the redirection of pride is a redirection towards the virtues proper to a commercial society, virtues promoted by luxury, or the refinement of society. Those virtues are summed up in Hume's "indissoluble chain" of "industry, knowledge, and humanity", which compose together a higher form of existence proper to the refined ages: refinement makes individuals more industrious by making them acquainted with the pleasures of luxury; it makes them more knowledgeable because, once the mind is awoken, it turns itself into all sides and carry improvements in all arts and sciences; and finally, it makes them more humane because refinement creates a whole new sociability in which they can converse and exchange their knowledge and passions (pride included) with other people.

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