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**Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Politics**  
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**Dissertation**



**David Hume's Politics: a distinct reconciliation between  
Liberalism and Conservatism**

**Celina Alcantara Brod**

**Pelotas, 2020**

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Dissertation presented to the post -graduate  
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*To my children, Gabriel and Bruno*

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“I believe in it, I answer for it, for the whole work of man really seems to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano-key”.

*Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground*

## **Abstract**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this dissertation is to argue that Hume's political theory can provide a theoretical procedural configuration that reconciles the skeptical principles of secular Conservatism in its form with the core values of Classical Liberalism in its content. To demonstrate the compatibility of conservative and liberal concepts within this framework, we will demonstrate the connections between Hume's formal principles and his substantive political ideas. This theoretical framework establishes criteria and limits to be considered in the articulation and justification of political arguments. Causality and habit are key concepts for understanding Hume's explanation of conventions, his strong defense of moderation, and his critique of political rationalism. We aim to show that it is possible to systematize criteria for a prudent activity of governing in a theoretical framework that filters empirically consistent arguments from metaphysical ones.

**Keywords:** Conservatism. Liberalism. Habit. Causality. David Hume



## Abbreviation for Hume's Works

It is a standard practice to refer to Hume's texts using abbreviations, though not everyone uses the same abbreviations. I will adopt the single letter abbreviations with paragraph and section number to simplify the location of Hume's passage. As this dissertation was originally written in English, I used Hume's *originals texts* available on Hume Texts Online. *Hume Texts Online* is a free and open access collection of works by David Hume. The site is developed and maintained by Amyas Merivale, and the texts are edited by Amyas Merivale and Peter Millican. The site consists of every philosophical text that Hume published, in accurate editions that faithfully represent the original 18th century publications.

### 1. Major works (in chronological order)

T	Treatise of Human Nature
A	Abstract of the Treatise
L	Letter from a Gentleman
E	Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding
M	Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals
P	Dissertation on the Passions
N	Natural History of Religion
D	Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion
H	History of England

### 2. Essays (as ordered in Miller's standard edition)

DT	Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion
LP	Of the Liberty of the Press
PR	That Politics may be reduced to a Science
FP	Of the First Principles of Government
OG	Of the Origin of Government
IP	Of the Independency of Parliament
BG	Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic
PG	Of Parties in General
PGB	Of the Parties of Great Britain
SE	Of Superstition and Enthusiasm

DM	Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature
CL	Of Civil Liberty
El	Of Eloquence
RP	Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences
Ep	The Epicurean
Sto	The Stoic
Pl	The Platonist
Sc	The Sceptic
PD	Of Polygamy and Divorces
SR	Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing
NC	Of National Characters
Tr	Of Tragedy
ST	Of the Standard of Taste
Co	Of Commerce
RA	Of Refinement in the Arts
Mo	Of Money
In	Of Interest
BT	Of the Balance of Trade
JT	Of the Jealousy of Trade
BP	Of the Balance of Power
Ta	Of Taxes
PC	Of Public Credit
RC	Of some Remarkable Customs
PA	Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations
OC	Of the Original Contract
PO	Of Passive Obedience
CP	Of the Coalition of Parties
PS	Of the Protestant Succession
IPC	Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth

IM Of Impudence and Modesty  
LM Of Love and Marriage  
SH Of the Study of History  
Av Of Avarice  
EW Of Essay-Writing

MP Of Moral Prejudices  
MS Of the Middle Station of Life  
CR A Character of Sir Robert Walpole  
Su Of Suicide  
IS Of the Immortality of the Soul

## SUMMARY

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Why associate David Hume's political theory with terms that are late to the author himself? What relevance is there in knowing where conservatism and liberalism are placed in his political doctrine? The answer to this question explains, to a great extent, the two main purposes of this work: first, to show that Hume's political thought, a landmark in the British Enlightenment tradition, should not be neglected, because it represents the final union of his epistemological and moral thesis. Secondly, to defend an attractive fitting of these two concepts within the theoretical structure of the Scottish empiricist.

While investigating the relationship between these concepts, an underlying question will be considered throughout this study: how, after all, can novelty integrate the past and how does the past remain in the present without one preventing or damaging the movement of the other? In other words, what is the sensible Magistrate's formula, the one whose role is to "bear a reverence to what carries the marks of age"<sup>1</sup> We will demonstrate in this study that, for Hume, this formula implies a philosophical methodology, guided by a combination of moderate skepticism and experience. An epistemological stance that is more understood by what it opposes: speculative metaphysics, philosophical rationalism and political idealism.

The objection to these conceptions of philosophy places David Hume as a participant of a pragmatic enlightenment, which was based on observation and experience. Hume, unlike his antagonists, did not aspire to change the empirical world, but to understand it. Any normative philosophy, which intended to be socially beneficial, depended on an anatomical knowledge, that is, "an accurate knowledge of the internal fabric, the operations of the understanding, the workings of the passions, and the various species of sentiment which discriminate vice and virtue"<sup>2</sup>. If it is not possible to logically deduct an *ought* from *is*, as Hume argued, then duty cannot be determined by purely rational inferences. It is necessary to explain the reasons for our *ought*, starting from the objects that "the anatomist presents to the eyes"<sup>3</sup>. This implies that the justifications for our political obligations, in Hume's naturalist perspective, lacked, above all, a science of man.

Based on these issues, I aim to defend a sui-genesis reconciliation between liberalism and conservatism. I will show that Hume's political thought configures an intelligent and

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<sup>1</sup> IPC 1, Mil 512-3

<sup>2</sup> E 1.8, SBN 9-10

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

harmonic distribution of the following aspects of reality: change and permanency. By his analysis of the social consequences that emerges from the needs and nature of men, Hume's political views consider these two paradigmatic notions of human action. The final set is a political theory that counterbalances the Anti-utopian principles of conservatism with the central values of liberalism. In Hume's political writings (1752), we can find the elements that have inspired the ambitions and achievements of the forthcoming political theories, as well as the warning of the danger caused by their extravagances. Such reflections have somehow shaped and influenced the structure of liberal and conservative ideas. Thus, I intend, throughout this study, to articulate the position of these two concepts in Hume's political thought, as well as to defend an attractive theoretical structure.

The starting point of this defense will be the epistemological methodology that Hume adopts to develop his theory of justice. We will trace the existing connections between Hume's formal principles – his central philosophical assumptions – and his political ideas. This theoretical outline allows Hume's thought to gather, in a non-discordant way, the elements of the conservative tradition and classical liberalism. Throughout the exposition of this reconciliation, I will argue that his skeptical methodology and the resulting positive doctrine enable the conjugated use of both terms, due to the way the core characteristics of each of these philosophical traditions are adopted and allocated, respectively.

David Hume's political theory is difficult to frame and to have a conceptual delimitation underpinned, thanks to its originality and his challenging Enlightenment. His positioning divides opinions among scholars. There are several authors who affirm that Hume's political thought bears features that express the nuclear content of secular conservatism.<sup>4</sup> Others claim that he is undeniably a liberal thinker<sup>5</sup>. For the latter, Hume's naturalistic and skeptical analyses resulted in a critique of the traditional understanding of morality, politics, economics and religion; such criticisms<sup>6</sup> would have influenced and enabled important liberal reforms. On the other hand, Hume's disdain for radical changes – which were inspired by speculative philosophical systems – along with his defense of the social order and recognition of the

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<sup>4</sup> Some authors who defend this position are Donald Livingston, Sheldon Wolin, Frederick Whelan, David Miller, Spartaco Pupo, Anthony Quinton and Michael Oakeshott. It should be noted that each one of these authors have developed different arguments and aspects to characterize Hume as a conservative thinker. Nevertheless, they all affirm Hume's contribution to the conservative tradition.

<sup>5</sup> Some commentators defending this position are Russell Hardin, John Stewart, Christopher Berry.

<sup>6</sup> Such criticisms would include: " his ardent advocacy of commerce, by his attack on protectionism, by his indifference to the empire, by his debunking of the inherited constitution, by his effort to make philosophers and politicians focus on the public interest and by his denunciation of a Religious whiggery". (STEWART, 1995, p. 165-188.)

strength of conventions consolidated by time, would indicate his conservative thought. However, Hume is known for his unobscured clear writing, therefore, what explains such conflicting opinions? It is possible that some scholars might have overlooked important points regarding significant distinctions within each political "ism", therefore blurring a sensible characterization, or perhaps there is a misjudgment in the placement of the main elements of conservatism and liberalism *within* Hume's theory. This work will argue that the existing disagreement is mainly caused by the latter. We must consider Hume's epistemological framework and the political content that it is approved by it. The result is a procedural theory that involves both political concepts.

I will show that the theory's formal part, the structure that *permanently* guides political action, is composed of arguments and epistemological assumptions of Hume's secular analytical conservatism. Conservatism, in these terms, should be understood as skepticism in the face of idealistic theories, which derive their conclusions from purely rational abstractions. This positioning generates, in fact, distrust of innovations that neglect the social conjectures that have gained form and acquiescence over time. In the content of Hume's political doctrine, we find the substantive elements – rights and conventions uninterruptedly *changeable* – which we recognize as main conceptions of the Classical liberalism, such as rules regarding private property, the defense of a limited government, trade and political and civil liberties.

However, it is not my chief intention to assign a restricted label to Hume's political thought. The central aim here is to compile the characteristics that influenced both concepts, which we find arranged in the theoretical structure of Hume's political philosophy. This proposal offers, above all, the following advantage: to confer Hume's political theory an equilibrium that distances him from any absolutism and ideological rigidity.

The theoretical format proposed here is extremely relevant to contemporary issues. By applying Hume's conservative formal criteria on political arguments, we have a positive double effect: It excludes both the arguments of radicals avid for violent change, and of reactionaries who stubbornly defend the maintenance of traditions. This is because neither rationally demonstrable principles, as in the case of radicals, or the attribution of intrinsic value to certain social arrangements, in the case of reactionaries, are considered justifications valid by the skeptical conservative. Hume's arguments for supporting the preservation of conventions, are, instead, committed to social utility, to usual spontaneity, mutual benefit and pessimism in the face of human power. These general assumptions translate into the government's inability to determine the purposes and the course of human relations. In Hume's view, the purpose of

political action, allied to the artificial virtues, is to ensure that “social confederacy can be maintained, and every man reap the fruits of mutual protection and assistance”<sup>7</sup>. For these reasons, the conceptual scheme developed in this study, leads to an original, revisionist and cosmopolitan proposal, whose procedure of analysis of political activity combines two criteria: feasibility and reasonableness.

It is necessary to reinforce that Hume could not think of himself or even his ideas as elements of these two political theories, since both conservatism and liberalism are articulated as political classifications only after the French Revolution. However, there is no doubt that we find in Hume's ideas the philosophical support for both. Moreover, his political writings have gained notice and academic interest, precisely because of their strategic, moderate and realistic format. His pragmatic enlightenment maintains idealism under watch, while encouraging and justifying the development of Constitutionalism, the rule of law, commercial societies and scientific progress. This is because Hume's approach, in addition to opposing obscurantism, uses history, philosophy and empirical viability as intellectual tools.

Hume's conclusions show that the social arrangements, which have enabled modern and liberal societies, are not constructions encapsulated by speculative principles or rational foundations, but built consent, guided mainly by habit. Civil societies would therefore be the outcome of gradual habituation built upon repeated and collectively coordinated actions over time. This explains Hume's criticism of the social contract and natural rights theses. Thinkers of these schools ignored, according to him, that “each exertion of authority in the chieftain must have been particular and called forth by the present exigencies of the case”<sup>8</sup>. The complex and stable standard of our current orders, with their rules of justice, social virtues and civil obedience, derived from our intergenerational ability “of learning the advantage resulting from a more equitable conduct”<sup>9</sup>. It is because of such observations that Hume prescribes moderation, gradualism and social utility as evaluative criteria of political activity' dominant features of secular conservatism.

Moreover, Hume's intellectual contribution has, above all, a therapeutic purpose. His investigation can be read as a warring for certain deformities arising from what he called "false philosophy." In the political sphere, we find fanaticism as one of these deformities, where the clarity of the calm passions is blurred by philosophical alienation, which Livingston calls "metaphysical rebellion": A critical reflective disposition directed " not against this or that act

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<sup>7</sup> M 5.5, SBN 215

<sup>8</sup> OC 5, Mil 468-9

<sup>9</sup> M 3.13, SBN 188

or institution, but against the whole of historical society: everywhere man is in chains"<sup>10</sup> True philosophy, in turn, accepts the limits of experience, and remains in a dialectical relationship between the vulgar and the wise. Hume's criticism of philosophical political enthusiasm, which ends up inspiring government projects "which suppose great reformation in the manners of mankind"<sup>11</sup>, is therefore closely linked to his skepticism, his concept of human nature and his emphasis on the experimental method.

Hume's skeptical thesis reinforces the fallibility and limitations of reason, while demonstrating the epistemological value of habit and the "recognition of the normative status of the status quo – whatever that status quo might be".<sup>12</sup> The status quo, in this case, expresses a certain social order, which is product of the information accumulated by the regularity of experience and the chaining of ideas in the imagination. This is the epistemological basis which, according to Hume, directs our practical knowledge, including our adherence to social rules and norms. This means that our most basic beliefs, underlying conventions that sustain societies, such as language itself, morality and rules on property and political authority, are not consolidated by rational justification or philosophical validation, but by our adaptability and gradual changes. In other words, our everyday practices mirror the spontaneous orders that result from mental habits, due to one of the imaginative principles governing our mind: the relation of cause and effect.

Therefore, for Hume, the true philosopher should not think about world issues in a vacuum and then use his abstract findings to replace the existing order. According to him, this kind of intellectual ambition must be considered a "false philosophy", "which seems to have hitherto served only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error!"<sup>13</sup> Against such philosophical alienation, Hume emphasizes the authority of common life and the philosopher's involvement with the world. Humean empiricism, as opposed to apriorism, proposes the inverse path: from concrete to abstract. This choice is coherent with one of his epistemological maxims, his first principle of the science of human Nature: in which it defines that "that all our simple ideas proceed either mediately or immediately, from their correspondent impressions"<sup>14</sup>. By demanding that philosophers ask the question "from what impression is that supposed idea derived?"<sup>15</sup> Hume was paying attention to the strength of

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<sup>10</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 280

<sup>11</sup> IPC 4, Mil 514

<sup>12</sup> BRENNAN, HAMLIN, 2004, p. 676

<sup>13</sup> E 1.17, SBN 16

<sup>14</sup> T 1.1.1.11

<sup>15</sup> E 2.9, SBN 21-2



experience. That is, experience is the criterion that limits the elucubrations of the imagination: "Without consulting experience, it is evidently impossible to fix any precise limits for our authority."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, past events and the observable causality is what makes a proposition more probable and hence, safer.

It is evident that, for Hume, the above elements establish the criteria and limits that should be respected by philosophers when they affirm solutions and develop political theories. Criteria also required to magistrates in the articulation of arguments that serve as justification for changing or maintaining a certain political norm. Since human conventions result from unintended actions agreed upon over time, with the purpose of remedying conflicts and broadening social exchanges, any proposed political refinement cannot be grounded on inferences emancipated from the empirical world. Because, for Hume, our judgments responsible for social morality and the cohesion between obligation and obedience have their motivation and due consolidation through habit.

Conventions provide cooperation and social stability through the coordination of mutual interests: "Thus two men pull the oars of a boat by common convention, for common interest, without any promise or contract."<sup>17</sup> The right to property is just like language and currency: a mutually advantageous agreement. These reciprocal agreements are, therefore, expressions of our adaptive competence, which relies on a complex network of emotive communication and rationality. In these conventions, it is evident that time and imagination exert great authority, and such aspects, this is crucial, are not left to our choice. This means that our mental habits, which combine understanding and natural inclinations, generate our social practices. Therefore, any alteration or preservation in such practices should consider the inevitable and gradual *transformations* that follow our relations, as well as the *permanent* moral and intellectual imperfection of the human species.

If, on the one hand, Hume's political skepticism is suspicious of the solutions of an emancipated reason and for that he censures enthusiasts and superstitious, on the other, his empirical conclusions confer an optimistic reliability on men's skill to organize themselves in complex and sophisticated nations, under constitutional governments. Hume's economic ideas were extremely modern, converging in several aspects with those of Adam Smith. Although Hume's tensed and historical view reveals caution in respect to social changes, he

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<sup>16</sup> HUME, 2009, p. 671 (Appendix, Treatise)

<sup>17</sup> M App3.8, SBN 306-7

simultaneously displays optimism in the civilizational process, with its commercial societies, refinement of the Arts and Sciences, constitutional reforms and the resulting rule of law.

Although Hume is discreet when mentioning his preferences regarding forms of government, he does not conceal his admiration for the combination of a monarchy and parliament, and he is suspicious about democracy, for its possible degeneration and absence of historical commitment. England's constitutional success, according to the Scottish philosopher, was due to the parsimonious combination between the loyal preservation of liberty and the authority recognized by the people. Hume, in fact, rebuilds the liberal theories of natural rights under a distinctive justificatory structure, that is, he elaborates naturalistic arguments to show that both private property and freedom are not axiomatic propositions, but evolved agreements.

The hypothesis of this dissertation is that Hume's political frame contains the limits, the parameters and the justificatory arguments for a prudential manner of dealing with political actions. And this frame is philosophically conservative. But, the content, whose elements express the practical political actions, is liberal. Understanding the outlines of Hume's political philosophy can help us figure out which political actions and arguments Hume is willing to approve. Roughly speaking: the central problem of this work is to verify whether the conservative frame does not contradict the content of basic liberal ideas. If this hypothesis is correct, Hume's thesis will be of extreme relevance, not only by its multiple and strategic character, but also by the guidelines it offers to deal with practical politics.

In this study there will be no detailed historiography of the political concepts, nor the biographical details of Hume and his connection to Torys. The historical events that are mentioned here will be used to support the arguments presented. This way we can concentrate the efforts of this work in the presentation of the logical and conceptual structure that underlies Hume's sociopolitical works.

In the first chapter, the characteristics that compose the formal part of his theory will be presented, as mentioned earlier, the elements that characterize the conservative thought, with its respective conceptual scheme and philosophical justifications. Such frame is constituted by Hume's mitigated skepticism, his pluralistic perspective of human nature and the qualitative value of time and conventions. In the second chapter, the substantive part of Hume's political scheme will be presented, that is, the changing political concepts belonging to the liberal tradition: private property, civil and political freedom, commercial society and limited government. In the third and last chapter, we will analyze the dynamics and interdependence

between the conservative form and the liberal practices policies and how they behave when related.

I aim to defend that the theoretical structure proposed here provides us with a heuristic model for contemporary politics, since its main intent is to avoid the intrusion of radicalism in the political realm. By articulating the philosophical foundations, which Hume establishes as the criterion of probabilistic knowledge, together with his declared preferences for liberal political practices, we seek to provide a philosophical conception that contemplates a political theory, whose greatest contribution is applied moderation.

## 2 THE CONSERVATIVE FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Skepticism in politics

Hume traditionally carries the title of Skeptical thinker. His refusal to develop a philosophy that attributed to rationality the *locus* of infallible and unshakable affirmations is one of the reasons that gave his thought such fame. However, the extreme interpretations<sup>18</sup>, which see in Hume's philosophy pathways to a radical skepticism, tend to neglect the solution he offered for the insufficiency of our rational conclusions and the insolubility of "philosophical delusions"<sup>19</sup>. Hume's solution for these problems is revealed throughout his works, in a naturalistic and descriptive analysis of the inventive, passionate and rational nature of men. Characteristics that are manifested in regular phenomena that constitute both our social and political experience and are, in the Humean empirical perspective, the consequences of our psychological functioning.<sup>20</sup>

The innovative form by which the philosopher of Passions scrutinizes the mental, sentimental and social life of the human species, results in a theoretical system with great scientific and philosophical relevance. His research reveals the performance of our psychological compensations (feeling and habit) in the absence of rational validation for some of our most basic beliefs. The belief in the objectivity of the external world and the necessary regular and uniform connection<sup>21</sup> are some of them. Hume's convictions are, therefore, developed *in the face of and despite* skeptical doubts. Consequently, his affirmative theses,

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<sup>18</sup> Authors who see in Hume's work a radical skepticism are Thomas Reid, James Bettie, Robert Fogelin.

<sup>19</sup> Philosophical Delusions is a term used by Hume that refers to the contradictions and imperfections of human reason every time reason alone seeks to find some ultimate principle or resolve, through arguments, the paradigmatic problem of our knowledge of the external world and the cause for our existence. (T 1.4.7.9)

<sup>20</sup> To Whelan, Hume is the great precursor of modern behavioral science. (Whelan, 1984, p. 304). In Hardin's vision, Hume can be considered a social proto-scientist and a precursor of what we now know by game theory. (See Hardin, 2007)

<sup>21</sup> Philosophy cannot, according to Hume, respond with arguments to the questions that skeptics raise because both the questions and the answers are ultimately part of the structure itself that is being questioned by the skeptic. Moreover, nature exerts its strength and forces us to believe both in the distinct and external existence as in the necessary connection. This does not mean that Hume denies the ontology of the external world or causality, only that we cannot know their natures. (See Strawson, Galen The Secret Connexion, 2014)

regarding the political realm- one of the moral subjects he puts under the lenses of his experimental method- are no different.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, understanding the implication of skepticism in Hume's system is the initial step towards the integral understanding of the practical policies defended by him, as well as his more radical philosophical criticism<sup>23</sup>. After all, it is precisely such criticism that approaches his political thought to secular conservatism. The characteristics that properly define such a political tradition will be explored only at the end of this first chapter. The use of the term is extremely elastic and polysemic, so Hume's relation to conservatism cannot be done, as Livingston warned, "without careful qualifications that take account of the narrative framework in which the term has meaning".<sup>24</sup> For now, what should be considered is that Hume's anti-utopian conservatism, which we understand to be the procedural structure of his political theory, is linked to the naturalistic conclusions and the positive theses that he articulates from his skepticism. Therefore, before any characterization is carried out, we need to detail the assumptions that guide the formal structure of Hume's theory, as well as the respective influences it has on political issues. One of these assumptions, the main one, is skepticism about the role of reason.

In the third part of book I of the *Treatise*, in the section *Why a cause is always necessary*, Hume argues that even one of the most general philosophical maxim, namely, "whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence."<sup>25</sup> is not demonstratively or intuitively necessary. According to him, the truth of this matter differs from the one we find between the relations of ideas. The truth of these latter is discovered by thought and it does not depend on reality, it is the sort of accuracy present in geometry, algebra and arithmetic. While in the philosophical maximum or any factual proposition, their denial can "be conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever so conformable to reality"<sup>26</sup>. For the mind, "the contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction."<sup>27</sup> In other words, any denial of a certain fact is not contradictory, if it were, it would not be conceived by the imagination. Here's Hume's explanation:

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<sup>22</sup> The work *The Philosophy of David Hume* by Norman Kemp Smith contributed heavily to a naturalistic reading of the works of David Hume.

<sup>23</sup> To Frederick Whelan, Donald Livingston, David Miller and Sheldon Wolin, the coherence and soundness of Hume's doctrines about society and the government arise from the links between Hume's epistemological and moral philosophical assumptions.

<sup>24</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 307

<sup>25</sup> T 1.3.3.1, SBN 78-9

<sup>26</sup> E 4.2, SBN 25-6

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Suppose a person present with me, who advances propositions, to which I do not assent, that Cesar died in his bed, that silver is more fusible than lead, or mercury heavier than gold; 'tis evident, that notwithstanding my incredulity, I clearly understand his meaning, and form all the same ideas, which he forms. My imagination is endowed with the same powers as his; nor is it possible for him to conceive any idea, which I cannot conceive; or conjoin any, which I cannot conjoin. I therefore ask, Wherein consists the difference betwixt believing and disbelieving any proposition?<sup>28</sup>

This means that, utterances such as "the sun will not rise tomorrow" or a "new production can emerge from nothing", can be considered unlikely or even absurd, but they are not *necessarily* false or unintelligible<sup>29</sup>. Naturally there will be difficulty in believing what they claim, but we can still understand them, because our imagination is able to mix, compose, separate and transform any material we receive from the senses and experience. But even though our imagination can conceive "what never was seen or heard of"<sup>30</sup> as improbable or fanciful as it may be, we are not able to demonstrate the eternal necessity of a cause, nor the lack of it. Such proof would require metaphysical assurances that our limited experience is not capable of providing us. For Hume, when we say that certain facts are inseparable, it is because the objects are strongly connected in our imagination by principles of association, however, "we cannot penetrate into the reason of the conjunction"<sup>31</sup>, that is, we do not have access to its nature.

The only philosophical relations capable of generating accuracy are those applied to mathematics, however, the philosophical maxim "everything that begins to exist must have a cause for its existence" does not have any of the following scientific relations: similarity, the proportions of quantity and number and grades of quality and contrariness. The maxim, as well as all the reasonings we form on matters of facts, are founded on the relation of cause and effect<sup>32</sup> and only in experience it is possible to know that A causes B. Objects never reveal their

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<sup>28</sup> T 1.3.7.3, SBN 95

<sup>29</sup> Hume inaugurates what later in the philosophical tradition is known for analytical judgments and synthetic judgments. The opposite of the first kind of judgment is simply unintelligible, while the second one is unlikely. A simple way to exemplify such a difference about the nature of these judgments is the example drawn up by Grice and Strawson in the article *In Defense of a Dogma*, written to refute article the Quine's Two Dogmas of Empiricism. The example elaborated by the authors is: One thing is to say that my neighbor's three-year-old son is an adult. Another is to say that my neighbor's three-year-old daughter knows Russell's theory. (Grice and Strawson, *In Defense of a Dogma*, 1956)

<sup>30</sup> E 2.4, SBN 18

<sup>31</sup> T 1.3.6.15, SBN 93

<sup>32</sup> Every time I affirm something about the world, and I am questioned how I know such a statement is true I must give some other fact that justifies my knowledge. One of Hume's examples is: if someone asks me how I know a friend is in France, I answer that I received a letter; If I find a clock on the beach, I suppose someone passed by there. "All of our reasoning regarding facts are of the same nature." (See Hume, Section 4, Part 1 of Enquiry of Human understanding)

effects<sup>33</sup> in advance. Hume states that "it is impossible to determine, otherwise than by experience, what will result from any phenomenon, or what has preceded it."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, statements about facts depend on our unshakable confidence in the uniformity of nature and on the inductive inference that a similar object will have, in the future, similar effects.

Hume's point is to show that our knowledge of the world rests on experience and testimony of the constant conjunction between objects and their effects. Our thought goes from cause to its usual effect and, thus we *believe* in regular repetition. Such is the phenomenon that allows our understanding to anticipate events, a relation that is not analytical, and "it is by this knowledge alone, we are enabled to control events, and govern futurity"<sup>35</sup>. However, such knowledge is never necessary.

How, then, can we sidestep the skeptical impasse and be able to assert something about the world? In which combination of ideas, connected by imagination, should we trust? If the certainty that we place in philosophical maxims or future facts does not derive from mathematical knowledge or from chains of reasoning – as Descartes believed – from where, then, do we extract the lasting opinion "of the necessity of a cause to every new production"<sup>36</sup>? from common life, from experience and from habit will be Hume's answer.

For the Scottish philosopher, the excesses of skepticism are disarmed with "action, and employment, and the occupations of common life."<sup>37</sup> The Pyrrhonian principles that, in the first moment, defeat every judgment – from skeptical objections and endless chains of reasoning<sup>38</sup> – when they abandon the speculative philosophy dimension "they vanish like smoke, and leave the most determined sceptic in the same condition as other mortals"<sup>39</sup>. Hume argues that our most basic beliefs are assured by experience. "Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it"<sup>40</sup>, says Hume. In other words, the

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<sup>33</sup> To prove this empirical fact, Hume asks the reader to inquire if a person endowed with reason and reflection was suddenly brought to the world would "by any reasoning, be able to reach the idea of cause and effect; since the particular powers, by which all natural operations are performed, never appear to the senses; nor is it reasonable to conclude, merely because one event, in one instance, precedes another, that therefore the one is the cause, the other the effect." E 5.3, SBN 42

<sup>34</sup> T 1.3.9.10, SBN 111-2

<sup>35</sup> E 3.9

<sup>36</sup> T 1.3.3.9, SBN 82

<sup>37</sup> E 12.21, SBN 158-9

<sup>38</sup> Hume shows that every reasoning that we form can be revised. As much as we have acquired, through long experience, a relative degree of certainty and security in our opinions, this "authority is never complete, whether in the most intelligent and experienced man." by discovering the original uncertainty, we corrected our mistake, by correcting our error, adding a new probability, which derives from the possibility of error and thus ad Infinitum. (T. 1.4.1.5)

<sup>39</sup> E 12.21, SBN 158-9

<sup>40</sup> A 27, SBN 657

irreducible and inescapable reliability that we place in the existence of an external world and in the uniformity of nature is irremovable, for such phenomena present themselves as inevitable realities to our mind, which we never seriously doubt.

Contrary to Cartesian thought, Hume postulates that these beliefs, which we take *internally* as unquestionable, do not derive from the operations of reason, but from habit. An instinctive principle “that alone determines the mind, in all instances, to suppose the future conformable to the past”<sup>41</sup>. “If we believe that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise”<sup>42</sup>. Belief is “that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination”<sup>43</sup>. Custom, along with a distinct feeling, produces the intense and involuntary acceptance that we give to the content of certain propositions.

In fact, Hume develops his skeptical argument in order to gradually show the reader that the difference between believing and not believing in a proposition depends on a specific and spontaneous feeling, “it is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination.”<sup>44</sup> Let us illustrate Hume’s argument: I can imagine or hear from a friend about the existence of a man with horse legs, however, this assertion does not accompany the sensation<sup>45</sup> necessary for me to believe in it. This *feeling* follows the usual transition that is felt by the mind after observing multiple cases. Therefore, if I say that an object is and will *always* be connected to another it is because they “acquired a connection in our thought”<sup>46</sup>. Consequently, our inclination to believe and confer authority to some assertions over others does not come from a priori reasoning or chains of arguments, but from customary experience. Consequently, reliable affirmations *invariably* depend on reality and regular conjunctions, never on a confined and isolated reason.

For Hume, “the understanding exerts itself after two different ways, as it judges from demonstration or probability”<sup>47</sup>. Reason, therefore, can produce knowledge by systemizing, calculating and ordering events correctly following the rules of judgment, but it is incapable of

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<sup>41</sup> A 16, SBN 652

<sup>42</sup> T 1.4.7.11, SBN 270

<sup>43</sup> T 1.3.7.7, SBN 628-9

<sup>44</sup> T 1.3.7.7, SBN 628-9

<sup>45</sup> Hume uses the term feeling to describe the peculiar way in which beliefs are formed. Hume even admits having difficulty finding the “fully satisfactory word” (T. 1.3.7.7) to describe this assent, which, according to him, is a more vivid, strong, solid and stable way of conceiving something. Although he uses the term feeling for other equivalent words like “*Sentiment*”, “*Sensations*”, or even “*Impression*”, The word Feeling here, is used as the opposite of thought. Feeling like different from thinking; To believe in something Simply “*Feels different*”.

<sup>46</sup> E 7.28, SBN 75-6

<sup>47</sup> T 2.3.3.2, SBN 413-4



generating certainties about facts of the world without the attendance of the experience. Given the absence of eternal truths, Hume's philosophical analysis anchors knowledge in explanations extracted from the observation of phenomena, with the purpose of producing judgements measured by *probability*. It establishes through general principles a doctrine of provisional truths "always open to potential challenge in the light of new evidence"<sup>48</sup>. The gradual increase of certainty is the addition of new probabilities and it is derived from the constant union of causes and effects: The more we accumulate evidence, the safer a certain reasoning is <sup>49</sup>. In this way, scientific knowledge advances as well as our political judgments, even with an inappropriate degree of certainty.

For Livingston, "the presence of skeptical arguments in Hume's works is designed to show that belief is determined not by rational *insight* or inference, but by instinct, habit, and feeling."<sup>50</sup> The science proposed by the Hume's doctrine, in addition to being a historical science<sup>51</sup>, rests on the recognition that man is, after all, a sensitive being before being cognitive. We humans, like other mammals, have founded our beliefs in a mechanism that acts involuntarily under imagination and which, aided by an instrumental reason, exerts great influence on our scientific, moral and political orders.

In the end, despite the inescapable degeneration of knowledge in probability, we *involuntarily* rest our trust in what is given by nature. To be convinced of a fact is to "conceive it, along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere reveries of the imagination"<sup>52</sup>. "Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breathe and feel"<sup>53</sup>. Hume's intention is to defend that man, be him a vulgar or a philosopher, acquires much of his most basic beliefs in the usual course of things, consolidated by a principle that determines him profoundly: habit

Unlike Descartes, whose starting point was a hyperbolic doubt and ended in the certainty of the clear and distinct ideas, assured by "a chain of reasoning, deduced from some original

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<sup>48</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p. 301

<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that Hume lays down rules for judging things right. Criteria that avoid prejudice, which would be a non-philosophical probability. The experimental method of reasoning is the application of such rules in the observed phenomena.

<sup>50</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 26

<sup>51</sup> Donald Livingston, in his work *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, emphasizes that Hume's philosophical and Historical Works act as mirrors of each other. For Livingston, Hume considers the past and with it the role of temporal narrative when investigating human understanding. For the author the very theory of meaning of language articulated by Hume and consequently his epistemology is linked to a narrative, in which concepts are intelligible due to a historical unfolding. The words we use such as "father", "is a friend", are "guaranteed by the declaration of Rights" depend on the story to make sense. "Without the past the present would not be logically what it is." (LIVINGSTON, 1984, Chapter 4, p. 103)

<sup>52</sup> T App.2, SBN 623-4

<sup>53</sup> T 1.4.1.7, SBN 183

principle, which cannot possibly be fallacious or deceitful”<sup>54</sup>, Hume neutralizes the skeptical doubt<sup>55</sup>. He enhances the authority of common life by showing that in "our mixed species of life,"<sup>56</sup> we act and reason from involuntary beliefs which come from the sensitive part of our nature. Therefore, the epistemological position adopted by Hume is dialectical<sup>57</sup>. A synthesis between philosophical reflection (thesis) and common life (antithesis), or in the words of Whelan, a non-discordant dualism<sup>58</sup>. This suggests that Hume retains skepticism as a theoretical possibility but disarms it with the acceptance of naturalistic standards.

As a consequence of the dialectical procedure, between skeptical doubt and common life, Hume reveals the incoherence of the unlimited use of the autonomy principle of reason, since the very causal relations that the understanding uses to make inductions and deductions depend on the ideas derived from empirical experience. Based on the epistemological principles, developed by Hume in book I, it is evident that "the autonomy of reason is only an abstract possibility because the imagination itself is essentially tensed and narrative."<sup>59</sup> Hume's objections against an autonomous reason – a notion of independent substance or reality detached from sensitive world – have, as we will see, two main consequences in the theoretical conclusions he develops on the political sphere.

First, both obedience to the rules of justice –prescriptive actions that express our duties in relation to private property – as for allegiance to the government and the performance of promises are useful human inventions and are *always* committed to posteriori thinking. In other words, certain practices and social conventions do not adjust to rational, universal or principled justifications. This is because the judgments underlying these social dynamics result from the same compensatory mechanisms of our psychology to validate our belief in the predictability that such orders engender. The convention stability of possessions, for example, "arises gradually, and acquires force by a slow progression, and by our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing it"<sup>60</sup> Thus, the idea of justice, which relates to the inflexible

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<sup>54</sup> E 12.3, SBN 149-50

<sup>55</sup> The term used here that is inspired by the conference of Peter F. Strawson "Skepticism, Naturalism and Transcendental arguments". Strawson points out that Hume's naturalistic response disarms and makes skeptical questions impotent. Instead of refuting them with arguments, Hume takes some beliefs as a natural fact that we must admit. According to Strawson, the Humean argument is that "we simply cannot avoid believing in the existence of bodies and we cannot avoid the formation of beliefs and expectations in general compliance with the basic rules of induction." (STRAWSON, 2008, p. 22)

<sup>56</sup> Mixed because, according to Hume, man is both a rational, social and active being. This means that the human being transits the reality of thoughts and science, the intersubjective and social sphere. (See I.E. H section 1)

<sup>57</sup> See more Livingston, 1984, Chapter 2

<sup>58</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p. 306

<sup>59</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 284

<sup>60</sup> T 3.2.2.10, SBN 490

and inviolable laws of property, was not discovered by reason, but coined by our habits of induction and perpetuated by virtue of its resulting functionality.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike natural rights and social contract theories affirmed, for Hume, it was the action of time that imprinted righteous mental habits in men. By detaching justice from reason, that is, by disassociating rational from natural, Hume revealed that "an arrangement might through usage become habitual therefore natural, but this had nothing to do with its rationality and rationality had nothing to do with it."<sup>62</sup> It was that habit had taught men to observe the rules of justice, and this same habit made them obey effortlessly. "In like manner are languages gradually established by human conventions without any promise."<sup>63</sup> A convention is useful and enjoyable when it invokes predictability of impartial conduct and expectation in the regularity of this same conduct.

It is in this sense that Hume emphasizes that the artifice of justice precedes the very idea of promise, words such as property, right and obligation "are altogether unintelligible without first understanding the former"<sup>64</sup>. Unlike natural dispositions such as self-interest and partial benevolence, "there is naturally no inclination to observe promises."<sup>65</sup> Fidelity is a human invention articulated to satisfy human needs and interests, which is fixed and naturalized by habit. However, this social morality is only possible through our original mind structure, that is, artificiality depends on our utilitarian psychology<sup>66</sup>, our self-collaborative interest, benevolence and empathy. In other words, artificial virtues are extensions of our natural dispositions, which, in turn, acquire a sensitivity to social morality, whose redirection takes place by the mediation of certain artifices.

Conventions generate new motives<sup>67</sup>, artificial virtues that would simply be non-existent without "certain symbols or signs instituted, by which we might give each other security of our

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<sup>61</sup> The only a priori and universal elements in Hume's thesis are those that constitute the operations of human psychology, that is, those principles governing the association between the ideas of the imagination, making their operation "uniform at all times and places."

<sup>62</sup> WOLIN, 1954, p. 1003

<sup>63</sup> T 3.2.2.10, SBN 490

<sup>64</sup> T 3.2.2.11, SBN 490-1

<sup>65</sup> T 3.2.5.6, SBN 518-9

<sup>66</sup> It is important to emphasize that the utilitarian term here is related to the empirical fact that utility pleases psychologically and therefore exerts great influence on the way we approve artifices. The usefulness of something is good for a certain thing, not good *Per se*. This means that we react positively to artifices, conventions and actions that are useful to us and others. Hume assumes that "our approval arises in the face of the utility of various virtues and or actions." (See Hardin, 2007, p. 30)

<sup>67</sup> Hume's conclusions reveal that neither self-love, consideration for public interest nor love for humanity (benevolence) can be considered the motives of just action. For Hume, none of these motives are stable and fixed enough to "affect the generality of men"<sup>67</sup> and ensure the exercise of justice. It should be emphasized that when Hume speaks of self-love, he writes that when it "acts freely instead of taking us to honest deeds, is the source of all injustice and violence; And no one can correct these addictions without correcting and restricting the

conduct in any particular incident”<sup>68</sup> In society everyone “enters into a scheme of actions, calculated for common benefit”<sup>69</sup> and discover, by experience, its advantages. Over time, individuals naturalize adherence to the general scheme, as well as their moral censorship every time the fixed rules of justice are violated.

As Whelan noted, there is within this conception of nature a "fundamental disposition of the mind to seek order"<sup>70</sup> from the observable sequences. This perspective suggests that our imagination causally orders objects to their effects in time, consequently, schemes of regularity for natural phenomena, as well as for human action are generated. Our imagination is inclined to follow general rules and “certain habitual patterns of association, which both in reasoning and in moral judgement is the source of the regularities with which we apprehend the world and conduct ourselves in it.”<sup>71</sup> From these conclusions, we may assert that the rules of justice, language, currency and even scientific methods are mental orders that we adopt and, thus, conduct our actions in accordance with them.

These gregarious artifices resist the tests of time, because they are extremely beneficial, for they "bring order to our cognitive life and permits the sort of control over our environment that we find conducive to our well-being"<sup>72</sup>. Therefore, based on these premises, the practices that comprehend conventions – modes of organization that represent coordinating strategies – cannot be explained or, much less, altered from deliberate designs<sup>73</sup>, abstract alternative schemes or purely speculative theories.

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movements *Natural* of this appetite. " (T.N. H p. 521) Both the word *Freely* as well as the word *Natural* point to self-love (Self-interest) still absent from the redirection provided by the established Convention and regulation of conduct by rules of justice.

Hume provides three assumptions in support of this statement of That The public interest cannot be the reason for justice: "(i) the public interest is not naturally [i.e. not artificially] attached to the observation of the rules of justice, but is only linked to it, after an artificial convention for the establishment of these rules (ii) If we assume that the loan was confidential, and that it is in the interest of the refund, that the loan be refunded in the same way (for example, if it wants to conceal its wealth), in this case there is no more exemplarity, and the public is no longer interested in the actions of The prestuary; However, I suppose that no moralist would claim that it eliminates duty or obligation. (iii) men, in their daily behavior, do not think of anything as distant as the public interest when they pay their creditors, fulfill their promises and refrain from stealing, looting or committing any injustice. " (T 3.2.1.11; p. 521). In relation to love for mankind, Hume defends that there is nothing "in the minds of men a passion like love for mankind, conceived merely as such, regardless of personal qualities, favors or a relationship of the other person with us." (T 3.2.1.11P. 521)

<sup>68</sup> T 3.2.5.10, SBN 521-2

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p. 305

<sup>71</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p. 305

<sup>72</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p. 18

<sup>73</sup> Hayek takes some epistemological assumptions from Hume's psychological theory as part of his defense of the concept of spontaneous orders. According to the author, Hume explained how actions can spontaneously create structures Organizing that function as cooperative and mutually advantageous strategies. The rules on property, the market and the language itself are examples of "that our values and institutions are determined not only by previous causes, but as part of a process of unconscious self of a structure or pattern." P.9 (See Hayek, *The fatal Conceit, Chapter 1 Between Instinct and Reason*)

The second consequence of Hume's skeptical assumptions is the structuring of a naturalistic philosophical system that exerts dual practical function: (1) to benefit the civilizational movement of modern societies and their constitutional governments, based on empirical general principles; (2) eradicate from philosophy the dangers accompanying superstition and rationalist philosophical enthusiasm. For the empiricist, such systems of thought corrupt the good use of reason, as they overestimate reason's reach and tend to consider it independent and emancipated from the sensory world, which leads to deformities in the political realm. Among these deformities we find political fanaticism, where the clarity of calm passions is darkened by the subversive alienation, provoked by what Livingston calls "metaphysical rebellion."<sup>74</sup>

One conclusion that can be drawn from Hume's objection to speculative metaphysics, that is sustained by the theory of double ontology, is that such a state of mind tends to interpret the external reality and common sense as "a grand hoax"<sup>75</sup>. This kind of dualistic philosophy can stimulate a pattern of revolutionary, resentful and revolted thinking<sup>76</sup>, because for the metaphysical, the true and appropriate political order becomes: "a timeless object of reason existing independently of the Historical process"<sup>77</sup>. This cartesian state of mind has its rebellion "directed not to some institution or act, but against all historical society."<sup>78</sup> In this conception of the world, reforms are never enough because every order is rejected as illusory, there is a rejection of common life, and "with it the possibility of making distinctions between good and evil"<sup>79</sup>. In view of this, Hume's investigation can be read as a revisionist critique of the excesses of rationalism in politics.

By showing that reason is much more limited than previously thought and that it is incapable of validating our belief in the continued and distinct existence of objects, morality and uniformity of nature, Hume's doctrine demands that philosophy itself and philosophers be modest in the face of their theoretical ambitions. After all, reason "can judge the world only because it is already related to the world in ways which are not of its own making"<sup>80</sup> The philosopher, contrary to what rationalism postulates, is inevitably committed to a causal

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<sup>74</sup> According to the author, in assuming the thesis of the double existence, "the whole order is seen as illegitimate, resulting in a melancholic alienation of a world, in which the subject is forced to inhabit or force an attempt at a moral, social and total political revolution. " (LIVINGSTON,1984, p. 6)

<sup>75</sup> LIVINGSTON,1984, p. 277

<sup>76</sup> For Livingston Such a pattern of thought inspired thinkers as Jean Meslier, Morelley, Gabriel Bonnot de Mably and Rosseau. According to him, such influence has gained practical form in the French Revolution and mainly in the conspiracy of the Gracchus Babeuf as well. See Livingston, 1984, chapter 10)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 277

<sup>78</sup> LIVINGSTON,1984, p. 280

<sup>79</sup> LIVINGSTON,1984, p. 278

<sup>80</sup> MOUNCE,1999, p.52 (See chapter on Skepticism)

experience of the world, where past impressions make up his mind. Therefore, habit is a cognitive instrument to be systematized and corrected, not a structure to be overthrown.

The rhetorical effect of metaphysical rebellion- a frame of mind formed by the doctrine of the double existence- is to generate alienated and self-deceived philosophers. These metaphysicists, by denying that common life has "an authority underived from philosophy"<sup>81</sup>, impose alternative schemes "that when carried out in political form are destructive to society"<sup>82</sup>. For Hume, such an epistemological position exerts a "corruption of reason"<sup>83</sup> because the reason as well as the body is liable to vices. In this case the vice is a "false and adulterated"<sup>84</sup> metaphysics, which cannot be considered science because it comes from "the fruitless efforts of human vanity"<sup>85</sup> or "the cunning of popular superstitions."<sup>86</sup> Philosophy, when used in this manner, shelter the beliefs of superstition through obscure terms and conclusions without any empirical consistency.

In politics, a philosophy detached from the world can become a special kind of sedition and subversion, "serious threat to social and political order and not merely an amusing error of the closet philosophers"<sup>87</sup> It is precisely in this sense that Hume states that "the general virtue and good morals in a state, so essential to happiness, "can never arise from the most refined precepts of philosophy, or even the severest injunctions of religion"<sup>88</sup>. The government is an institution to deal with conflicts of interest and safeguard stability among men; not a device for imposing ends or alternative versions of idealized worlds.

The false philosophy is, in Hume's eyes, precisely the one that by disregarding the limitations of reason, extrapolates in its speculations and articulate philosophical terms, universal truths and groundless first causes. The same elements that we find in superstition and religion. With this, the naturalism that arises from Hume's skepticism "stands against the theories of most philosophers in his time, and arguably also of our time"<sup>89</sup>. What Hume did was to lower reason's epistemological statute, a statute overestimated by rationalist theories and philosophers whose systems were purely speculative. On the other hand, true philosophy understands that "philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life,

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<sup>81</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 33

<sup>82</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 273

<sup>83</sup> MOUNCE, 1999, p. 52

<sup>84</sup> E 1.12, SBN 12-13

<sup>85</sup> E 1.11, SBN 11

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 274

<sup>88</sup> PG 1, Mil 54-5

<sup>89</sup> HARDIN, 2007, p. 15

methodized and corrected."<sup>90</sup> This is exactly what the Scotsman did in Book II and Book III after delineating the limits of philosophical research in Book I: a systematization and evaluation of the abstract and historical patterns that constitute the conventions of common life. However, the philosopher, unlike the vulgar, now understands why he must assume and admit certain beliefs of common life, and can, then, analyze them critically.

The consequence of Hume's philosophical revisionism was to make some of our most basic beliefs immune to skeptical doubt, without appealing to dogmatism or radical skepticism. Hume does not deny the use of reason but acknowledge its limits. With a scientific attitude towards facts, he produced an original descriptive analysis that explains the relationship between social institutions and human nature. Although there are differences between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, differences of tone, style and balance, Hume maintains the same intent: provide a philosophical reflection with new empirical bases. In summary, Hume's main argument is that in order for us to understand and be able to evaluate the existing society and its duties (*ought*), that is, to comprehend the gap between *is* and *ought*, a science of man had to be elaborated, in other words, a knowledge about our affective and ingenious nature, considering the scope and, above all, the limits of our reason.

## 2.2 The Passionate and Inventive Nature of the Political Man

To explain the emergence of civil society, with its rules of ownership, obligations and government, Hume applies his experimental method of reasoning to extract, from the observable regularities, general principles that underlie the development and maintenance of the social order. The conception of human nature, in his time, was the usual starting point of political theories that sought arguments for the concept of property, the justification of the right to rule and political obligations. Hume's socio-political thought is equally conditioned by his assumptions on human nature; however, his vision is quite distinctive.

Unlike Rousseau, Hume does not see in the civilizing process the distancing of man from his natural morals nor does he romanticize a state of nature where noble and good savages live. On the contrary, for the empiricist, it is in society that man tames and redirects his "heedless and impetuous movement"<sup>91</sup>, in order to guarantee long-term interests by giving up immediate interests. Contrary to the pessimism of Hobbes and Mandeville, who believed that morality was

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<sup>90</sup> E 12.25, SBN 162

<sup>91</sup> T 3.2.2.9, SBN 489

simply a contrivance of political control, Hume points out our natural inclination to approve and censor actions. According to him, the feelings of approbation and dislike “are so rooted in our constitution and temper, that without entirely confounding the human mind by disease or madness, 'tis impossible to extirpate and destroy them”<sup>92</sup>In Hume’s theory of value, uneasiness and contentment give rise to values, and these ultimately influence our moral conclusions. However, Hume does not completely dispense with the idea of artifice, but he harmonizes it with our natural sentiments of approval and rejection.

Although Hume shares many of Locke’s ideas, his genealogy of justice differs from Locke’s perspectives and the combination that the English philosopher makes between secular and theological ideas. While Locke conceives respect for property as a moral obligation, guaranteed by a natural law inscribed in men, Hume considers that respect for property is built upon established rules. An agreement expressed between members of a community, originating an ingenious order rooted by habitual experience and our customary connections.

In Hume, the word experience covers all the perceptions of the mind: our emotions, thoughts, reactions, pains, pleasures and ideas. Perceptions, in his vocabulary, happen every time we feel and think, and what we feel, and think are transmitted to us in our experience in the world. The Scottish social thesis describes political men who are not able to change their nature, yet they can “change their situation by making the observance of justice and render the observance of justice the immediate interest of some particular persons, and its violation their more remote”<sup>93</sup> Individuals, therefore, transform their circumstance and environment from their hybrid nature: a being who lives between the reality of the will and the reality of ideas. We shall see that the prism by which Hume describes his conception of human nature will have implications in his political conservatism. But for such relationship to be clear, we must first understand the main assumptions of the philosopher in the articulation of our institutions.

To expose the emergence of shareable social values and our institutions, Hume relates the psychological principles of his theory of knowledge with socio-biological facts and contextual historical contingencies. The result is, as Baier has noted, an unprecedented originality that grants Hume with the “glorious title of inventive philosopher”<sup>94</sup>. He rejects theological and rationalist visions and explains, just as a Darwinian<sup>95</sup> would explain, the enlargement and transition of feelings of private approval to feelings of general approval. The first involves

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<sup>92</sup> T 3.1.2.8, SBN 474

<sup>93</sup> T 3.2.7.6, SBN 537

<sup>94</sup> BAIER, 1991, p.271

<sup>95</sup> According to Hardin, Hume's strictly naturalist approach and his scientific explanation of our moral beliefs and the social development of our feelings have equated Darwin's scientific approach., (see Hardin, 2007, Chapter 2)



direct reactions and small-scale interactions, while general feelings occur in complex interactions, involving many participants in established agreements. It is therefore in this sense that Hume affirms that not all virtues are natural.

While the natural virtues produce an immediate effect in the interrelationship with the other, the artificial virtues have their effect mediated by the social practices in which subjects are inserted. The good of natural virtues results from each particular action, while the good of the artificial virtues results from the consequences generated by the participation of all in the general practice of sanctions. This general practice, a convention in Hume's words, represents "a general sense of common interest; which sense all the members of the society express to one another, and which induces them to regulate their conduct by certain rules."<sup>96</sup> Once the rules of justice are in force and provide an arrangement, in which all those affected by the rules are benefited, the advantages resulting from this system of action becomes the object of appreciation<sup>97</sup>. Hume, therefore, assumes that artificial virtues "produce pleasure and approbation by means of an artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessities of mankind"<sup>98</sup> Individual, seeking their interests, create norms to restrict their natural appetites and these are the norms are responsible for making life in society viable and the conduct of men predictable.

As we can see, the empiricist distances himself considerably from Hutcheson by elaborating his theory of justice. While his predecessor held that civil society's duties were within our benevolence, -innate moral sense, universally implanted by God-, Hume showed that there is nothing in human nature that *originally* upholds a consideration for the rules of justice. Without observance of the laws of property, men "are not able radically to cure, either in themselves or others, that narrowness of soul, which makes them prefer the present to the remote."<sup>99</sup> It is in society that we acquire convenient behaviors. Involved with a social life, where there are large-scale interactions, we are accustomed, with the help of sympathy, to prefer calm passions rather than violent passions and enjoy the advantageous effect of the general scheme. In other words, justice represents the redirection of self-interest, an "alteration of its direction"<sup>100</sup>, or what Taylor, for example, defined as "cultural transformation of the instinct"<sup>101</sup> via social practices.

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<sup>96</sup> T 3.2.2.10, SBN 490

<sup>97</sup> For Hume, in addition to the fact that men become "sensitive to the endless advantages" of the peaceful order that derives from the stability of external goods, they also "acquire a new taste for conviviality and conversation." All these characteristics together become the object of common interest to all. (T.3.2.2.)

<sup>98</sup> T 3.2.1.1, SBN 477

<sup>99</sup> T 3.2.7.6, SBN 537

<sup>100</sup> T. 3.3.2.13 SBN 492

<sup>101</sup> TAYLOR, 2002, p. 207

This transformation erupts from the combination of three factors: the particularities of human nature - socio-biological facts, needs and external contingencies. The first relates to our limited partiality and generosity, that is, "while each person loves himself better than any other single person, and in his love to others bears the greatest affection to his relations and acquaintance there will be a conflict of passions and consequently of actions."<sup>102</sup> Human needs and necessities represent our search for the expansion of the workforce, safety, shelter and the "natural appetite between the sexes"<sup>103</sup>. These factors coincide "with a peculiarity in our outward circumstances"<sup>104</sup>, namely, the scarcity of goods. Thus, the rules of justice act as a remedy for the partiality and instability of our possessions in the face of scarcity. Since "in the "the original frame of our mind, our strongest attention is confined to ourselves"<sup>105</sup>. The word original, used by Hume in this passage, evidences that his vision of the emergence of justice is supported by a notion of adaptability to our social potentialities.

The artifices are advantageous inventions that gradually modify the original structures of the mind. Through such arrangements, certain mental habits are apprehended so that, finally, the motivations and consequently the crude and savage behaviors of men are redirected. Hume points out that although we are partial, we can understand the advantage resulting from fair conduct. Thus, political agents are skillful builders of aggregative patterns, complex cooperative schemes that are beyond the imagination and intent of these same agents.

It is important to emphasize that these modifications presuppose the existence of some powerful principles in human nature, which without none of these inventions would even be possible. Sympathy, our utilitarian psychology:<sup>106</sup>, habit and the associations shaped by the imagination provide and sustain our social orders, as well as their moral and political obligations. It is based on this interdependence between natural and artificial that Hume writes

Tho' justice be artificial, the sense of its morality is natural. 'Tis the combination of men, in a system of conduct, which renders any act of justice beneficial to society. But when once it has that tendency, we

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<sup>102</sup> T 3.2.2.6, SBN 487

<sup>103</sup> T 3.2.2.4, SBN 486

<sup>104</sup> T 3.2.2.7, SBN 487-8

<sup>105</sup> T 3.2.2.8, SBN 488-9

<sup>106</sup> It is necessary to consider that Hume is not making utility a moral criterion, or deriving from all that is useful some normative quality for action, assuming that it is something good in itself. Hume points to the fact that we have a reactive action before it brings benefits to our species. It would be a mistake to call Hume a utilitarian, at no time his thesis makes a defense that the usefulness possesses intrinsic value, but that we psychologically consider the facts in utilitarian form. In relation to politics, we can consider this position as an institutional utilitarianism, from a psychological utilitarianism. "Our approval arises from the usefulness of various virtues or actions, so we can say again that he is a psychological utilitarian, that is, he assumes that people desire pleasure and usefulness."<sup>106</sup>(See Hardin,2007, Chapter 2)

naturally approve of it; and if we did not so, 'tis impossible any combination or convention could ever produce that sentiment.<sup>107</sup>

In this passage we can identify Hume's perception on the behavioral and social changes that general schemes of interaction produce. The interaction among individuals provides spontaneous regulatory conventions and the naturalization of the respective approval of such systems. Without a set of rules for distributing resources, conflicts would be resolved in a private and chaotic way. That's why Taylor is right when she calls this redirection of cultural transformation. However, Hume "certainly does not regard human nature undergoing a radical transformation through the course of history in the manner of Hegel or Marx."<sup>108</sup> His analysis, different from teleological visions, only perceives, in the development of societies and civilizations, the refinement of human nature, which includes economic and political elements. In other words, in Hume's view of social order, there is a change of direction of ingredients already present in nature, "rather than a" radical recasting of the human frame"<sup>109</sup>. Moreover, his analysis does not see in this evolving and civilizational movement a definite course for history.

Human nature, in Hume's naturalist project, should be understood as the set of psychological and physical dispositions that influence the way men conduct in their actions and how they organize the world of facts and the world of values. Politics, in this sense, is the order concerning the world of goods, that is, the mastery of the cultural artifices that hold *meum and teum*. In this domain, the artificial virtues represent the consequent moralization of the conduct in the face of rules that we created to redirect the self-interest, the sedimentation occurs because we mutually benefit from this new direction. The use and end of justice is "to procure happiness and security, by preserving order in society"<sup>110</sup> In summary, the good that results from the general scheme that the general rules provide is, and should be understood, as all the consequences of this civil association: from the construction of bridges to the development of constitutions.

Based on these assumptions, Hume's political agent must be studied from a historical narrative, whose inventions and artifices are inevitably tied to the psychological structure, innate sociability, interests and the strategic inclination we bear to generate order through cooperative schemes. When we carefully consider Hume's project, we realize that his greatest

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<sup>107</sup> T 3.3.6.4, SBN 619-20

<sup>108</sup> MILLER, 1984, p. 104

<sup>109</sup> MILLER, 1984, p. 104

<sup>110</sup> M 3.8, SBN 186-7

contribution is to have identified that all these manners of life are linked to how the imagination manipulates the content it receives from experience. This means that human beings are deeply committed to a derivative knowledge. The principles of association of ideas, together with habit and our rationality, build collective institutional facts, such as the government, to remedy and at the same time satisfy various aspects of our nature.

The government emerges after the invention of rules of justice, when communities become "large and polished societies"<sup>111</sup>, where the observance of the rules can no longer be done by the members themselves. This shows that Hume does not understand, as Hobbes had understood, that coordination and order depended on "the imposition of a draconian force"<sup>112</sup>. However, it is evident that, for Hume, allegiance to the government satisfies our interest in living peacefully in society, but what ultimately legitimizes such conduct is acquiescence to political authority, rooted by habit, not by the results of a rational choice. Contract alone, as reason alone, cannot save us. "The contract must be accompanied and guided by other sources of obligation to be truly beneficial"<sup>113</sup>. We are once again supported by a trivial disposition of imagination. Hume, in fact, reconstitutes the theory of social contract and natural rights based on the principles of the association of ideas: contiguity and causality.

It is in this sense that Hume states that "on opinion only that government is founded".<sup>114</sup> The establishment of obedience is just one more consequence among the various consequences of the two original effects of custom upon men. This is how Hume explains the fact that "many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers."<sup>115</sup> Habit, Hume, tells us, has double effect "bestowing a facility in the performance of any action or the conception of any object; and afterwards a tendency or inclination towards it"<sup>116</sup>. For the empiricist, these two effects can "account for all its other effects, however extraordinary."<sup>117</sup> Hume's implications suggest that we are culturally transformed by custom and repetition. Together, they "increase and diminish our passions, to convert pleasure into pain and pain and pleasure."<sup>118</sup> Habit, consequently, has a central epistemological role in Hume's theses.

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<sup>111</sup> T 3.2.8.5, SBN 543-4

<sup>112</sup> HARDIN, 2007, p. 24

<sup>113</sup> BAIER, 1991, p. 264

<sup>114</sup> FP 1, Mil 32-3

<sup>115</sup> FP 1, Mil 32-3

<sup>116</sup> T 2.3.5.1, SBN 422

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> T 2.3.5.3, SBN 423

Through custom I can know what to expect if I hurt or help a certain person, as well as I can know what to expect if I violate the promise of not restoring a loan or taking ownership of others. The difference is that in the first case, I know immediately through sympathy and it is a value that does not depend on any artifice to manifest itself, it rests on a pre-conventional sentimental causal chain. The second, I know through the established conventions, which I learn through the causal chain of repeated and strengthened moral obligations over time. The latter is internalized in socializing and arises from the same passion responsible for their own invention: self-interest. Likewise, “gold and silver become the common measures of exchange and are esteemed sufficient payment for what is of a hundred times their value”<sup>119</sup>. Such practices become so solid that we do not even reflect on its artificiality, the fact that a paper bill is, in fact, a mere piece of paper is something that falls into oblivion.

In this transition between savages and refined men, the first experience of restricting our self-interest and impulses takes place in the family, it is in the family that we have the first contact with equitable conduct. Children and their “tender minds”<sup>120</sup> are taught to observe the rules of justice and to acknowledge the advantages of the principles of probity. As time passes, they conceive “their violation as base and infamous”<sup>121</sup>. Gradualism and temporal transformation are evident when Hume states that “first rudiments of justice must every day be improved, as the society enlarges”<sup>122</sup>. The relationships, when simple and small-scale, i.e. individual-individual, possess the structure of natural virtues as shareable values, whose effects are immediate. This initial relationship is the starting point of morality, “the education of sympathy begins in the narrowest confines of our family or tribal circle.”<sup>123</sup> In other words, the first intersubjective and, therefore, social experience occurs in this narrow and inevitably partial circle.<sup>124 125</sup>

In the pre-conventional state are “our natural uncultivated ideas of morality”<sup>126</sup>, in this first social phase the partiality and the close affections influence the notions of vice and virtue and “conform themselves to that partiality”<sup>127</sup>. In large-scale interactions (more complex societies), there is a relationship between individual- society, in this second stage, social practices broaden the reach of our morality and provide the feeling of approval of those who self-regulated by fixed

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<sup>119</sup> T 3.2.2.10, SBN 490

<sup>120</sup> T 3.2.2.4, SBN 486

<sup>121</sup> T 3.2.2.26, SBN 500-1

<sup>122</sup> T 3.2.2.14, SBN 492-3

<sup>123</sup> HUME, 2009, p. 541

<sup>124</sup> HUME, 1963, p. 35

<sup>125</sup> TAYLOR, Jaqueline. Justice and the Foundations of Social Morality in Hume's Treatise, p. 214

<sup>126</sup> T 3.2.2.8, SBN 488-9

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

and inviolable rules. It is only in the postconventional state that the “the notion of injury or injustice implies an immorality or vice committed against some other person”<sup>128</sup> Thus, in view of the more complex relationships, the establishment of formal institutions to ensure rules of justice is the first step towards the order.

The benefit resulting from general norms, which includes impartiality and mutual advantage, gives rise to the new virtues and establishes other sentimental expectations and a new pattern of behavior. It is in this sense that Hume states that: “obedience or subjection becomes so familiar, that most men never make any enquiry about its origin or cause”<sup>129</sup> In this process, imagination, habit and feelings, with the instrumental help of reason, develop the regularities and routines necessary for theoretical and practical knowledge, in which probability and predictability serve as guides of action and reasoning.

Now that we understand the context for the emergence of justice and the assumptions about human nature that condition Hume's theses, we must ask: how do these characteristics influence his political conclusions?

Firstly, in how man organizes and mentally associates the impressions transmitted to him, in which causality has a very important role. It is the relationship of cause and effect that generates cohesion and union between ideas and greater security in the assertions that individuals make about matters of fact. The importance that Hume grants to the effect of causality results in his probabilistic view of events, and therefore moderate, when it comes to political reforms. Secondly, given the respective limits of our natural virtues coupled with our inventive attitude to remedy our passions, Hume, therefore, defends the types of political systems that best correspond to our natural characteristics and can satisfy our collaborative interests.

These conclusions influence his conservatism in two ways: (1) No rational scheme devoid of the force that the imagination acquires over time can motivate and transform people's behavior. (2) The artificial virtues, the moral system for the institutions we have built, are supported by conventions that we have agreed collectively and that gain legitimacy through acquiescence and the resulting social utility.

It becomes clearer that the epistemological basis by which Hume will privilege some political conduct to the detriment of others is due to his discoveries that our understanding and morality are imperfect. Much of what Hume writes is to show that our psychological compensations yield unexpected artifices, which originate shareable values and agreements that have not been

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<sup>128</sup> T 3.2.2.8, SBN 488-9

<sup>129</sup> OC 7, Mil 469-70

previously planned and are taken for granted. According to Quinton, the conservative will reject the rationalist ambition, because, he understands that "a radical innovation will not have instinctive emotional roots in the nature of those on whom it is imposed."<sup>130</sup> By showing how reason plays a limited role in the expression of our will, Hume shows that it is not possible to establish any kind of knowledge that disregards the outcomes of accumulative experience in our social life. In summary, the motivations of human action in a rule-governed society has little to do with rationality, nor can these motivations be manufactured overnight.

If reason does not motivate, just action cannot be influenced by the "the cool assent of the understanding"<sup>131</sup>, that explains why political actions or any innovation that seeks to radically transform men's way is merely imaginary. "A rule, which, in speculation, may seem the most advantageous to society, may yet be found, in practice, totally pernicious and destructive"<sup>132</sup>, Hume concludes. He mentions the case of the Levellers, "who claimed an equal distribution of property"<sup>133</sup>, political fanatics, writes Hume, who believed it was possible to put into practice ideas of perfect equality. However, Hume argues that, as plausible as such an idea may be, history shows they are "impracticable; and were they not so, would be extremely pernicious to human society."<sup>134</sup> Such a rule of property, deliberated from mere speculation, would never motivate the action of men, because the principles behind it do not correspond to the "the nature and situation of man"<sup>135</sup> A rational scheme like this, "must soon degenerate into tyranny, and be exerted with great partialities; who can possibly be possessed of it, in such a situation as is here supposed?"<sup>136</sup> Based on these ideas, Hume opposes political rationalism and the infiltration of philosophical enthusiasm into governing activity.

The idea that reason can alienate itself from the world and discover eternal and perfect duties is, for the Scottish empiricist, fallacious. For the very content that reason manipulates derives from the experience. In view of this, Hume strongly criticized the parties of speculative principle that, according to him, are "known only to modern times, and are, perhaps, the most extraordinary and unaccountable phenomenon, that has yet appeared in human affairs."<sup>137</sup> For Hume, such parties presented a threat, because by virtue of their emancipated principles of the world, their extremist members would be willing to "sacrifice peace and order to achieve their goals: *Fiat Justitia, Ruat*

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<sup>130</sup> QUINTON, 1978, p. 18

<sup>131</sup> M 1.7, SBN 172

<sup>132</sup> M 3.23, SBN 192-3

<sup>133</sup> M 3.24, SBN 193

<sup>134</sup> M 3.26, SBN 194

<sup>135</sup> M 3.27, SBN 194-5

<sup>136</sup> M 3.26, SBN 194

<sup>137</sup> PG 11, Mill 60

*caelum*.<sup>138</sup> Accordingly, he treats them like the worst kind of party.<sup>139</sup> In fact, as Wolin well noted, "they represented a pathological condition from which all parties were susceptible."<sup>140</sup> Factions, which operate in the limits of common life, when measured by metaphysical thinking, can generate bigotry and violent antagonism, since their principles do not admit standards of contrary conduct. Hume, hence, concludes that "when men act in a faction, they are apt, without shame or remorse, to neglect all the ties of honor and morality."<sup>141</sup> For these reasons, in Hume's naturalist view, political arrangements cannot be measured by the precisions of abstract theories.

The path of emancipated reason is averse, because it presumes we can start from the abstraction of ideas and then have access to values at some Archimedian point, from where the order of the world can be judged and these brand new values applied in the world. Hume realizes that such ambition is not only an overestimated idea of reason, but also fallacious belief that men can be perfected by these same ideas. Such political intent does not take account of Hume's passionate man, who can be educated by learning how to handle his emotions (choosing calm passions over violent ones) with the instrumental help of reason, however, this same man, is always fallible and vulnerable to vicious motives.

Hume's skepticism in politics is, therefore, represented by a moderate pessimism about the metaphysical notion that human nature can be perfected, and by a distrust of political theories, whose conclusions derive from assumptions detached from original impressions. If reason is not capable of grasping the totality of events, motivating actions nor extracting effects from causes, how can it intend to dictate the men's ends? Executing such a plan is what Livingston has characterized as "philosophical alchemy"<sup>142</sup>. Alchemist philosophers spiritualize their theories as they try to explain the totality of experience from their cabinets, reducing all reality to a single principle. Such a philosophical enthusiasm fosters the idea that it is possible to revolutionize the current order and replace it by a purely rational one. The popularization and massification of philosophical autonomy cause men to detach themselves from observation and from habitual phenomena, abandoning the dispute of practical interests and negotiable conflicts and embracing the conflict between alternative world versions.

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<sup>138</sup> WOLIN, 1954, p. 1009

<sup>139</sup> Hume characterizes three types of party: Parties of interest, affection and principle. According to him, the parties of principle would be the most prone to generate factions and fanatics, since such parties are motivated by metaphysical ideas, not by interest or affection. Their political claims and arguments would be based on timeless principles known by reason. (See *Of the Parties in general* )

<sup>140</sup> WOLIN, 1954, p. 1010

<sup>141</sup> FP 3, Mil 33

<sup>142</sup> See Livingston, 1995, On Hume's Conservatism.



It is important to emphasize here that Hume does not elect human nature as the source of normativity, it is rather the condition for normativity. Normativity, instead, by which we manifest our duties and *ought*-utterances, is the result of our inferential conclusions that are mediated by conventions, knotted by habit, motivated by feelings and corrected by reason. Hume's teaching demonstrates how complex the constitution of our normative sphere is and, thus, shows the philosophical alchemist's illusion of reducing such complexity into a single principle. Normativity contradicts the simplifiers, for it is a phenomenon that involves the skills of cooperation, coordination, moral feelings and imagination, "forming collective convictions of right."<sup>143</sup> A social reality is possible, thanks to the complex human mind and its operations in the face of affective and cognitive experience. Hume's revisionist philosophical project intends to show that, for the political order and its artifices to work impartially and under functional and general moral sentiments, the superstitious or metaphysical arguments should not inspire political changes, as they can incite true religious wars.

### **2.3 Time Conventions and Hume's Secular conservatism**

We will now see how Hume's mitigated skepticism and his conception of human nature influence his political ideas regarding changes in the social order. Based on the assumptions gathered so far, we can draw some formal terms out of Hume's doctrine that may serve as criteria for evaluating political arguments and actions. The practical point of these criteria is to identify what types of arguments would be rejected for violating main premises from his experimental method. In addition, we intend to show that these criteria represent heuristic markers that relate Hume to Secular conservatism.

The heuristic markers can be reduced into four criteria: (1) reason cannot derive predictable effects without the support of past events; (2) The complexity of social orders, which comprehends the embedded mutual agreements, is the result of habit and not rationally planned choices; (3) Any simplification and reductionism of social reality, made through principles that have been attained solely by the autonomy principle is misleading; (4) social utility is the test of the institutions.

The first (1) criterion results in the demand for empirical consistency. Arguments suggesting political changes should consider that man is inevitably inserted in a historical narrative. Therefore, the existing institutions and the status quo correspond to the social patterns that result from the

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<sup>143</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p. 322

causal associative mechanism of ideas in the imagination. Hume's message was that: society "is in perpetual flux, one man every hour going out of the world, another coming into it."<sup>144</sup> This complex picture of causality implies that the rules of justice, the existence of government, and the political obligation to obey it, became robust conventions due to the unintentional powers of custom and the inventive nature of our species. Here is what Hume writes about our tenuous involvement with the existing civil organization:

Did one generation of men go off the stage at once, and another succeed, as is the case with silkworms and butterflies, the new race, if they had sense enough to choose their government, which surely is never the case with men, might voluntarily, and by general consent, establish their own form of civil polity, without any regard to the laws or precedents, which prevailed among their ancestors. But as human society is in perpetual flux, one man every hour going out of the world, another coming into it, it is necessary, in order to preserve stability in government, that the new brood should conform themselves to the established constitution, and nearly follow the path which their fathers, treading in the footsteps of theirs, had marked out to them.<sup>145</sup>

This passage is a critique directed to social contract theories, which presuppose that rationality is capable of making choices emancipated from time and circumstances. Although John Rawls' original position, for example, is an abstraction for attaining principles of justice that everyone would intuitively agree upon when plotting a contract, Hume rightly observes that historically no society is formed this way. Contractualism in his view, as Baier has written, is for butterflies.<sup>146</sup>

From Hume's perspective, thought experiments of this kind serve only as speculative systems of principles articulated "in order to protect and cover that scheme of actions, which it pursues."<sup>147</sup> The case Hume is making is that, between the beginning and the present situation of any social organization we find the gradual refinement of the artifices that men create for the stability and coordination of their interests. Hume saw, as others had not seen, "that the concepts of promise and contract are cultural achievements, that depend on cultural invention and artifice."<sup>148</sup> Therefore, neither classical contractualism nor natural law theories explain political obligations.

This first criterion is also linked to Hume's conclusions about our beliefs. After all, if believing in a certain proposition comes from a feeling that follows the usual transition after the testimony of multiple cases, then we cannot foresee or control the effects of political changes based on apriorism. That is why the sensible magistrate is obliged to respect what brings the marks of time. Violent innovations, Hume warns, are dangerous for the same reasons,

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<sup>144</sup> OC 28, Mil 476-7

<sup>145</sup> OC 28, Mil 476-7

<sup>146</sup> See Hume's Account of Social Artifice – Its Origins and Originality. Anette, Baier (1988)

<sup>147</sup> OC 1, Mil 465-6

<sup>148</sup> BAIER, 1991, p. 296

"they are even dangerous to be attempted by the legislature: more ill than good is ever to be expected from them."<sup>149</sup> In other words, radical political proposals that seek to *completely* break with past precedents, with the aim of generating effects extracted from purely rational chains of argument, are mere fictions of the imagination, having no empirical support. Thereby, they are not fit for purpose.

If society is in permanent transformation, constantly changing by the usual effects of imagination, with arrangements and networks of expectation that were not deliberate by some isolated thinker, then no man has the right nor the *ability* to transform society from his/her speculative principles. As Miller has put it, "The main threat comes from political or religious fanatics who provide a license for egoism in the guise of a principle."<sup>150</sup> Hume therefore insists that men should draw from experience their probabilities and build an empirical knowledge about their scientific, moral and political values.

This demand for empirical consistency corresponds to a skeptical style of politics, in which, according to Oakeshott, there is "a recognition of the contingency of every political agreement."<sup>151</sup> In practical terms, it means we use experience and the rules of judgement to prefer effects. The political values we consider inalienable, such as private property, voluntary exchanges, individual freedom and religious tolerance, do not bear a value beyond the world or any essence discovered by reason. However, such values are equally fundamental and imperative. Although they are not regarded as intrinsic, they do not lose their mandatory attributes. The same goes for language, it is a man-made convention, which is indispensable and "where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as anything that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflection."<sup>152</sup> In sum, if we consider that we are speaking about political values that sustain our own survival as a species, we can, then, consider that their merit prevails regardless of any transcendent aspect.

Experience, then, is the source of our inferences, whether they are epistemological, moral or political. Hume's explanation of the ideas of law and obligation rest on an analysis of past events. The words we use to express prescriptive actions would not be intelligible if there was no past narrative to support them. Hume's real achievement was to have demystified and

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<sup>149</sup> OC 28, Mil 476-7

<sup>150</sup> MILLER, 1981, p. 119

<sup>151</sup> OAKESHOTT, 2018, p. 133

<sup>152</sup> T 3.2.1.19, SBN 484

secularized moral and political theories showing that laws and virtues are the result of our social psychological functioning and accumulative knowledge.

Moreover, if Hume states that belief is more properly felt than thought, that will also be the case for the beliefs we have in relation to rules of justice, political authority and private property. This thesis, as we can see, comprehends all of Hume's reasoning about human action. We consent with a feeling and not with reason that stealing is an unfair action. And such sensation comes accompanied by the usual transition and connection between cause and effect in our imagination. In the case of theft, we reprove the violation of a rule that acts on my behalf and common behalf simultaneously. The fact that the *wrong* action is not the conclusion of reason does not mean that we cannot give good reasons and explain why such actions are wrong.

If we take modern democracies as an example, regarding proper distinctions, we will see that all of them seek to preserve the integrity and freedom of individuals through their constitutions. By contrasts, tyrannical and brutal societies are mostly theocratic, that is, governments maintain their laws associated with either superstitions, metaphysical or ideological beliefs. Hume is therefore thinking of human conventions whose agreement derives from mutual advantages schemes of action.

In the case of the second criterion, we have the requirement of gradualism and reforms. It is evident that if mutual agreements and the sense of justice itself is the product of a long process, then the political activity should be limited to corrections in the current order. Arguments that propose reforms of the status quo are desirable, but not the replacement of the order for timeless principles. Hume understood, before many others, that respecting the workings of custom meant that moving from theory to practice is not the same as “where an old engine may be rejected, if we can discover another more accurate and commodious, or where trials may safely be made, even though the success be doubtful”<sup>153</sup> Reforms, however, based on the observation of facts and regularities, are not only welcome, but constitute the movement of imagination itself.

In this sense, the skeptical frame shaped by Hume’s ideas opposes both the sacralization and the stagnation of social practices, as if they possessed some kind of mystical or transcendent value, and the complete destruction of the status quo in the name of some principle or maximization of political concept. As Livingston has observed “metaphysical conservatives and metaphysical revolutionaries operate on the same logical level”<sup>154</sup>, both become alienated from common life’s reality and norms. Metaphysical conservatives<sup>155</sup> understand that there is

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<sup>153</sup> IPC 1, Mil 512-3

<sup>154</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 329

<sup>155</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 330

some sacred order to be stubbornly preserved, whereas the revolutionaries understand that there is some holy order to be reached. In this respect, Hume differs from Burke's romantic traditionalism, and is completely contrary to Maistre's "hard-headed dogmatism"<sup>156</sup> and from revolutionaries like Tom Paine and Robespierre.

The third criterion, intertwined with the first, is linked to reason's inability to extract effects without the sieve of reality or to settle ideas without corresponding impressions. Therefore, this criterion excludes political arguments inspired by abstract systems of thought that seek the "foundation of universal harmony and contentment"<sup>157</sup> through perfect and absolute formulas. This criterion addresses Hume's aversion to axiomatic philosophical systems and theories. In other words, a philosophical position that opposes ideological politics.

Thus, the third criterion requires that political arguments bear concreteness. That is, the empirical sensitivity for the case-by-case and the choice of political alternatives that consider both viability and desirability, as opposed to visions proposed by, what Oakeshott termed, politics of faith. For Oakeshott, idealistic choices assume a notion of a single path and not a better path between possible alternatives. Conservatives, then, will reject the idea that governments should seek perfection, "by the thorough and incessant control of all the activities of individuals."<sup>158</sup> For this reason, within the conservative tradition the government is seen only as a mean, "as one among numerous forms of activity that compose the community"<sup>159</sup>. In this line of argument, we should expect the government to have a limited role, it is not its purpose to improve the nature and condition of men, government's role is, in contrast, to bring or restore "calmness."<sup>160</sup> The skeptic, for not having faith in reason and human powers, will doubt the ability of axiomatic schemes to determine human ends.

Such speculative schemes, with a perfectionist and providential perspective of the activity of governing, can, like religion, foster a rigid and fanatical adherence. By despising the present moment, zealots justify the annihilation of stability so that human actions are suited to the timeless principles of their ideologies. Hume affirms that "the fanatic consecrates himself, and bestows on his own person a sacred character, much superior to what forms and ceremonious institutions can confer on any other"<sup>161</sup>. As Livingston notes, "the conception of Cartesian

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<sup>156</sup> BERLIN, 2014,p.142

<sup>157</sup> KIRK,2014, p. 92

<sup>158</sup> OAKESHOTT, 2018, p. 162

<sup>159</sup> OAKESHOTT, 2018, p. 165

<sup>160</sup> BAIER,1999, P. 263

<sup>161</sup> SE 6, Mil 75-6

reason can lead to a profound alienation not only of tables and chairs of ordinary life, but from the social and political order as well."<sup>162</sup>

Hume was, in a certain way, the first to launch "a systematic critique of modern ideologies"<sup>163</sup>, although the term ideology was still unavailable to him. By noting reason's fragility, Hume's skeptical disposition opposes radical proposals that are willing to sacrifice morality in order to make governments satisfy abstract theoretical conditions. Consequently, the ideas that result from his mitigated skepticism will confront rationalism and political idealism.

The fourth criterion is social utility. It assesses the approbation of a given institution or convention, and, thus, scale the argument's reasonableness regarding change. For Hume, the conventions are changeable and malleable, but it is the resulting utility and public benefit that confers authority of perpetuation.

We have now come to a full circle, the problem of induction contains both the criticism of philosophical rationalism and the basis for Hume's positive theses. The principle of causality is what underlies Hume's experimental reasoning. It would not be different in politics, at the beginning of *Treatise*, in section 5 of Book 1, Hume states that the relation of cause and effect is the "source of all the relations of interest and *duty*, by which men influence each other in society, and are placed in the ties of government and subordination"<sup>164</sup>. In other words, human relations, which coin political orders and their coordination, are based on the cohesion that the relation of cause and effect produces in the imagination. Therefore, it is this relation that establishes the perpetuation of political authority, trust in promises, allegiance to the government and the rules of justice.

Does that mean that there is no room for change or improvement? Absolutely not. Evolutionary and gradual changes, as we have seen, are part of the association mechanism of ideas and the imagination's influence in our orders. The same is true for science. The experience and observation of events allow adjustments and the incrementation of a certain body of knowledge. Science, morals and politics represent conceptual maps of different domains of human action, where our accumulative information improves the knowledge of the causes and, then, adds new findings to these maps. However, it is important to emphasize that political life unfolds without a determined end, neither by man or by nature, because, although there is a

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<sup>162</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 277

<sup>163</sup> LIVINGSTON, 2009, p. 39

<sup>164</sup> T 1.1.4.5, SBN 12

certain regularity and " great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation "<sup>165</sup>, there is a vast complexity followed by unexpected variables.

Therefore, politics and its reforms cannot offer ways of life that artificially subvert habits, but it can economically use its power to guarantee order for individuals to determine their private purposes. When Hume asserts, in one of his essays, that "*Politics can reduce itself to a science*," he is suggesting that politics should comply with experimental procedures rather than traditional logic methods. "Logic, which relied on demonstrations founded on understanding, was for dealing with probabilities which were of the essence of man's actual life in society."<sup>166</sup> A science of politics, therefore, must be founded on the experience provided by historical research and observation of existing societies, so it can prudently guide the necessary changes and reforms.

Conventions are not static, they gain modifications over time from new observations and interactions, as well as our knowledge about facts in the world. In this case, social utility and the test of time serve as an important criterion when thinking about reforms. However, we will find in Hume's political views room for civil disobedience, when rulers do not exercise the shelter of justice and freedom, in other words, when they cease to provide "mutual advantage and security"<sup>167</sup> Therefore tyrannies lose their legitimacy because they become *useless* to the interests of individuals. In simple terms, the government, being a mere human invention, may fail. As Baier has summarized this point, "if state terrorism is to make life equally dangerous, or if the state's inequality and violence leads to the fight against violence, then the invention will have failed."<sup>168</sup> That is precisely why, a wicked law, which harms the interests of society, "loses all its authority, and men judge by the ideas of natural justice, which are conformable to those interests"<sup>169</sup>. In that case, utility is ambivalent, for it provides the firmness of obedience as its weakening.

Hume's conservatism is, therefore, "a criticism of a certain pattern of thought."<sup>170</sup> Such pattern goes against what Hume holds to be a requisite for a true philosopher:

to restrain the intemperate desire of searching into causes and having established any doctrine upon a sufficient number of experiments, rest contented with that, when he sees a farther examination would lead him into obscure and uncertain speculations. In that case his enquiry would be much better employed in examining the effects than the causes of his principle.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> T 2.1.11.2, SBN 316-7

<sup>166</sup> WOLIN, 1954, P. 1005

<sup>167</sup> T 3.2.10.16, SBN 563-4

<sup>168</sup> BAIER, 1991, p. 261

<sup>169</sup> M 3.34n12.2, SBN 197

<sup>170</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 309

<sup>171</sup> T 1.1.4.6, SBN 12-3

Ultimate causes are different from general causes. Gravity, it's not last cause, but general cause. Trying to explain the cause of gravity is to go further, as he said, in "obscure and uncertain speculations." Similar remarks could be made about our actions, which means that we can ask why men need to establish rules of justice, but we cannot ask if there is justice *per se*.

The full implication of Hume's skepticism in politics is that we ought to exchange absolute truths for probability, and reason using the facts that have already been observed. Therefore, Hume offers a positive thesis within his skepticism, a reasonable solution for our inevitable ignorance, rendering a propaedeutic political disposition aimed at avoiding disasters. It is worth remembering that, after the writing of his political essays, mankind has experienced reform systems based on ideologies, in which large general schemes of thought culminated in the persecution and planned murder of millions of people. Concentration camps, whether they are designed to kill people from different ethnic or social classes, are reminders that "the corruption of the best things produces the worst"<sup>172</sup> Holodomors and holocausts were the product of metaphysical *isms* that wished to reset common life, so that reality would fit a holy imaginary order.

An intellectual disposition suspicious of rationalism in politics is what Oakeshott called politics of skepticism, as opposed to politics of faith. According to the author, this provision has direct implications on what a given philosopher believes to be the function of the government. According to him, Hume is one of the great precursors of this political style. The skeptical style does not attribute to the government the role of implementing perfection, for understanding that the use of power must be economical since society is composed of complex variables. Human understanding and morals are inevitably imperfect to simplify orders put together by time and experience. Oakeshott observes that Hume was one of the first to note that the zeal for perfection leads to enthusiasm, evoking violent opposition and dogmatism. By demanding perfection, "the enemies of the regime will be identified not as mere dissidents to be inhibited, but as unbelievers to be converted."<sup>173</sup> Hume shows how naïve is the idea that we can rely on human powers to eliminate the evils of the world. For the Scotsman, the least we can do is act as if all men were knaves and develop political laws that protect us from ourselves.

The conservative skeptical delimitation seems to form the necessary groundwork by which Hume assesses and understands society and its conventions. In Hume's evolutionary perspective, individuals create their social reality and find, through their collaborative and

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<sup>172</sup> SE 1, Mil 73

<sup>173</sup> OAKESHOTT, 2018, p. 153



strategic self-interest, ways of ordering social facts. If the dynamics of social reality is not completely founded on reason, political rationalism and a speculative point of view – the Archimedean point that rejects the historical narrative – will never be able to produce the normative effects it desires.

It would be no exaggeration to say that Hume understands the world in the same way as the ordinary man, but he systematizes it as a scientist and a moderated skeptical. It is precisely the skeptical character and Hume's conclusion about human nature that guide his pessimistic expectations on the "ability of men to govern altruistically"<sup>174</sup>. Therefore, we must not rely on testimonials of a society composed of perfectly benevolent men. As Hume's expectations regarding reason's ability to determine universal purposes for men is narrow, the same degree of expectation occurs in relation to the government and philosophical political theories.

If there is any radicalism in Hume's project, it lies in his insistence on a scientific position in the face of human affairs, and politics is one of the most important among them. By scientific position we must understand the investigative commitment to empirical evidence, human psychology, probabilities and causal relations that involve the development of human institutions. Any improvement in the content of the current order should consider the criteria we have listed here. They serve as a scaffold for the true philosopher to walk on. For Livingston, there is within Hume's intellectual scheme a normativity regarding political thinking. Any revolutionary project<sup>175</sup> "informed by the principle of autonomy is not something someone can be moderate, it is simply something one ought not to do."<sup>176</sup> My submission is that, the recommendations that result from Hume's dialectical position serve as normative guidelines for a sensible conduct towards political actions. Hume's moderate skepticism is a reminder of the limitless ignorance of men and reason's inability to choose our destiny as humanity.

In the light of these conclusions, the relationship between Hume's political theory and conservatism tradition becomes sharper. In sum, the elements that compose Hume's conservative frame are: moderate skepticism and its naturalistic solution, focusing on our psychological compensations and men's inventive nature and the strategic collaborative conduct that we adopt to live in society. The common denominator among all these assumptions

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<sup>174</sup> MILLER, 1981, p. 103

<sup>175</sup> Revolution, in the sense adopted by Livingston, means the total substitution of a social political order established by another. This sense of revolution excludes rebellions that occur within the established order, whose purpose is to correct a limited error, while the rest of the order remains legitimate. (See LIVINGSTON, 1984, chapter 12)

<sup>176</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 335

is the role of imagination and its principle of causal association. Thereby, it is habit acting in the imagination that predicts matters of fact, of values and of social rules.

In the construction of the scientific order, causality acts systematizing and producing general principles that explain and predict natural phenomena. In the moral order, causality relates motivations to feelings of approval and censorship, in which language represents functional concepts and a general and firm viewpoint. In politics, imagination and its causal operation makes, through conventions, the acquiescence to the artificial virtues possible.

It is in this sense that habit is the great guide to human action. However, it is important to emphasize that Hume's conclusions cannot be transformed into justification for an extravagant defense of traditionalism. As Pupo has stressed: "the warning of French counterrevolutionaries that, outside the unity between politics and religion, man will never find society, truth or salvation, is totally outside the intentions of Hume"<sup>177</sup> Wolin also points out that, "habit, emotion and imagination did not constitute political values in their system, but belonged to a catalog of descriptive facts related to human behavior."<sup>178</sup> "Analysis and not mere sentiment is the basis of Hume's conservatism."<sup>179</sup> As Miller notes, it is precisely this posture in view of the limitations of the philosophy that characterize Hume as the best example of conservatism. In short, Hume's conservatism does not endorse things as they are, nor is the status quo sacred, Hume only establishes limits for philosophical speculation and emphasizes the authority of time upon men's imagination.

Just as it happens with our actions, in which virtuous attitudes are those that favor a calm passion - an end that benefits the individual in the long term – a virtuous political action is one that is caused by calm passions. That is, violent motivations are vicious, and if a man can desire the destruction of the world rather than a scratch on his finger, that means that in politics men may wish to destroy an entire society in the name of their interests or religious ideals. Hume, in contrast, offers the politics of what is possible, rather than the politics of perfection. Analysis, predictability, calmness, regularity, gradualism and prudence are words that symbolize Hume's thought.

We learn from Hume that our virtues and political values are no less legitimate because they are artificial, and just like our conventions they are subject to our analyses and ongoing transformation. Here's what Hume writes about this:

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<sup>177</sup> PUPO, 2016, p. 33

<sup>178</sup> WOLIN, 1954, p. 1004

<sup>179</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p. 314

Most of the inventions of men are subject to change. They depend upon humor and caprice. They have a vogue for a time, and then sink into oblivion. It may, perhaps, be apprehended, that if justice were allowed to be a human invention, it must be placed on the same footing. But the cases are widely different. The interest, on which justice is founded, is the greatest imaginable, and extends to all times and places. It cannot possibly be served by any other invention. It is obvious, and discovers itself on the very first formation of society. All these causes render the rules of justice steadfast and immutable; at least, as immutable as human nature. And if they were founded on original instincts, could they have any greater stability?<sup>180</sup>

We can conclude, based on the ideas developed so far, that Hume's mitigated skepticism and his dialectical position between reflection and common life serve as epistemological pillars for a distinctive philosophical attitude. His conclusions culminate in an experimental method that structures, to a certain extent, the theoretical form of a politics of moderation. A carefulness that saves on idealism but is generous in moderation, and relies on the beneficial teachings of experience. Thus, we can say that that this philosophical stance gathers the core aspects of what was later known as British conservatism.

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<sup>180</sup> T 3.3.6.6, SBN 620-1

### 3 LIBERAL IDEAS

#### 3.1 Private Property: A Miraculous Invention

Hume's historical view at the development of civilization, as well as his preference for a certain type of society, is closely tied to his epistemological premises and philosophical political conclusions. By investigating human actions and the reasons for the emergence of private property, Hume dispenses with the hypothetical approaches so used by political theorists at his time. In his reflections we encounter an evolutionary perspective of social life, founded on external contingencies, anthropological facts and social interactions that are sustained by his description of human psychology. What we see is Hume's experimental method of reasoning being applied to political and social affairs. Here, once again, neither timeless principles nor natural laws are arguments invoked to explain the emergence of *meum* and *teum*: an invention that contributed strongly to the development of what we understand today by modern societies and constitutional governments.

Hume refused to preach the existence of an innate morality, one that would *originally* acknowledge the moral vice of disrespecting promises, as well as natural and original duties to refrain from other people's property. To explain normativity concerning private property, that is, "to attribute to the observance or neglect of these rules a moral beauty and deformity"<sup>181</sup>, Hume distances himself from Hutcheson as well as Locke. For him, the rules of justice were settled by habit and ensured by "a general sense of common interest; which sense all the members of the society express to one another, and which induces them to regulate their conduct by certain rules",<sup>182</sup> These expectations, that we develop in our physical and social world, given the regularity of causes and effects, acquire the status of undoubted belief. In short, abstaining from the property of others, and the stable, peaceful and advantageous condition of life that follows it becomes deeply connected in our imagination. Such a connection, coupled with a feeling of content, generates a social belief<sup>183</sup>, perhaps as strong as those we feel in relation to the regular connection between objects.

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<sup>181</sup> T 3.2.2.1, SBN 484

<sup>182</sup> T 3.2.2.10, SBN 490

<sup>183</sup> The sympathy extended by the convention of justice is reinforced by praise, public condemnation and education and naturalized by habit. In this sense, Hume writes: "The feelings of honor can take root in their

While Hume's theory of knowledge seeks to find the principles that associate the contents of our mind, giving cohesion and coherence to our reasoning about the facts of the world, his political theory investigates the principles that govern life in society and provide a civilized social order. Hume is thinking of a civil association that is in line with our moral expectations, that is, our calmest passions. In this case, conventions that establish actions coordinated by mutual expectations that certain rules - general and impartial norms - protect our individual interests and, at the same time, promote or public interest. The resulting advantages are reinforced by education<sup>184</sup> and by the "new affection" we have acquired "to company and conversation"<sup>185</sup>. From this "progress of feelings" we appreciate and feel pleasure in the social interaction that civil societies promote.

In Hume's naturalistic and evolutionary account, establishing rules for dealing with property is the first step towards order and social cooperation. "If we first reach order, then we can go on to achieve freedom, justice and property."<sup>186</sup> Private property, the object of justice, is therefore a convention of right built under our intergenerational causal understanding of the world, in this case a world we must, need and want to share with other human beings. "The sense of justice, therefore, is not founded on our ideas, but on our impressions."<sup>187</sup> Thus, Hume answers his own epistemological question: from what impression is that supposed idea derived? The idea of justice derives from our impressions and feelings in the face of the circumstances that led us to the creation of general rules.

Recognizing and affirming that a certain object is mine and other objects are yours enabled the existence of free and complex societies, "a sine qua non without which the social order cannot function in a larger society."<sup>188</sup> The property convention seeks to make external goods "on an equal footing with the firm and constant advantages of mind and body", this means that movable goods would be as safe as the limbs of our body and the virtues of our spirit. Justice,<sup>189</sup> therefore, emerges as a solution to our affective partiality and the fact that there are

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delicate minds, acquiring such firmness and solidity that they do not fall far short of the principles most essential to our nature, and more deeply rooted in our internal constitution." HUME, 2009, p.541

<sup>184</sup> Education plays an important role in Hume's theory, where the family serves as an educational agency, responsible for the training, conditioning and internalization of such rules. As Forbes notes, "the family is man's first social guardian." (FORBES, 1975 p. 70)

<sup>185</sup> T 3.2.2.9, SBN 489

<sup>186</sup> HARDIN, 2007, p.134

<sup>187</sup> T 3.2.2.20, SBN 496

<sup>188</sup> HARDIN, 2007, p.145

<sup>189</sup> Andrew Sabl points to the difference between the various existing conventions, justice would be a fundamental convention, which in politics we call constitutional. Fundamental conventions, unlike other conventions, "consist of ways of coexistence that provide basic political and social goods that any threat to them is probably fruitless or immoral." (SABL, 1969, p.32)

no goods available all the time to everyone. If there was a context where all needs were infinitely met and together with it men felt an innate love for humanity, there would not even be a need for any artifice or convention, said otherwise: justice would be useless.

Although Hobbes, Locke, Clarke and Hutcheson had written about laws governing private property, they all assumed that their emergence was not a simple and easily justified phenomenon. However, apart from other thinkers, who claimed that the reason recognized the existence of a natural law, Hume maintains that we, in fact, are self-conditioned to respect the rules coined by ourselves to benefit our self-interest by restricting and redirecting it. The redirection of self-interest is possible thanks to our psychological associative functioning, which considers the useful effects of this agreement and the importance of the inviolability of such rules through our accumulative and repetitive experience. The phenomenon of gradual adaptability is evident in the following passage:

In a little time, custom and habit operating on the tender minds of the children, makes them sensible of the advantages, which they may reap from society, as well as fashions them by degrees for it, by rubbing off those rough corners and untoward affections, which prevent their coalition.<sup>190</sup>

The expectation in the uniformity of conduct, in relation to property is with time firmly rooted and becomes a belief. Hume naturalizes, through his theory of convention, the natural law of private property. Respecting other people's possessions is an artificial virtue just because such an act does not *occur originally* among individuals, if it did why would we invent rules to prevent it from happening? In our wild uncultivated state, our attention to strangers is extremely weak when compared to the attention we give ourselves and our family members. This inequality of affection could not be remedied without a convention established through time and experience.

Thus, Hume grants private property a moral achievement of utmost importance in the history of civilization. Not only because of its utility, but also for its power to transform a disordered, chaotic and tribalist world into an orderly association of owners. Violent passions and immediate desires are replaced by calmer passions, the urge to obtain what is contiguous is replaced by the *inculcated* notion of justice and its moral and social undeniable importance.

Deontological theorists may argue that excluding intrinsic value from the idea of private property can weaken it, however, it is the value based on the usage and empirical evidence that makes it not only an irrefutable fact, but also as a more present reality with greater weight in

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<sup>190</sup> T 3.2.2.4, SBN 486

our minds and a greater influence on passions and imagination. It is the establishment of this convention that “leaves everyone in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry”<sup>191</sup>. The security and expectation that everyone will abide by this general scheme allows not only the expansion of trade, but it also fosters other sociable and liberal behaviors, such as tolerance, consent, moderation, reasonableness and pluralism.

Human beings can be easily motivated by violent passions and immediate desires, but they are also capable of altruism and good deeds. However, such benevolence is not stable enough to ensure fair and constant behavior, so as inventive mammals that we are, we forge codes of impartiality. Hume's anatomical research shows that we are a species who creates rules and desire the rules we create, provided that such rules meet our interests. That is, they need to be mutually advantageous and useful. That is precisely why religions and superstitions are not considered by Hume as legitimate conventions, rather as pseudo conventions. In Hume's view, “these artificial lives” can conflict with the empirical principles of ordinary life and generate fanaticism and alienation.

Piaget, the French pedagogue, dedicated part of his academic career to empirically demonstrate how children come to respect rules that are agreed in games and how they judge such rules. According to Piaget's conclusions, individual innovations, as well as in the case of language, “succeed only when they meet a general need and when they are collectively sanctioned as being in conformity with the " spirit of the game.””<sup>192</sup> For him, if we wish to gain knowledge about morality, we should look at how we come to respect systems of rules, for “all morality consists in a system of rules”<sup>193</sup> says Piaget. Now, the fact that morality involves a system of rules is only a part of the issue. A part that Hume's theory can satisfy. However, explaining the rules is not enough, we need to know why we learn to respect them, that is, what is our motivation in following them?

Piaget starting point is children's behavior towards rules when playing games, which he calls “admirable social institutions”<sup>194</sup>. Hume, in turn, starts with small-scale interactions. Although their starting points are different<sup>195</sup>, both explanations have a common ground:

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<sup>191</sup> T 3.2.2.9, SBN 489

<sup>192</sup> Piaget 1966 , p.13

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. p. 1

<sup>194</sup> See more in PIAGET, 1966 (Chapter 1 The Rules of the Game).

<sup>195</sup> Interesting to note another point of convergence in Piaget and Hume. According to the pedagogue's studies the rules are initially heteronomous, that is, they are commands delivered by older people, however as the mental development of the child occurs the rules become respected when they guarantee cooperation and respect, thus, moral judgment on them becomes autonomous. In Hume the rules of justice are taught to children by parents, but it is the mutualism of these rules that ensures their persistence and moral approval. (See Piaget, *The Moral Judgement, New of the Child*, New Year)

cooperation and mutual respect. It doesn't matter if cooperation is the cause or the effect of our respect for the rules, but it is cooperation that makes the individual submit to the universal. Besides the fact that members of a community hold interactions to be desirable and enjoy the exchange that games provide.

It is a commonplace to say that private property is a key concept of Classic Liberalism. The relationship between freedom and lack of coercion on ownership is a landmark in the development of what today we call law. A free society depends on the strength of this concept. Now, why does Hume consider private property to be a legitimate convention? And, how does this liberal value relate to Hume's conservative criteria?

The arguments justifying private property as a liberal <sup>196</sup> political value and at the same time a convention capable of meeting Hume's conservative criteria, that is, the structure that must *permanently* guide political actions are: (1) it is a political concept that arises from repeated experience, whose motivation for its consent is not a rational deliberation, but the product of habit and its effect on imagination. That is, "it arises gradually, and acquires force by a slow progression, and by our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing it";<sup>197</sup> (2) private property has the useful social role of pacifying and establishing corresponding impartial conduct; (3) it is a *mutually advantageous* convention that reflects and corresponds to the characteristics of human psychology, as well as meets the moral expectations of reciprocity and general sympathy; (4) the emergence of the property is extremely complex," accidental and resulting from many centuries",<sup>198</sup> thus, reason is not able to predict the effects, advantages or architect all consequences if such a concept were to be extinguished deliberately.

It is possible to deduce from Hume's epistemological assumptions that he would be against any planned attempt to replace this order - which was instituted gradually and based on mutual self-interest - by some other rational system of thought. His conservatism would act as opposition to theoretical alternatives of *deliberate* annihilation of the private property convention. The conservative structure that must permanently conduct political action does not prevent any criticism, changes or improvement in the rules regarding the convention, but rather the its replacement by some imposed order, which had been extracted from purely rational, or

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<sup>196</sup> A liberal policy is one that protects the freedom of its members to do whatever they want as long as they do not harm others. Consequently, such form of policy must prohibit and seek to prevent anyone from depriving any member, who is the owner of any material item, of the freedom to use or dispose of that item in an innocent manner. (CONWAY, 1995 p.11)

<sup>197</sup> T 3.2.2.9, SBN 489

<sup>198</sup> Hume, 1963. p.35



teleological speculative theories<sup>199</sup>. As this is clearly the case with the great massacres of the 20th century caused by the Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes, both “isms” brutally violated such convention. Therefore, Hume's political arguments are robust enough to combat ideological innovations and the full horror that comes with their destructive possibilities.

In the case of private property, Hume endorses it positively and considers its preservation indispensable, because such a convention<sup>200</sup> is fundamental for the perpetuation of the stability and order of societies and it is in accordance with human psychology. As Forbes described, "the fundamental rules of justice are Aboriginal."<sup>201</sup> Private property is not good in itself, nor are the laws that protect it right or wrong in an abstract way, it is the very experience of such a social structure that will demonstrate its benefits, in this case the usefulness in promoting adaptability and mutualism.<sup>202</sup>

A system that provides the stability of moveable and easily transferable property promotes productivity and satisfies our passions. Hardly anyone would be motivated to produce goods if there was no guarantee that they would not be stolen. Such guarantees make society more prosperous and cohesive, in which consensual exchange strengthens interest in maintaining a Government that maintains such ownership regime protected and ensured. In short, the security of the rules ensures the satisfaction we feel in "making greater progress by acquiring possessions than in the solitary and discouraged conditions resulting from violence and universal leave".<sup>203</sup> This satisfaction, therefore, guarantees compliance with the Government.

In this section we sought to give an example of how a liberal value, converges without conflict with Hume's secular conservatism criteria. To sum this section up, we can say that Hume is a liberal for defending private property, as we can consider him a conservative by his endorsement of this habit, which was spontaneously and gradually fixed in societies. After all,

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<sup>199</sup> Nazism, Communism, Bolshevism, Anarchism, Nationalism, Fascism or any ideology that pleads to maximize some political principle or the radical transformation of society and with it the annihilation of aggregating conventions is obviously excluded by Hume's conservative criteria.

<sup>200</sup> It is important to emphasize that Hume is not concerned with fixed property, but rather with those goods that are easily transferable, and therefore easily taken. "Hume is not an ideologue who supports the class of those who own property, especially fixed property. On the contrary, it even assumes that class relationships are accidental and can reverse with the passage of time."

<sup>201</sup> FORBES, 1975, p.71.

<sup>202</sup> In this sense, we can call Hume's political theory evolutionary. Hume is concerned with finding the operation that best guarantees the success of civilizations and their maintenance. Societies that promote individual interests parallel to mutualism will have more chances of survival than civilization that have not reached this level of ordering and adaptation. They are more subject to conflict and therefore more weakened, and do not promote what Hume calls civility.

<sup>203</sup> HUME, 1963, p.35

understands that it is the conservation of stable principles for dealing with property that enables a civilized society.

### **3.2 Constitutional Governments and Freedom**

After resolving the inconveniences that result from the absence of rules for the stability of property it is possible to move forward and deal with freedom. The rules of justice are, as mentioned earlier, the first step towards order. There is no sense in speaking of freedom, if there is no system of laws that primarily protects our most immediate interests, as well as a moral system that establishes a stable shared expectation regarding behavior.

Hume's conception of mind strongly shapes his political philosophy. The principles governing our mental faculties and their regular functioning (non-superstitious), along with the understanding of the causality of our passions, form the basis for building a legal structure of a politically organized society. It is not possible to institutionalize a system of political freedom without the stability that the rules of property provide. Sympathy extended to third parties and moral disapproval, when such norms are violated, also establish the basis of social conduct under which political freedom can be improved.

The fact that Hume starts by knowledge, then moves to morality to finally deal with political life is consistent with the hypotheses of his system. Understanding the scopes of our reason within our passionate structure and knowing how to distinguish knowledge from superstition is part of what constituted his science of man. This set of knowledge is the resource that Hume proposes as the basis for "from which we can hope for success in our philosophical researches."<sup>204</sup> The associative mechanism - whose main effect is regularity and order - by which we form our factual and moral beliefs come before understanding how we form our conventions that enable large-scale economic and social interactions. Such conventions and their codes depend on our causal understanding of the world, on human actions and motivations.

Regarding freedom, what is important to say is that it is formed in a gradual process in which the balance between authority and freedom is expressed through general <sup>205</sup> rules that allow us to gradually improve coordination. This is the case with civilizing political

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<sup>204</sup> T 0.6, SBN xvi

<sup>205</sup> According to McArthur, "Ideally for Hume, general laws have the following characteristics: i. They apply to everyone, including the magistrates themselves. ii. They are rigid in their execution - dictating uniform treatment of offenses and ensuring that employees fulfill their functions in the prescribed manner. iii. They are clear and determined in their application. iv. They are known to the public in advance. (McArthur, 2007, p.57)

achievements in England, which resulted from "a series of successive times of barbarism until we finally reach the dawn of civility and science."<sup>206</sup> For Hume, we will find civility and freedom in a Government:

which admits of a partition of power among several members, whose united authority is no less, or is commonly greater than that of any monarch; but who, in the usual course of administration, must act by general and equal laws, that are previously known to all the members and to all their subjects.<sup>207</sup>

In this sense, a free government is, by definition, a government of laws: a shelter where individuals are protected from arbitrary power, whether from a larger group or the state itself. Such a legal system develops not from a rational design, but from numerous accidents and circumstances, resulting in its complexity and detailed laws. "Government commences more casually and more imperfectly"<sup>208</sup>, Hume argues. Just as the concept of ownership "does not arise from a simple and primordial instinct located in the human heart, implanted by nature",<sup>209</sup> the concept of political freedom, guaranteed by the *rule of law*, also arises artificially. That is, it emerges from the impossibility of natural freedom to be sufficiently coercive.

Now, "why abridge our native freedom, when, in every instance, the utmost exertion of it is found innocent and beneficial?"<sup>210</sup> mocks Hume. His point is to show that the Government arises to meet human needs, in which "the sole foundation of the duty of *allegiance* is the advantage, which it procures to society, by preserving peace and order among mankind."<sup>211</sup> Hence, obedience "is a new duty"<sup>212</sup> that comes to support justice. Political authority is, therefore, essential to the existence of freedom.

Hume treats freedom in two senses: freedom as free will, an individual is free in this sense when he exercises his will, by which is always moved by some passion; and freedom in the political sense, which is the absence of arbitrariness guaranteed by the rule of law. It is the second kind of freedom that we must address if we wish to understand the relationship between liberalism and conservatism in Hume's theory of social order.

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<sup>206</sup> HUME, 2017, p.119

<sup>207</sup> OG 7, Mil 40-1

<sup>208</sup> OG 6, Mil 39-40

<sup>209</sup> The feeling of justice differs from hunger, thirst, resentment, love for life, appeal for descendants and other passions. The concept of ownership itself is infinitely complex and requires several discernments, since the property relationship unfolds in multiple circumstances: possessions acquired by work, by prescription, by inheritance, by contract. "Would it be possible to assume that nature, by an original instinct, instructs us on all these methods of acquisition?" (HUME, 2004, p.265)

<sup>210</sup> M 4.1, SBN 205

<sup>211</sup> M 4.1, SBN 205

<sup>212</sup> Hume, 1963.p.39

In his Political Essays, civil liberty, liberty of the press and economic liberty are a set of cultural achievements that "enhances creativity, motivation for production, commerce, and all economic activities that make the society and hence its members in better off " <sup>213</sup> Freedom, which Hume calls "perfection of civil society", <sup>214</sup> as well as the stability of private property, satisfies both individual and public interests. Combined with industrial progress, freedom leverages social virtues by promoting politeness and a sense of humanity, through the intense interaction and friendliness that accompany it. Such characteristics Hume calls civility.

The philosopher of passions does not hide his preference for civilized and commercial societies, but this preference is in accordance with his inferences of his experimental method and adopted naturalism. It is only in a free society that men can express and achieve their multiple ends and domesticate, by self-interest and mutual assistance, their most violent passions. A social organization with political institutions of constitutional regime, that are able to guarantee individuals' freedom will be more prosperous, plural and intellectually richer.

Hume does not hesitate to praise the English constitution and the freedom that it assurances through the general execution of its laws and its limited authority. Although he does not make a detailed conceptualization of what he understands by freedom, in his essay *Of the Liberty of the Press*, Hume obliquely defines the term:

No action must be deemed a crime but what the law has plainly determined to be such: No crime must be imputed to a man but from a legal proof before his judges; and even these judges must be his fellow-subjects, who are obliged, by their own interest, to have a watchful eye over the encroachments and violence of the ministers. <sup>215</sup>

Such restrictions are part of the aspects of what Hume calls civilized society in opposition to barbarism. As McArthur noted "the terms 'civilized' and 'barbarous' are used in an unabashedly prescriptive sense to designate those societies we should most desire to achieve and to avoid, respectively." <sup>216</sup> In this case, a society where magistrates as well as subjects are restricted by the same laws.

Political freedom, as a central value in Classic Liberalism, does not contradict Hume's conservative criteria, even if we were to extend it, suggestively, to contemporary social freedoms. It is possible to defend the hypothesis that Hume would not oppose the expansion of civil rights and the progress of social freedom present in current democratic societies. Hume's conservatism is merely formal, that is, it is restricted only to the conservation of the structure

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<sup>213</sup> HARDIN, 2007, p.185

<sup>214</sup> OG 7, Mil 40-1

<sup>215</sup> LP 4, Mil 11-2

<sup>216</sup> McARTHUR, 2007, p. 8

that enables the very virtuous subsistence of society, not the content of cultural social customs and practices. That is the formula of the sensible magistrate to respect what "bears with it the marks of ages", that is, to recognize that our tacit knowledge of our social structures provides a functionality underlying the social order itself.

At no point does Hume talk about maintaining traditions, after all, human inventions are subject to analysis and disuse, they "have a vogue for a time, and then sink into oblivion".<sup>217</sup> Hume's skeptical and therefore conservative criticism is directed to deliberated and violent annihilation and replacement of order, not specific corrections *within* the order. Revolutionary projects, animated by ideological idealism and metaphysical rebellion, generally go beyond the limits of causal knowledge and tend to degenerate into sectarianism, radicalism and in the worst scenario; totalitarianism. It is to this kind of change that Hume's cosmopolitan conservatism opposes.

What must be preserved in the case of freedom is the constant balance between authority and freedom, and the division of powers so that one aspect does not overlap the other. In short, it is necessary to maintain the opinion that sustains the Government itself, the opinion of interest, that is, "the sense of the general advantage which is reaped from government",<sup>218</sup> which is one of the opinions that gives legitimacy to political authority. As Livingston notes, such conservatism should not be understood as "a mere reaction to something called 'progress', but as an insight into the emergence of a mass philosophical consciousness and its destructive possibilities."<sup>219</sup> It is evident that, such thesis moves Hume away from a traditionalist or metaphysical conservatism.

Within this same logic, economic<sup>220</sup> freedom is closely tied to individual freedom, since "individual well-being and aggregate productivity will be improved by the decentralization of decisions that corresponds to the decentralization of knowledge".<sup>221</sup> A society that fosters a market economy coupled with a liberal policy and non-intrusive social institutions enables individuals to seek their own values and not succumb to the tyranny and despotism of theocratic<sup>222</sup> governments. "In the case of enormous tyranny and oppression, 'tis lawful to take

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<sup>217</sup> T 3.3.6.5, SBN 620

<sup>218</sup> FP 2, Mil 33

<sup>219</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1995, p.155

<sup>220</sup> Russell Hardin brings Hume's political and economic arguments closer to the theoretical arguments of the Austrian school. According to him, Hume aligns himself with Hayek by defending the complexity of spontaneous order formation and the social and beneficial value of scattered knowledge. (See Hardin, Chapter 8, Value, New Value Theory, New Theory)

<sup>221</sup> HARDIN, 2007, p. 188

<sup>222</sup> Hardin supports the same argument and cites Iran and the Ayatollah as an example, and in Afghanistan the Taliban. (Hardin, 2007, p.196)

arms even against supreme power”<sup>223</sup> defends Hume. In a despotic scenario, mutual benefit and security disappear, so government can no longer impose a moral obligation on individuals because it has lost its useful and advantageous tendency.

Freedom, in Hume, is secular and evolutive. Such political value does not rest on any absolute and rationalist pattern, it does not need to be deontological, nor a philosophical theory, but a practice<sup>224</sup>. That is, a means for diverse and infinite human purposes. Hume advocates a legalism and “preference for a regime in which all authority is exercised through regular laws, public and evenly administered system of laws, stands out as its most consistent normative element.”<sup>225</sup> Such conception of political freedom distances Hume from Classical Republican conceptions, in which civic virtue and public participation meant the real sense of political freedom. In this sense, his political theory is capable of accommodating plural and cosmopolitan societies.

Political freedom is legitimate as a liberal value and it does not conflict with Hume's conservative structure for the following reasons: (1) it has no rational foundation, it is rather a collectively moral consensus constructed through experience and guaranteed by the fundamental convention of the constitution; (2) its consolidation is the product of habit's force and it is reinforced by social life practices and the consequent public utility; (3) its complexity does not allow the maximization of the principle and requires the case-by-case concreteness, so it is always open to reforms; (4) Political freedom is a useful and mutually beneficial convention in which moral approval is satisfied.

Unlike foundationalist liberals, Hume does not believe that freedom is an object of reason that exists regardless of the historical process. In account of this assumption, his secular conservatism defends the conservation of the constitution that guarantees the existence of political freedom itself. That being said, any attempt to violate the *rule of law* that would compromise civil liberty or any attempt at revolution guided by abstract principles, which sought to annihilate political authority, would be treated as unacceptable and pernicious by the conservative structure proposed here. To put it simply, if a certain social change jeopardized the order of society and its constitutional conventions that allows the very existence of freedom, Hume would warn of the risks of extremism and radicalism.

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<sup>223</sup> T 3.2.10.16, SBN 563-4

<sup>224</sup> Livingston points to such a difference. According to him, Hume's criticism is "concrete and comparative, exploiting advantages and disadvantages, pointing out how much evil is mixed with good, how much goods lead to other assets, and in all this trying to make a balanced judgment convincing those already engaged in the practice of freedom." (See Livingston, 1995.)

<sup>225</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p.349

### 3.3 Commercial Societies and Civilization

Hume strongly contributed to classical economic theories<sup>226</sup>, and he also played a decisive part in our understanding of economic behavior. He is regarded as one of the enlightenment thinkers who most fiercely defended trade and the social refinements it promoted. His defense is underpinned by the notion that socially shared orders and norms can be generated by self-interest and simultaneously provide freer civil societies<sup>227</sup>.

An environment where the exchange of goods and services is fostered, besides contributing to the improvement of science and liberal arts, turn men more sociable, encouraging them to abandon isolation and barbaric behavior. In this social life governed by general rules that are affirmed and reaffirmed by signs, symbols and language, the custom acts upon minds creating regular patterns of mental habits and with them new moral codes, such as fidelity and keeping promises.

Hume would have agreed with Benjamin Constant when he declared, in his memorable text *The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns*, that trade is “ an attempt to conquer, by mutual agreement, what one can no longer hope to obtain through violence.”<sup>228</sup> Trade is, above all, a collective artifice that works regardless of what individuals regard as private well-being values. Involved in this social dynamic, men realize that “love to receive and communicate knowledge; to show their wit or their breeding; their taste in conversation or living, in clothes or furniture.”<sup>229</sup> Such passionate effects allied to our willingness to reciprocity through the natural principle of sympathy, make the fidelity of promises a new moral obligation among men. Thus, trust allied to reputation become social values that lead us to self-regulate our conduct. Therefore, self-interest ends up unpretentiously favoring public interest.

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<sup>226</sup> Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* clarified the relationship between national power and the wealth of citizens." This does not mean that the elements were not available to Hume. But Smith formalized such concepts so that they could form a comprehensive theoretical body." (Soule, Edward.2000, p.155)

<sup>227</sup> The concept of civil society, different from the contemporary concept that puts it in opposition to the State, in Hume civil society means a different society of military societies. Attention perpetuates wars.... "Conspicuously lacking in the language of the eighteenth century is the contemporary use of civil society as merely the structural antithesis of the state, a distinction that only arose late after the Marxist reappropriation of Hegel in the nineteenth century." (Boyd, Richard Year p.67)

<sup>228</sup> CONSTANT, Benjamin: *The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns* (1819)

<sup>229</sup> RA 5, Mil 271

Hume is one among other thinkers<sup>230</sup> who had also bet on the potential of the commerce to soften men and provide a cultural transformation in their ways. Although the Scotsman is not among the enlighteners who were enthusiastic about the power of reason, Hume is still optimistic about the ethical and industrial progress of societies. According to him, economic activity increases the division of labor, weakens the need for wars, generates cohesion based on mutual interests, provides the exchange of production excess by other products, instigates creativity and increases the State's wealth and power, by providing its military strengthening and the supply of public goods. For all these reasons, Hume declares that the greatness of the State and the happiness of subjects are "are commonly allowed to be inseparable,"<sup>231</sup>

The main bet on industrial progress is that such exchange can promote the convergence of the various human interests regardless of the absence of affection one has for strangers. Trade serves in this sense as a kind of instrumental convention, in which everyone can use it as a means to satisfy different ends. A method of collaboration in which there is no need to be agreement on the ends, only the means. Yet, commerce presupposes a moral behavior towards an ethics of individualism. As Boyd notes, this characteristic is part of what Hayek, Oakeshott and others have called civility: a response to moral pluralism.<sup>232</sup> Such an intense exchange would weaken intolerance and strengthen private freedoms through political institutions capable of ensuring a stable and regular regime of laws.

Where there is no stability of possession, there is constant conflict. Where there is no exchange for consent there is no trade. Where there is no promise keeping there can be no alliances. Such inconveniences prevent the establishment of societies, so conventions and their benefits become closely tied to our interest. Thus, "the advantages, therefore, of peace, commerce, and mutual succor, make us extend to different kingdoms the same notions of justice, which take place among individuals".<sup>233</sup> Thus, society can be maintained because our instrumental intelligence is able to teach our passions a way where they can satisfy themselves better.

It is worth mentioning that in Hume's economic view, international economy would also benefit from the same freedom of trade that he preached for domestic economy. A thriving domestic industry produces in large quantities enabling the export of its excess. Therefore,

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<sup>230</sup> Today, it is widely recognized that figures as diverse as Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Smith, Ferguson and Burke hoped that the extensive order of the market would soften or polysebarism barbarism, rudeness, superstition and enthusiasm of premodern societies. (Boyd,2008, p.65)

<sup>231</sup> Co 4, Mil 255-6

<sup>232</sup> "After centuries of civil war and religious controversies, the agreement no longer seemed possible about a single hierarchy of virtues, shared purposes or principles of distributive justice." (BOYD, 2008, p.68)

<sup>233</sup> T 3.2.11.2, SBN 567-8



mutual benefit can be expanded between nations. A kingdom that exports and imports becomes "more powerful as well as richer and happier",<sup>234</sup>Hume guarantees. For Miller, "Hume's preference for *laissez-faire* reflects a belief that this normally serves the nation best."<sup>235</sup> The wealth circulates and products also, "satisfying the senses and appetites",<sup>236</sup> as a result, the public is also benefited, as soon as there is a sufficient workload reserve enabling the satisfaction of public services without harming the needs and conveniences of life.

These conclusions anticipate the classical economic theory, which will be established in the writings of his fellow countryman Adam Smith. For these reasons, "Hume seems to be the archetypal supporter of modern commercial civilization".<sup>237</sup> His economic ideas argue that with constant laws safeguarding property, industry is animated, the arts flourish, and the prince lives guaranteed among subjects, that is, a civilized government "is a government of laws, not men."<sup>238</sup> Hume is certainly ahead of his time, showing that it is the quality of institutions that ensure the flowering of societies. And some of the elements that constitute such quality are the civil and economics liberty<sup>239</sup>. Oppression not only ruins subjects but also nobility itself, turning "and beggars their tenants",<sup>240</sup>so Hume considers harmful a government that contracts debts and mortgages public incomes, making taxes abusive and intolerable.

Just like private property and political freedom, the market is the result of human interactions towards situations of mutual gain. Once again here, a market economy, is a value recognized as one of the central characteristics of Classical Liberalism and meets the criteria of Hume's conservative form. The arguments proving such reconciliation are: (1) the general scheme of monetary exchange is generated not by a rational abstract order, but by the observation and repeated experience of men in society; (2) commercial activity provides mutualism, cooperation, collaboration and promote public goods and services; (3) the complexity of the order is the result of a gradual, voluntary and spontaneous process whose improvement stems from the combination of individual wills and not the result of rational

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<sup>234</sup> Co 14, Mil 263

<sup>235</sup> MILLER, 1981, p.129

<sup>236</sup> HUME, 1963, p. 134

<sup>237</sup> Boyd 2018,.p

<sup>238</sup> HUME, 1963, p.104

<sup>239</sup> Hume also advocates that workers be paid fairly. In the test "Trade" Hume develops two arguments: 1. A connection between production of luxury items and a vibrant economy, 2. An appeal to fairness in relation to the hiring of workers. Fair working class payment is a necessary condition for the first argument. Hume fought the argument of 18th-century thinkers who believed that if workers earned reasonable wages they would be inclined to licentious behavior. (View Soule, Edward, 2000)

<sup>240</sup> CL 13, Mil 94-5

design; (4) the social utility resulting from the trade agreement is the criterion for assessing its perpetuation.

In view of these conclusions, we can consider Hume a liberal for his defense of trade and the freedoms linked to such activity, as well as it is possible to characterize him as a conservative, for arguing that the functioning of this scheme depends on the conservation of a legal and hierarchical structure that will ensure the conditions for economic progress.

Such positioning corresponds to what Oakeshott termed politics of skepticism. For such a style the function of the government is limited to "preserving the order and balance relevant to the current condition and activities of society".<sup>241</sup> This style is in contrast to the politics of faith, which grants the Government more permission to interfere in the nature of activities, welcoming power and placing it "at the service of human perfection."<sup>242</sup> It should be emphasized that Hume's conservatism does not prevent adjustments or changes to the update of the trade scheme, however, his skepticism would certainly attack attempts to subvert it to some extravagant new version of economic policy, especially if it were inspired by axiomatic theories and alchemist philosophers.

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<sup>241</sup> OAKESHOTT, 2018, p.138

<sup>242</sup> OAKESHOTT, 2018,p.57

## 4 HUME'S CONSERVATIVE LIBERALISM

### 4.1 Liberalism and Common Life

As we have seen, Hume's liberalism is a positive set of social values that results from his historical and philosophical analysis. This means, briefly, that property, civil and economic freedom correspond to patterns inherited and perpetuated by reflection and habit. These organizational practices satisfy the general moral principles of pleasurable and utility<sup>243</sup>, as well as positively shape our psychological functioning and its mechanism of sympathy. We can therefore, considering Hume's defense of these values, group him among liberal thinkers. That being the case, what does it mean to consider him a conservative within these terms?

Before moving forward in formulating the answer to this question, it should be reminded that liberal and conservative are terms of the early nineteenth century framed to characterize a political and intellectual response to the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution<sup>244</sup>. Although Hume did not live during that period, nor there is any mention of such "isms" in his writings, it is undeniable that Hume's works "have altered the future course of both liberalism and conservatism."<sup>245</sup> Therefore, if we go back a few steps we may be able to identify such inspirations, and thus better understand the meaning of these concepts and what place Hume takes in this debate.

From a structural point of view, as we have seen in the previous chapters, liberalism and conservatism constitute part of Hume's political framework, giving him a *sui generis* positioning. Initially, we can say that his distinctive theory implies a sort of prudentialism, in other words, moderation. Moderation will be regarded here as a conservative disposition in the face of political affairs. The moderate's bedrock premise is the basic understanding that there will always be imperfection and a degree of uncertainty when dealing with political decisions. Caution in the face of innovations – especially those that favor technical knowledge to the detriment of practical knowledge – comes from recognizing that schemes of actions in a social

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<sup>243</sup> Hume's perspective on utility is rather different from the utilitarian approach. First because he does not consider the principle of utility as a supreme normative standard and its calculative approach valid, that is "utilitarian assume a model of man as a creature capable of altering his behavior according to a calculation of relative advantage. (see Miller, 1984, p.190)

<sup>244</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1995, p. 151

<sup>245</sup> WOLIN, 1954, p. 999

order do not lend themselves to simplifications. What's more, human nature is too unstable and passion-oriented to expect that unfailing theories will reform men, such government plans, Hume writes, "are plainly imaginary."<sup>246</sup> That explains much of conservative's suspicions of grand schemes. Echoing conservatism's core feature, Hume's philosophy is all about showing us how complex wide-ranging schemes<sup>247</sup> result from the natural workings of imagination and its cumulative developments in the course of history.

This perspective inevitably generates undreamy men, who distrust any project that promises immutable and perfect orders, because skeptical conservatives, like Hume, understand that politics, as Oakeshott stated, is the world of the "traditional, circumstantial and transitory."<sup>248</sup> Therefore, the political conservative will tend to be economical with idealism and attentive to the concreteness of the facts and hostile to apriori propositions. This means keeping in mind Hume's underlying question: "*from what impression is that supposed idea derived?*"<sup>249</sup> If the answer is: from the calculations of an autonomous reason or the customs of superstitions, to the moderate, they do not meet the terms of an appropriate answer. This is because, neither reason can establish maxims without the support of experience, nor does superstition extract its principles from regular and careful observation of facts<sup>250</sup>. Any of these philosophical accounts, wrongly suppose that words such as rights, obligations and political authority have a metaphysical or rational foundation. It is a logical consequence that, such fixed assumptions, especially when supported by political factions, or what Hume termed parties of speculative principle<sup>251</sup>, eliminate any room for moderation.

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<sup>246</sup> IPC 4, Mil 514

<sup>247</sup> Russel Hardin explains Hume's account of government, or other conventions imply that the maintenance of a convention is an issue for functional explanation. Such explanation is sought whenever there are many variables involved and multiple causes of a rule or multiple rules that could handle a particular problem and there is a feedback from effect to cause, so that the explanation seems circular. In these cases, we are able to say how such a convention works but not necessarily how it got to be this way. The following is a form of functional explanation of some institution or behavioral pattern. An institution or a behavioral pattern X is explained by its function for group G if and only if:

1. F is an effect of X
2. F is beneficial for G
3. F maintains X by a causal feedback loop passing through G

Example: X is government, F is social order and G are the citizens. (See Hardin, 2007, especially Chapter 4).

<sup>248</sup> OAKESHOTT, 1963, p.3

<sup>249</sup> E 2.9, SBN 21-2

<sup>250</sup> Hume claims that if an idea does not have any impression associated with it, it lacks any real meaning. because such idea is detached from experience, either of the world of feelings or empirical sensation. Philosophical maxims imply necessity, and in the realm of actions as in the realm of facts necessity is the result of habit, not reason, therefore it is not a mere relation of ideas. The same goes for the costumes derived from superstitions, after all, their maxims were not extracted from regular observation but from abstract reasoning and fanciful imagination.

<sup>251</sup> Hume's argument is that such parties do not operate within the limits of common life, moreover they provoke violence, as their metaphysical principles do not allow any contrary pattern of conduct. Not only metaphysical principles cannot be applied to the world, they also turn parties into religious factions eager to impose such principles.

The term moderation is difficult to frame. After all, what does it mean to be moderate in practical terms? Or even theoretically speaking? In fact, the main aim of this work has been to frame the notion of moderation from a coherent reconciliation between Liberalism and Conservatism. To this end, Hume's theory is capable of fitting core elements from both political concepts, providing a balance between freedom and authority, as well as conservation and change. The concern with a fitting between both concepts has to do with the fact that the preservation of a constitutional regime depends on moderation<sup>252</sup>. After all, it is only through moderation that concessions are possible. The opposite of concession is imposition, and whenever ideas are imposed there will naturally be violence, instability and the strangling of freedom and pluralism.

We can, for now, define moderation as the intellectual disposition that harmoniously combines two features present in the political realm: permanence and change. The first lies in recognizing the strength of the conventions consolidated by time, which endure for their social utility and *mutual benefit*. The second lies in the realization that changes are inherent to the civilizing process itself. Therefore, innovations are welcome, *if and only if* they do not jeopardize the principles that enable the very subsistence of what Hume called civilized societies. In sum, social organizations where tolerance, freedom, consented exchanges and property exist depend on the preservation of a certain legal structure whose laws protect an ethics of individualism.

Therefore, the opposite of conservatism here is not progressivism itself, but political rationalism: “independence of mind on all occasions, for thought free from obligation to any authority save the authority of 'reason'.”<sup>253</sup> In other words, conservatives will oppose changes guided by ideologues, “men of theory” who disregard the authority of habit and neglect probabilistic judgments in favor of a set of abstract ideas. Moreover, ideologues tend to see politics as a “revolutionary instrument for transforming society and even human nature.”<sup>254</sup> A reaction to this sort of thinking is the very reason why Hume can be labeled a secular conservative<sup>255</sup>. Unlike rationalism, which aims at perfection by trying to conform reality to the maxims of reason, the question that takes place as the object of moderation is: how can novelty

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<sup>252</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p.327

<sup>253</sup> OAKESHOTT, 1965, p.1

<sup>254</sup> KIRK, 2014, p.91

<sup>255</sup> Livingston points out that Hume's conservatism differs from “Latin Conservatives” because his “works are framed from a cosmopolitan point of view and ordered around a system of philosophy”. That means that Hume's assumptions were not developed as a reaction to events, but “were deliberately worked out in the mid-day of the Enlightenment”. (See Livingston, 1984, chapter twelve, p.310)

merge with the past and how can the past remain in novelty without suppressing the movement of both realities as well as the stability of the social order?

By analyzing which of Hume's ideas align with liberal thinking and which of his epistemological assumptions lead him to a conservative philosophy, the term moderate gains clarity and a theoretical body, weakening its label of "unspoken wisdom". My submission is that, for Hume, liberal values are constructed, refined and perpetuated by habit and may be criticized and modified by rational analyses and case-by-case method. While Hume's conservatism, "an obvious consequence of his skepticism and his political empiricism"<sup>256</sup>, sets the limits for such rational analysis. This dual structure is the scaffold of Hume's prudentialism, whose main purpose is to ensure the fundamental conventions of justice and prevent the side-effects of "metaphysical rebellion" brought by false philosophy, namely fanaticism, zealotry and radicalism.

However, while several scholars have concluded that "all the works of the Scottish philosopher denote his undeniable conservative inclination",<sup>257</sup> other authors still claim that Hume's political philosophy is by no means conservative. Christian Berry, for example, argues that Hume could not be considered a conservative, because his philosophy was closely engaged in Science and strongly opposed to superstitions, and such commitment distances the Scotsman from any approximation to conservatism. Here is Berry's argument:

Hume considers it a central role of the science of man to challenge and overturn prejudice, notably in the form of superstition, and his conviction of the possibility of a science of politics indicates that his skepticism is not pressed into conservative political service.<sup>258</sup>

Berry also maintains that Hume places habit as cement of the universe because "that declaration reflects his analysis of causality and the centrality he apportions to it"<sup>259</sup>, thus the universality of its scope cannot serve as support for "one particular application over another"<sup>260</sup>. However, all the arguments gathered so far indicate that Berry's conclusions are misleading, for Hume's conservatism is precisely a scientific and analytical position in the face of political issues. By dispensing with axiomatic theories, Hume is taking circumstances and feasibility seriously. Much of what Hume writes is to defend that there is no "Archimedean point" to evaluate proposals and that we should, therefore, make our judgments by comparison. For that

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<sup>256</sup> PUPO, 2016, p. 24

<sup>257</sup> PUPO, 2016, p.25

<sup>258</sup> BERRY, 2011, p.144

<sup>259</sup> BERRY, 2011, p.145

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. p.145

reason, a status quo bias<sup>261</sup> will naturally take part in his conservatism, meaning that “all policy proposals must be assessed ‘from here’ rather than from some abstract or impartial perspective”<sup>262</sup>. That is exactly how a true philosopher should proceed when reflecting on political changes: dispense with foundational justifications and metaphysical thinking then consider a set of feasible options together with the conditions of the status quo<sup>263</sup>.

Moreover, for Hume, science is allied to his experimental method of reasoning, which means extracting from experience general principles that are vital if we wish to develop intelligent institutions. Therefore, the very notion that habit is a psychological compensation for the beliefs we cannot justify rationally is a product of his experimental method. Consequently, Hume’s scientific account is exactly what leads him to an anti-foundationalism and skeptical account.

Other fact that Berry seems to neglect is that habit is one of the principles of greatest influence in the formation of our judgments that we form in relation to values and facts, in it “consists the whole nature of belief.”<sup>264</sup> Habit, Hume tells us, is what makes any kind of predictable knowledge possible, whether about human actions or facts, it is habit acting underneath the mind’s tendency for regularity and order. If we think that artifices and political institutions are valuable, it is not because they conform to reason, that is, our demonstrative and analytical capacity, but rather that they are founded on our experiences towards them.

Men consider and seek to preserve certain conventions much more by feeling and habit than reflection. That’s why justice, Hume says, is based on impression. It would be impossible for men to articulate fair laws and general norms without the principle of causality. The very principle of causality is responsible for promoting adherence and motivation to the rules of justice. It is habit that teaches men what happens when they violate such general norms, and hence provide them with social and moral knowledge.

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<sup>261</sup> Here I take into consideration Brennan and Hamlin’s arguments. Their article is an attempt to provide an analytical account of the modern conservative disposition. They hold that “conservatism can be understood as a disposition that grants the status quo a normative authority by virtue of its being the status quo”. Having this key element in mind, the authors see that conservatism adopts an intellectual stance like normative economy. For them, a conservative ‘posture’ is just a derivative result that may emerge when one does one’s normative analysis properly, taking full cognizance of fundamental ignorance/uncertainty in all relevant dimensions. Being a ‘conservative’ consequentialist is just a matter of being a consequentialist who ‘takes feasibility seriously’ in a particular way. (See Brennan and Hamlin, *Analytic Conservatism*, 2004, British Journal of Political Science, 34)

<sup>262</sup> BRENNAN, 2004, p. 679

<sup>263</sup> Status quo bias to characterize conservatives cannot be understood as a timeless disposition to *defend* the status quo. Because any ideology in power will defend the status quo. “Marxists, Liberals and Socialists in power have a disposition to defend the status quo and to look with dark suspicion on any proposal for fundamental change”. Conservatism, in the sense of an intellectual tradition, should be viewed as a movement that appears on the scene whenever its enemy appears: the violent intrusion of rationalistic metaphysics into politics. (See Livingston, 1984, Chapter 12)

<sup>264</sup> E 5.11, SBN 48

No individual or citizen who enters the world can choose the conventions in which he is inserted, "an implied consent can only have place where a man imagines that the matter depends on his choice"<sup>265</sup>. Neither language, nor currency, nor even traffic rules or government obedience are based on given consensus, or at some principle in accordance with reason. Instead, consent is built, internalized and *desired* when fulfills a certain purpose: to ensure a regime of norms that meet our individual interests and inadvertently social interests. All these issues not only depend but are product of the association mechanism of ideas: causality.

But Berry insists, Hume's "disposition" is anything but "conservative". John Stewart also claims that Hume could not be considered a conservative, as his philosophical contributions led several of the social reforms that paved the way for Classical liberalism. For Stewart, Hume was ready, eager to put prejudices, precedents, and customs to test."<sup>266</sup> Stewart may be overlooking that such social reforms took place and were possible in the face of the structures and conventions formed in ordinary life. Perhaps Berry, Stewart and other authors resist any approximation with the conservative term, because they take this concept to mean the maintenance of prejudices, or the notion that the social order depends on maintaining metaphysical or religious beliefs<sup>267</sup>. If these authors have in mind this definition of conservatism, certainly Hume cannot be associated with such a term. However, Hume's conservatism is not anchored on any kind of religious tactics like those of Maistre or Bonald<sup>268</sup>, or any sort of metaphysical belief.

What is important to note is that, Hume's conservatism is nothing more than his core motto: habit is the guide of human life. Habit is responsible for the sedimentation of private property, for the perpetuation of our constitutional conventions and for maintaining our economic enterprises. " A position of this kind must in a diffuse sense be conservative, not because it is yet committed to a particular set of institutions or social arrangements, but because it remains closely tied to conventionally accepted judgments."<sup>269</sup> Hume understands that men cannot be masters of their own destiny, because what has brought them so far is beyond our rational agency.

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<sup>265</sup> OC 23, Mil 475

<sup>266</sup> STEWART, 1995, p.167

<sup>267</sup> This sort of conservatism is usually associated with Joseph de Maistre, who held that society was not made by man, weak as he is and his 'reason' a feeble pretense, but by God. Thus, any attack on the social order amounts to a blasphemy. Furthermore, society is held together only by the executioner, 'the terror of human society and the tie that holds it together'. This is conservatism as reactionary ideology. Anthony O'Hear, '*Conservatism*', in Edward Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), section 1.

<sup>268</sup> See Spartaco Pupo, *Il conservatorismo politico di David Hume*, *Rivista Di Politica*, 02/2016

<sup>269</sup> MILLER, 1984, p.191



That does not mean that everything generated by habit is useful, agreeable and mutually beneficial. Habit can also help to ingrain superstitions and fantasies in people's imaginations. Even good liars are the product of habit, "who by the frequent repetition of their lies, come at last to believe and remember them, as realities"<sup>270</sup>. Beliefs, Hume tells us, can gain vigor through repetition "and custom and habit having in this case, as in many others, the same influence on the mind as nature"<sup>271</sup>. The same ambivalence is present in social sympathy, it ensures the communication of our feelings, but it can also generate fanatical factions and zealotry; "less laudable effects of this social sympathy in human nature"<sup>272</sup>, says Hume, It is out of sympathy that men communicate their passions and enthusiasms. Good and evil are not ontologically divorced, virtues and vices share the same reality. "Nothing is pure and entirely of a piece. All advantages are attended with disadvantages".<sup>273</sup> This is where social utility in accordance with a general point of view and rules for reasoning serve as a standard for judging conventions.

Hume shows how our social life is built upon customary conventions, but he never said all conventions are desirable. When Hume refutes metaphysicians, he is considering the gradual refinement of society, for reforms and changes are possible exactly because, unlike religion and philosophy, common life's conventions are not absolute. That is exactly why secular conservatism must be distinguished from ideological positions adopted by political parties who bear the label 'conservative'.

For all these reasons, Hume's epistemological stance can be labeled what Mc Arthur called precautionary conservatism, or what Wolin called analytical conservatism, or what Quinton called conservative rationalism, or what Oakeshott called conservative disposition, or what Livingston called secular conservatism. If Hume positively defends the values of what was later called Classical Liberalism, it is because individual freedom restricted by spontaneous and mutually advantageous orders do not present an opposition "to the principles of human nature, but rather a construction upon them"<sup>274</sup>. In the end, what Hume did was to reconstruct liberal values through his experimental method, providing us, through a naturalistic account, with good reasons why we ought to preserve them.

For Hume the main values of liberalism must be defended, not because they are true, that is, because they correspond to an analytical and demonstrable relationship, but because

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<sup>270</sup> T 1.3.5.6, SBN 86

<sup>271</sup> Ibid. 115

<sup>272</sup> M 5.35, SBN 224

<sup>273</sup> HUME, 2005, p.125

<sup>274</sup> WHELAN, 1985, p.251

these values, refined and polished over years, are expressions of our educated calm passions. Liberal values provide a life in society based on mutual contentment. Such values were not rationally designed but perceived and assumed as a source of pleasure, for they promote a more peaceful life in society, where our individual interests are met along with our public ones.

The conclusion to be drawn here is that there is absolutely no sense in expecting reason to be the foundation for obligations that were not built solely by reason. Hume's naturalistic account defends that obedience and fidelity are not maintained over promise, "the general interests or necessities of society are sufficient to establish both"<sup>275</sup>. Hume reminds us that we are sensitive beings who learn how to reason, not rational beings who learn how to feel. Impressions precede ideas, not the other way around. Imagination, however, is an efficient slave and provides us with valuable information on our long-term interests. In short, a civilized society is one where men have internalized the positive effects of being motivated by calm passions.

If Hume is a liberal, it is because liberal political values motivate men into acting virtuously and empathically. Hume, as Livingston wrote, presents a story of how "an ethic of individualism began to appear, touching only a few at first, but over the centuries gradually spreading and appearing throughout Europe."<sup>276</sup> We value property, liberty and commerce not because it is consistent with the true and false, but because it corresponds to our will, our self-interest and our sympathy.

For Hume, liberalism is a practice of life, not a philosophy. Liberalism, in this sense, is a consequence of men's ability to invent artifices out of their self-interest, reflection and ambivalent human nature. A liberal way of life, Hume would say, is a mean to satisfy our emotional and intellectual ends in a socially shared world. In short, liberalism is the world of common life systematized and organized. That historical understanding of liberalism is what makes Hume a conservative liberal.

## **4.2 Applying Moderation: Hume against extremism**

Hume's philosophy can be read as systematic theory against fanaticism. That is, by no means, any exaggeration. Moderation is not only a virtue to be praised or cultivated, for Hume a

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<sup>275</sup> OC 36, Mil 480-1

<sup>276</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1995, p.175

moderated mind is a requirement for any philosopher who wishes to develop a valid project and contribute to the world.

A philosopher who is detached from common life and mankind “is wrapped up in principles and notions equally remote from their comprehension”<sup>277</sup>. Yet, the ignorant who shows no interest in science and does not put his prejudices to test is no role model either. “The most perfect character is supposed to lie between those extremes”<sup>278</sup>, Hume tells us. Therefore, a true philosopher should keep a hybrid life, dwell in the world of ideas and books mingled with the world of actions and social life.

It is experience that limits the absurdities of our imagination, it is daily and common life that contradict our infallible tenets. “Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man”<sup>279</sup>, Hume prescribes to his readers. The underlying normative claim Hume is making is that we cannot say how the world ought to be until we have understood how it is. And that is exactly what Hume does when reflecting on our political obligations, in his own words: “in order to establish laws for the regulation of property, we must be acquainted with the nature and situation of man.”<sup>280</sup> The lesson is that knowing how we feel, think and act is mandatory if we wish to know what can be changed and what cannot.

Hume’s major contribution here is the idea that one should conform to facts about human behavior and mental life when philosophizing about politics. A realistic account is more likely to establish attainable resolutions and it is decisive for determining the content of justice, that is, the types of principles we can endorse. Hume’s explanation for the emergence of justice and conventions resonates in contemporary philosophy, Rawls’ “circumstances of justice”<sup>281</sup> and Hayek’s spontaneous orders<sup>282</sup> owe to Hume’s theory of social order.

Furthermore, Hume’s account of justice is closely tied to his commitment to a government free from moral or religious doctrines, his point is that political institutions should only be the mean in which human beings depend on to satisfy their multiple ends. That explains why Hume’s political and economic theories are joined in his philosophy, for both are grounded on individual

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<sup>277</sup> E 1.5, SBN 8

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, p.22

<sup>279</sup> E 1.6, SBN 8-9

<sup>280</sup> M 3.27, SBN 194-5

<sup>281</sup> Angela Coventry and Alex Sager claim that Rawls’s Theory of Justice has set the agenda in contemporary political philosophy, therefore mainstream political philosophy is a series of answers or critics to Rawls’ ideas. According to the authors Hume’s political philosophy resonates in Rawls’ concepts and framework, therefore Hume may be much more influential than people give credit for. (See Angela Coventry and Alex Sager *Hume and Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 2011).

<sup>282</sup> See Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*.

values<sup>283</sup>: own- welfare on an individual level and mutual-advantage on an aggregate level<sup>284</sup>. Hume's point is to show that it will be in my interest to support the government (political institution) if it allows my life plans to be fulfilled, by executing the laws of justice so that I and others have the security and freedom (economical institutions) to seek our own advantages, be it material or non-material.

Rawls' "veil of ignorance" resonates Hume's distinction between individual values and institutional values. Hume's view of social order suggests a framework constituted by principles that represent a sense of general interest enforced by legal institutions. Values derived from religion or philosophy, in turn, are not of general interest. That point is made clear when Hume states that the general virtue of a State "can never arise from the most refined precepts of philosophy, or even the severest injunctions of religion"<sup>285</sup> What Rawls calls "comprehensive doctrines"<sup>286</sup>, Hume first called philosophy and religion. The limited role ascribed to government allows people to live peacefully alongside one another, as they do not need to agree on ends just on means.

In this light we can conceive Hume's theory of justice as an attempt to keep political conceptions free from private ideas of God or philosophical conceptions of a good life. Men's ends are multiple; for they are not a matter of being neither true nor false, therefore, they cannot be reduced into one single end. For that reason Hume's ideas are compatible with modern pluralistic societies. Note that in his view "government it is not necessary in all circumstances"<sup>287</sup>, small societies can subsist without such invention, but not without rules of justice. Government, therefore, is not the cause of human beings' sociability, but its effect. Consequently, we should not expect the government to have a leading role in people's life.

From what has been observed so far it seems reasonable to conclude that when politics is taken as the expression of one absolute idea of good life or is given a supranatural mission such as the salvation of men, the transformation of our human nature or the path to a new order, it results in terror and brutal violence. Politics, for Hume, is the art of the possible, the place where evolutionary reforms and gradual changes should be sought, not redemption.

If Hume was hostile to sects and parties inspired by either what he called false philosophy (ideology) or religious zeal, it is because the very nature of such factions triggered violent

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<sup>283</sup> That does not make Hume a mere hedonistic, for men are strongly moved by benevolence. The rules of justice emerge to expand our sympathy. It is partial sympathy, that is, our concern with others nearest us the cause of contrary passions and in many occasions the love for other can surpass our self-love. (T. 3.2.2.6)

<sup>284</sup> See Hardin, 2007, especially Chapter 8 on Value Theory.

<sup>285</sup> PG 1, Mil 54-5

<sup>286</sup> Rawls, Theory of Justice

<sup>287</sup> T 3.2.8.1, SBN 539-40

passions, for they believed their cause to be sacred, and “when this frenzy once takes place, which is the summit of enthusiasm, every whim is consecrated”<sup>288</sup> “Radicals of this sort aimed to rebuild societies upon principles determined by reason, expecting the world to conform to some rational or divine order. But for Hume, there is no conceivable social order or way of life that could maximize all moral or virtues at once”<sup>289</sup>, that’s why revolutionary aims and promises of perfect and utopian orders are not only deceitful, but dangerous.

Though the Scotsman did not live to see the terror that took place after the French Revolution, nor the designed killing programs provoked by Nazism and Communism, he lived long enough to know what happens when political factions believe they are endowed with absolute truth and timeless principles, that was the case with the Puritan Revolution. “What the Puritans eventually sought was not reform but a total transformation of the social and political order in accord with a religious ideology”<sup>290</sup>. By Hume’s rejection of rationalism, we can suppose that he would have opposed to Marxism, Libertarianism, Egalitarianism or any sort of “ism” grounded on perfect formulas, axiomatic principles or providential views of History. The question we must now ask is what type of political arguments are ruled out by Hume’s conservative framework?

Now that we know what place Hume takes on this debate, and where conservatism and liberalism are allocated in his political philosophy we can use this framework to distinguish reasonable arguments from those that are grounded on a corrupted epistemology, in other words, false philosophy. Assuming that moderation means to carefully examine how decisions and changes<sup>291</sup> can be made without hindering the established conventions, in which individuals rely on to protect them, then we are able to know what kind of political arguments would, in Hume’s view, conceal risky implications. Applying his conservative framework, we can illustrate the arguments that would not correspond to the moderation required by Hume. For instance:

- (a) Political arguments that wish to make changes based on absolute principles taken from a set of abstract ideas, disregarding information, variables and ignoring any evidence and real-life consequences of such results would be ruled out.

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<sup>288</sup> HUME, *Superstition and Enthusiasm*.

<sup>289</sup> RASSMUSSEN, 2014, p. 40.

<sup>290</sup> Bounge, 1965, Livingston’s foreword.

<sup>291</sup> Considering the practical implications of how and where changes should take place in Hume’s institutional conservatism, Sabl explains that the fundamental conventions - Monarchy and Magna Carta – are static, and the parliament’s effective role is dynamic and evolutionary, so as society changes and new problems and actors arise, “the political role of the parliament also changes”. (See Sabl, 1969 especially chapter 7)

- (b) Political arguments that wish to weaken or eliminate any of the fundamental conventions, such as the rules of justice, through violent innovations or judgements determined by some philosophically autonomous principle.
- (c) Political arguments that wish to maintain or undermine an existing order would not be valid, unless they were backed up by evidence regarding not only their social utility but their implications on people's political freedom and equality before the law. (that would rule out radical and reactionary arguments)
- (d) Political arguments that wish to grant the state full power to interfere with the production, trade, wage, and price levels should be ruled out. Not only did Hume accept the notion of a self-regulating market, he distrusted men's power to plan and centralize the economical information flow. That does not mean that judgements favoring a welfare state would be immediately rejected by Hume's conservative framework. Though his theory does not provide much room for what is called social justice, for that was left to private morality, it displays an openness to the devices for resolving disagreement about such theories. As Sabl has put it, "a parliamentary solution to the problem of equality is therefore Humean but not Hume's".<sup>292</sup> Livingston stressed that this question cannot be answered a priori, yet "evolutionary reform is not only possible in Hume's system, it is internal to the narrative imagination"<sup>293</sup>. Given Hume's defense of an economic order free from political control, I am tempted to say that if pressed on this question Hume would probably opt for a narrow distributive justice, as long as it yielded social utility, clear beneficial consequences and prosperity without making people work harder to pay the burden.
- (e) Political arguments that demand the maximization of equality or liberty would be rejected. Hume states that the equal division of property is a pernicious idea and that perfect equality is "impracticable"<sup>294</sup>, since the existence of different social stations results from freedom. Hume points out that ranking is inevitable, and it happens because talents, reputation, labor can generate different standings. "Render possessions ever so equal, men's different degrees of art, care, and industry will immediately break that equality"<sup>295</sup>, says Hume. Any attempt to deliberately destroy social ranks is doomed to fail and may be socially damaging. The same goes for the maximization of

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<sup>292</sup> SABL, 1969, p.209

<sup>293</sup> LIVINGSTON, 1984, p.340

<sup>294</sup> M 3.25, SBN 193-4

<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 255

liberty, the restriction of natural liberty enforced by constitutional conventions is vital for the subsistence of societies and its stable order, hence arguments taken from ideologies such as Anarchism or Communism would be ruled out.

- (f) Political arguments that wish to apply legal asymmetry, in other words, any attempt to provide special laws to specific groups or class of people would be ruled out. Hume's idea of a free government is strongly committed to everyone being equal before the law.

All the arguments illustrated above fail to meet the terms of Hume's conservative framework and, of course, conflict with the liberal ideas that his historical and naturalistic account subscribe. These judgments are not something one can be moderate about, for which they are grounded on reasons' free play, they ought to be eschewed at all costs. Taking Hume's framework seriously can provide us with a strong theoretical device against the threat of extremism, as it yields philosophical arguments, firmly rooted in experience and analyses, to reject the sort of judgement that feeds radicalism.

With these criteria spelled out, Hume's *sui generis* positioning in this debate (conservatism versus liberalism) gains clarity and a compelling version. Miller remarkably summarized Hume's conservatism as a position where "liberty is the jam, security the bread"<sup>296</sup>, given Hume's demand for a fine line to walk, he would probably have agreed with Miller's analogy. The lesson here is that mechanistic models of society filled with political geometry cannot do justice to the workings of time and our pre-reflexive wisdom of building intelligent cooperation schemes.

Even though Hume prescribes caution and respect with the useful artifices that carry the mark of time, he leaves considerable room left for changes and new schemes that happen to evolve to deal with grievances and newcomers. Despite Hume's preference of a mixed government, his political positioning can be applied to contemporary open societies, where moderation should not be considered a mere character to be praised but the very best disposition for democracies to thrive.

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<sup>296</sup> MILLER, 1984, p.195

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The starting point of this study was to carefully illustrate what Hume meant when he said that it was the wise magistrate's obligation to respect what brings the marks of age. Hume's explanation of social conventions, through the lens of time and the effect it has upon our behavior, attests his remarkable stance as an original political philosopher. His perception of mankind as an inventive species together with his account of our mind's casual reasoning and the natural workings of imagination culminate in a *sui-generis* philosophical conception. Such uniqueness contemplates a political theory, whose greatest contribution is a compelling reconciliation between the core elements of Secular Conservatism and Classical Liberalism.

The result achieved by reading Hume's philosophical system as whole is a conceptual scheme with a *permanent* conservative framework that encloses a *dynamic* set of liberal values. These values are legitimate because they do not fail the criteria determined by Hume's mitigated skepticism, which approves mutually advantageous conventions, brought up by observation and repeated experience, that correspond to the standard of social utility. Such theoretical structure yields fixed rules for judging arguments and political actions that occur in the transitory arena of politics.

The underlying question always present in this dissertation was: how can our past narrative orders mingle with the present order without hindering social stability? To provide a comprehensive answer, one that was loyal to Hume's philosophical work, this study took into consideration his fundamental epistemological conclusions, that were afterwards carefully related to his substantive political ideas. Based on this procedure we were able to place Hume among conservative and liberal thinkers without reducing the complexity of this thought into a restricted label.

Much has been said, as well as unsaid, about Hume's influence in the liberal and conservative tradition. His place in political philosophy has been disputed by several scholars, however, some of them failed to grasp a sensible allocation of both terms in his work. The observations gathered in this study showed that Hume's *liberalism* correspond to a set of social practices that evolved in common life's relations and were brought up by men's ability to invent large scale interaction schemes of cooperation and coordination. Hume is considering useful and agreeable schemes that resist the test of time, for they satisfy both individual and social needs. Such conventions are kept open for refinements and evolutionary reforms. Whereas,



Hume's *conservatism* is to be found in his epistemological conclusions that reveal his main normative claim: any philosopher, contrary to what rationalism postulates, is inevitably committed to a causal experience of the world, where past impressions constitute his reasoning. thus, habit is a cognitive instrument to be systematized and corrected, not a reality to be overthrown.

Even though Hume's lesson is that true philosophers must lie between the world of ideas and the world of action, keeping a moderated frame of mind, his work is philosophically revolutionary. Hume's political ideas are radically against the invasion of pure abstraction and religious tenets in the political realm. He strongly warned us to pay homage to the institutions that brought us so far, by which he meant artifices that have prevailed because they are, after all, in accordance with the general interest of society. Innovations to correct wrongs and imperfections are desirable, but no one has the right to introduce violent innovations expecting experience to conform to the whims of an unleashed imagination.

Understanding Hume's realistic and evolutionary perspective can help us grasp the errors provoked by rationalism, manifested by men's will to invert the world according to an infallible system of ideas. It were violent passions combined with an efficient instrumental reason that helped radicals to implement their extravagant ideologies upon societies' inevitable imperfections. Experience together with rational analyses is the tool to be used to refine our political obligations, not an emancipated reason. If reason is let loose, common life ceases to be the true guide of actions, whereas superstition and philosophical enthusiasm lead men to fanaticism. Accordingly, Hume's philosophy can be taken as a valuable shelter against dreamy men who insist on seeing societies as machines to be perfected by their logical chain of thoughts.

Much has been said about Hume's moral and epistemological contributions, but not enough about his geniality as a political thinker. There is, of course, many problems that Hume is unable to provide us with answers. Nevertheless, he was ahead of his time when he advised us to design political institutions that would work well even for citizens who were not benevolent, in his own words, systems ruled by "knaves". Thus, there is much we can learn from his institutional-utilitarianism, since his theory proposes that the political exercise be performed prudentially, based on the coordination of interests - privileging the public interest - and handling conflicts, in a way that frees political institutions from private moral ends. It is up to the government to ensure the rules of justice so that members of society can enjoy the stability of institutions and thus refine liberties and civilized living.

The ideas developed here illustrate that Hume can be placed among modern conservatives, for his political philosophy favors our clever psychological compensations, distrusting the ability of reason to dictate men's ends. He can also be grouped among liberal thinkers for his defense of property, liberty and commercial societies.

However, these findings also raise questions about certain societies, where conventions, that violate the very liberty proposed by Hume's theory of justice, still survive. How should atrocious conventions, such as genital mutilation, legal death punishment of homosexuals, stoning of women in Saudi Arabia be broken? When Hume developed his ideas, he was, of course, thinking of societies where the legal structure is constituted by rules that protect individuals against groups and the state, thus ensuring liberty. He did state that when government does not protect our interest, trust is damaged, and civil disobedience is an option. Still, how the break of such harmful conventions should be carried out? Therefore, further research is needed to complement his theory of conventions, so that questions regarding these issues be answered properly.

This work aimed to show the originality and importance of Hume's teachings, attesting his affinities with the conservative and liberal tradition and displaying his views as a guide for contemporary philosophy. Having conservatism and liberalism harmoniously placed means having a balanced account of social security and liberty. The bottom line is, when moderated skepticism towards human power and optimism in casual learning are prudently distributed, then permanence and change can walk hand in hand. For all these reasons, Hume's political philosophy proves to be a worthwhile theoretical shelter against the invasion of rationalism and extremism in politics.

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