

# UTILITY AND REALITY IN HUME'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

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**Abstract.** This article aims at explaining a utilitarian and a realistic thought as the keystones of David Hume's political theory. For this purpose, in the first section, I treat Hume's moral theory as the basis of his political thinking. Hume thinks that every person has the natural ability to feel utility for society or humankind to be pleasant, but that this inborn ability is nevertheless limited such that we need artificial rules (virtues) for social interest. In the second section, through some concrete examples, I demonstrate that, in Hume's political theory, such a utilitarian basis is connected solidly with realistic thought. Hume believes that political theory should take into consideration what is really possible for human nature and for the present social situation. Because of human nature, the real human world can never be perfectly moral. Thus, I argue that the central purpose in Hume's political thought is not to build an ideal and perfect speculative theory; rather, it is to point out the concrete way to make a society or a nation more advantageous for its members in a realizable manner.

**Keywords:** Hume, Politics, Utility, Reality

## Introduction

In "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding," David Hume, one of the most famous Scottish philosophers, writes:

It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of this premise, Hume inquires into the core of human nature. As is well known, at the beginning of *A Treatise of Human Nature (Treatise)*, Hume presents his philosophical inquiry as "the science of Man"<sup>2</sup> and states the following:

'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another.<sup>3</sup>

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Hume argues that there are four main sciences, which comprehend “almost every thing, which it can any way import us to be acquainted with, or which can tend either to the improvement or ornament of the human mind.”<sup>4</sup> These four sciences are logic, morals, criticisms, and politics.<sup>5</sup> This article will treat one of these sciences; namely, politics: the science that, according to Hume, considers and treats “men as united in society, and dependent on each other.”<sup>6</sup>

Hume’s analysis of “human nature” is based on the philosophical examination of human experience in general and how human knowledge, reasoning, or action is constructed in that experience. Famously, this examination begins with the premise that “ALL the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds,” which Hume calls “IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS.”<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, these two notions—“impression” as a lively perception and “idea” as a faint perception—are the basic components of human nature.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, Hume’s political theory as an important branch of the science of man is not independent from such basic components of human nature.<sup>9</sup> However, for the understanding of his political theory, there is a more important feature of human nature; that is, the social or political feature. Similarly to Aristotle,<sup>10</sup> Hume premises that the human being is a social or political animal. He writes:

[Man is] the creature of the universe, who has the most ardent desire of society, and is fitted for it by the most advantages. We can form no wish, which has not a reference to society. A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer.<sup>11</sup>

The building of society is, according to Hume, not only highly desirable but also indispensable for the human being, serving as compensation for its weakness as an animal species.<sup>12</sup> The establishment of society belongs to human nature, and Hume regards politics as the science that treats “men as united in society, and dependent on each other.”<sup>13</sup> In this sense, all social types can be treated within the spectrum of politics. However, Hume’s political theory is concerned mainly with the problems of the *government* of society.

Hume is of the opinion that men are capable of society without government, or, more exactly, the “small uncultivated society without government”<sup>14</sup> that he saw in the then-American tribes. This state of society is even “one of the most natural states of men,” but the “encrease of riches and possessions,” if it attains some degree, obliges people to learn and appreciate the advantages of government and to build it.<sup>15</sup> Hume’s political thinking is oriented primarily toward the problems of the society that has already come to feature a government.

In this article, I aim to explain that Hume’s political theory, his theory concerning government, is based, on the one hand, on utilitarian thought, and, on the other hand, on realistic thought; moreover, these two thoughts are firmly linked. Towards this aim, I first describe some fundamental tenets of Hume’s utilitarian moral theory as the bases of his political theory (See section I). Then, based on this description, I explain the importance of the notion of utility and reality in Hume’s political thinking (See section II).

### 1. Utilitarianism Concerning Morality

Concerning the science of man, Hume writes: “as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, famously, Hume’s empirical philosophy is based fundamentally on experience (or, in other words, perception) and warns us not to “go beyond experience”<sup>17</sup> when establishing the principles of any science. Of course, the principles of ethics are not excluded.<sup>18</sup>

On the basis of experience and observation, Hume found a very important meaning in the notion of utility or usefulness, which is relevant for the history of modern English philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Utility is so important for Hume that he finishes the introduction of the *Treatise* by proudly maintaining that his science of man serves as the only basis of the other sciences and is “much superior in *utility* to any other of human comprehension.”<sup>20</sup>

What is first to be emphasized regarding the notion of utility or usefulness is Hume’s idea that utility or usefulness *pleases* us naturally.<sup>21</sup> For Hume, it is “confirmed by experience”<sup>22</sup> that usefulness or utility means something pleasant and therefore approvable. This argument plays an indispensable role in his moral philosophy: Hume derives from his experience and observation that the *morally good* is *useful* and *pleasant*. A moral character or action is always a *useful* one. But what does utility or usefulness mean in this context? Hume writes the following in “An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals” (EPM), which he composed almost ten years after the *Treatise* and which, in his own opinion, “is of all” his “writings, historical, philosophical, or literary, incomparably the best”:<sup>23</sup>

Usefulness is agreeable, and engages our approbation. This is a matter of fact, confined by daily observation. But, *useful*? For what? For somebody’s interest, surely. Whose interest then? Not our own only: For our approbation frequently extends farther.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, for Hume, usefulness or utility is not only usefulness or utility for the self but for *society* or even for *humankind*. In the *Treatise*, Hume emphasizes the human adherence to the utility for self as the basis of *artificial* morals, which I will explain below. In EPM, by contrast, he accentuates the human inclination for the utility for society or humankind as the foundation of *natural* and *universal* morals.<sup>25</sup> What is important at present is the latter accentuation and Hume’s thought that every person has an *inborn* feeling or sentiment that *naturally* approves utility for society or humankind. Hume repeats in EPM emphatically that it is not self-love but the “natural sentiment”<sup>26</sup> of (general/universal) benevolence or humanity that “accounts, in great part, for the origin of morality.”<sup>27</sup> Hume maintains that we cannot explain the reason but that this is an evident fact that “is experienced to be a principle in human nature.”<sup>28</sup>

Moral character or action is thus, according to Hume, useful for society or humankind, and human beings have the *natural* ability to feel what is moral; i.e., what is useful for society or humankind, or what is harmful for it. Moreover, such a natural moral sentiment of humanity or general benevolence provides, at least in great part,

the only reliable criteria for the *universal* moral judgment of right and wrong. Hume argues:

[The] affection of humanity may not generally be esteemed so strong as vanity or ambition, yet, *being common to all men*, it can *alone* be the foundation of morals, or of any general system of blame or praise. [...] the humanity of one man is the humanity of every one, and the same object touches this passion in *all human creatures*.<sup>29</sup>

According to Hume, reason alone has no power to judge morally. Essentially, what it can do is only demonstrate *facts* objectively. Moral *judgment*, moral *evaluation*, belongs to the jurisdiction of sentiment.<sup>30</sup> “Reason must,” Hume says, “find” “the duties and obligations of morality,” but “can never produce them.”<sup>31</sup>

Morality is a natural talent of humankind, which, independently of any intellectual demonstrative ground, can give rise to or assure universal morality in human society. Such an argumentation could seem to imply that Hume’s view of human nature is very optimistic or even naive. It could seem to mean that we should only seek morality introspectively and formulate moral rules in our mind; or, that the human being should merely develop its natural character by hindering artificial or cultural influences on human nature. However, Hume’s thought is very far from an optimistic doctrine that human nature is fundamentally good.

As argued in the previous pages, Hume is of the firm opinion that every individual has a natural moral sense. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Hume believes that the human being is *merely and purely* a moral creature. On the contrary, he believes that it is a species that cannot be purely moral; in other words, the human being has not only a moral character but an immoral character.

The account of *natural* moral sentiment is scarce in the *Treatise* but emphasized in EMP, whereas that of *artificial* morality (virtue) is very short in EMP but detailed in the *Treatise*. In the third book of the *Treatise*, Hume dedicates much more space to artificial morality (virtue) than to natural morality. Artificial virtue refers to a virtue that produces “pleasure and approbation by means of an artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessity of mankind.”<sup>32</sup> What is to be noted here is Hume’s belief that the necessity of such an artifice or contrivance lies originally in the fact that the human being cannot be perfectly moral for the good of humankind.

Also in the *Treatise*, Hume does not deny that there is a natural sentiment of humanity or benevolence,<sup>33</sup> but he maintains there that “there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself.”<sup>34</sup> The moral sentiment of humanity is a human characteristic; nonetheless, it cannot be realized perfectly. The moral sentiment of humanity is natural but very limited. Hume derives from experience that “the generosity of men is very limited, and that it seldom extends beyond their friends and family, or, at most, beyond their native country.”<sup>35</sup> Our sentiment of humanity (i.e., an individual’s concern about utility for humankind in general) is so imperfect that, on

behalf of the interest of our society *as a whole*, we need unavoidably *artificial* virtues that Hume calls *justice*.

In this regard, Hume draws attention to the fact that justice is an artificial virtue, but it is called *artificial* only in contrast to natural virtues, which are based on natural moral sentiment. He writes:

[A]s no principle of the human mind is more natural than a sense of virtue; so no virtue is more natural than justice. Mankind is an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural [...].<sup>36</sup>

It belongs to human nature to contrive artificial virtues; i.e., justice. As explained above, Hume deems this the case because the human being is very limited in generosity or benevolence. Additionally, Hume names two other reasons for the origin of justice; namely, “*the selfishness*” (self-love) of human beings and “*the scanty provision nature has made*” for the wants of human beings.<sup>37</sup> As for the latter reason, if there is no scarcity of an object then this object will, Hume points out, never bring about social problems.<sup>38</sup> As for the former reason, individuals are always concerned with their own interests, and that is precisely why they will understand that it is also for their own benefit that there are artificial rules as social virtues.<sup>39</sup> Thus, these rules called justice naturally come to be established (first as voluntary conventions and then as explicitly formulated promises or contracts).<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, as an artificial social virtue (or vice), justice (or injustice) embodies social interest; for Hume, social morality. Once the rules or notions of justice are well established artificially and taken for granted in a society, the members of this society feel an approving and pleasant (or disapproving and unpleasant) sentiment spontaneously by the experience of the execution of justice (or injustice).<sup>41</sup>

This is a very relevant human feature upon which Hume's political theory is based. For Hume, a politician's task lies in producing “an esteem for justice, and an abhorrence of injustice” so as “to govern men more easily, and preserve peace in human society.”<sup>42</sup> Or, as Hume states elsewhere, the “utmost politicians can perform, is, to extend the natural [moral] sentiments beyond their original bounds.”<sup>43</sup>

When the politician's task is thus to promote strong connections between the natural moral sentiments and justice/injustice, the philosopher's or political theorist's task is to demonstrate what kind of justice (that is, what kind of rules about social morals) ought to be established. In the next section, I will explain Hume's thinking on this point; especially from the perspective of the relation between his utilitarianism and realism.

## 2. Political Realism in Relation to Utilitarianism

In the essay “That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science,” Hume writes as follows:

Legislators [...] ought not to trust the future government of a state entirely to chance, but ought to provide a system of laws to regulate

the administration of public affairs to the latest posterity. *Effects will always correspond to causes; and wise regulations in any commonwealth are the most valuable legacy that can be left to future ages.* In the smallest court or office, the stated forms and methods, by which business must be conducted, are found to be a considerable check on the natural depravity of mankind. Why should not the case be the same in public affairs?<sup>44</sup>

Thus, one of the main purposes of Hume's political writings is to point out "wise regulations" "in public affairs." For this purpose, Hume's thinking is historical and realistic, though this does not mean a lack of some universal laws in his political theory.<sup>45</sup> According to Hume's fundamental thought and attitude, the answer to the question "what is requisite for society or nation?" cannot be given without taking into consideration the real situation of a society or a nation.

Hume as a political realist does not seek an ideal, perfect, and universal political system. Rather, he assumes "moral complexity in the assessment of means and ends" and is "more concerned to avoid the worst than to achieve the best outcome."<sup>46</sup> We can find a good example of such a realistic attitude in Hume's ideas concerning the origin of society or nation.

Hume rejects the social contract theory according to which a society or nation has its foundation in a certain contract between its members. Hume believes that, historically, voluntary but implicit conventions go ahead of explicit contracts (promises).<sup>47</sup> He admits that government arises from the social contract originally, as far as this contract is understood in the sense of implicit convention. However, he emphasizes at the same time that such a contract will inevitably lose its meaning in its succeeding (big cultivated) societies. "Almost all the governments, which exist at present, or of which there remains any record in story," says Hume, "have been founded originally, either on usurpation or conquest, or both, without any pretence of a fair consent, or voluntary subjection of the people."<sup>48</sup> What is "discoverable" in the vicissitudes of nations is "but force and violence."<sup>49</sup>

Hume does not recommend usurpation and conquest, force, and violence, nor does he deny the importance of the contract or consent at the origin of government. Concerning "the consent of the people," Hume states: "It is surely the best and most sacred of any. I only pretend, that it has very seldom had place in any degree, and never almost in its full extent."<sup>50</sup> Hume's intention is to maintain that such consent is a "state of perfection" that "is much superior to human nature."<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, we should seek the foundations of government in other reasons.

In the *Treatise*, Hume argues that the main foundation of government's authority is "*long possession* in any one form of government."<sup>52</sup> The notion of *custom*, which famously plays an important role in Hume's epistemology,<sup>53</sup> is also relevant for his political theory. Long possession is the main reason for government's authority because it generates custom and habit:

Time and custom give authority to all forms of government, and all successions of princes; and that power, which at first was founded only on injustice and violence, becomes in time legal and obligatory.<sup>54</sup>

For Hume, it is not of major importance how a government arose. What can one find other than “force and violence” when inquiring into the origin of government? More important is the question: how long has a government been existing and how it is profitable or useful for its members?

It is to be reiterated here that, for Hume, the moral and social problem is the problem concerning social interest; i.e., the problem concerning *usefulness* or *utility* for society. All the social problems ought to be reduced ultimately to the question of whether something is useful for society. For example, the need to correct great inequality concerning the distribution of wealth is, for Hume, derived not from the rational and theoretical consideration of universal human rights but from calculations about social interest or utility.<sup>55</sup> Actually, it is not very clear and concrete what utility for society ultimately means for Hume. However, in an essay, he formulates the ultimate law of society as follows: “*Salus populi suprema Lex*, the safety of the people is the supreme law.”<sup>56</sup> The ultimate political aim is—as mentioned briefly at the end of the first section of this article—to guarantee the safety and peace of the people.<sup>57</sup>

For such an aim, government is useful because of its power of the “*execution* and *decision* of justice.”<sup>58</sup> “If,” says Hume, “the reason be asked of that obedience, which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer, *because society could not otherwise subsist*.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the government should be *useful* for its members if it wants to fulfill its *raison d'être*.

Concerning the right of resistance against government, Hume confesses: “I shall always incline to their side, who draw the bond of allegiance very close, and consider an infringement of it, as the last refuge in desperate cases.”<sup>60</sup> We can see Hume’s moderation and cautiousness regarding resistance here, but, at the same time, it is clear that Hume does not deny the right of resistance; at least, “as the last refuge in desperate cases.” Here, Hume describes these cases in a concrete way; i.e., as a danger “from violence and tyranny.”<sup>61</sup> Generally speaking, however, Hume means by such cases the danger of general interest or utility. In another passage, he states that “government binds us to obedience only on account of its tendency to public utility.”<sup>62</sup> He writes also as follows:

As interest is the immediate sanction of government, the one can have no longer being than the other; and whenever the civil magistrate carries his oppression so far as to render his authority perfectly intolerable, we are no longer bound to submit to it. The cause ceases; the effect must cease also.<sup>63</sup>

Social utility is directly connected with moral obligation. This implies that the “diminution of interest”<sup>64</sup> leads to the “relaxation of morality”<sup>65</sup> (and the augmentation of interest brings the reinforcement of morality). For example, Hume argues that the moral obligation of duty is less binding between different states than

between different individuals of the same state, as the interest between states is weaker than that between individuals of the same state.<sup>66</sup>

In such a way, utility is the alpha and omega of the social and political problem. Hume formulates this thought in the following succinct and radical manner: “Truths which are *pernicious* to society, if any such there be, will yield to errors which are salutary and *advantageous*.”<sup>67</sup>

We should not forget such a utilitarian thought in any passage of Hume’s political writings. His very realistic attitude, or political realism, is firmly linked with his utilitarian way of thinking.

Hume’s respect toward the present political system (in other words, Hume’s moderate or conservative<sup>68</sup> attitude towards the present political system or situation) is to be understood only on such a utilitarian basis. We should, according to Hume, more or less respect the real, present form and state of a traditional government—a government that has founded its authority mainly through long time possession—unless it destroys social interests to a remarkable extent. Conversely, some disadvantages of a traditional government are forgivable insofar as they are not remarkable. This is the case because, Hume believes, a radical reform or revolution is normally—i.e., except for extreme desperate cases—more disadvantageous (in other words, less useful) than some disadvantages that the present traditional government causes.

Hume’s moderate and conservative thought is not mere adherence to the tradition or the present state, much less indolence toward politics. Such a thought is the result of a utilitarian view. The ultimate yardstick for judging social and political systems or acts is the general interest or utility for society.

Based on his experience and knowledge about history, Hume believes that the demand for the perfect ideal that derives from purely speculative theory can not only be an armchair theory but can be pernicious to society. Even where a political theory has a theoretically and systematically perfect construction, it is of no use if it can have no effect on the real social world. Its application can even be harmful to society as far as it pays no attention to human nature.

As argued above, Hume believes that the individual’s generosity is very limited. He formulates this conclusion from the political point of view as follows:

[I]n contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controuls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, co-operate to public good. Without this, say they, we shall in vain boast of the advantages of any constitution [...]. / It is, therefore, a just *political maxim*, that every man must be supposed a *knave*.<sup>69</sup>

The human being is not a creature that can always act ideally; i.e., according to the ideal moral and social principles. Therefore, a political theory that seeks to be effective in the real world should take into consideration that every individual might



come to act as a “knave” in any case. It is a utopian thought that, some day in the future, humankind’s generosity or benevolence will be ideal and perfect, or that humans could become ideally and perfectly generous and benevolent through education. As Hume writes:

For whatever may be the consequence of such a miraculous transformation of mankind, as would endow them with every species of virtue, and free them from every species of vice; this concerns not the magistrate, who aims only at possibilities. He cannot cure every vice by substituting a virtue in its place. Very often he can only cure one vice by another; and in that case, he ought to prefer what is least pernicious to society.<sup>70</sup>

Individuals should have thorough knowledge of the characteristics of human nature and what is possible and impossible for it. Based on this knowledge, we ought to render society better step by step in a realistic manner. The real world cannot be perfectly ideal, and the real individual cannot be perfectly generous; hence, accepting some vices is unavoidable. There are even cases in which we ought to resort to a vicious measure in order to avoid other vices that are more pernicious.

Hume refers to the English political situation at the time of writing; e.g., the belief that the influential power of the crown is requisite to some degree to prevent the British House of Commons from its pernicious monopolization. For this purpose, the crown is permitted to bribe people with the offices and honors that are at its disposal, though “private *bribery*”<sup>71</sup> that goes beyond the use of such offices and honors is not to be admitted. Hume writes:

We may [...] give to this influence what name we please; we may call it by the invidious appellations of *corruption* and *dependence*; but some degree and some kind of it are inseparable from the very nature of the constitution, and necessary to the preservation of our mixed government.<sup>72</sup>

Another example concerns the treatment of the clergy. Hume maintains that clergy and ecclesiastic establishments are normally “highly pernicious” to society because they cause “a strong mixture of superstition, folly, and delusion.”<sup>73</sup> Despite such a view, Hume does not suggest that we ought to banish the clergy from society. He says, rather, that we should keep it so as to avoid other, worse, social disadvantages:

[I]n reality the most decent and advantageous composition, which he [the civil magistrate] can make with the spiritual guides, is to bribe their indolence, by assigning stated salaries to their profession, and rendering it superfluous for them to be farther active, than merely to prevent their flock from straying in quest of new pastures.<sup>74</sup>

We ought not to seek an ideal and perfect solution with regard to moral problems, as this would be unrealizable. On the contrary, we ought to look for a realistic and realizable solution; even if it should contain some vices. Politics is concerned with real social interest rather than the purely ideal and speculative truth. Politics should aim at rendering a society better and better in a realistic manner. This is the case even though the real world never permits the perfectly ideal and permanent political state. After having sketched the government of a perfect commonwealth, Hume writes as follows:

It is needless to enquire, whether such a government would be immortal. I allow the justness of the poet's exclamation on the endless projects of human race, *Man and forever!* The world itself probably is not immortal. Such consuming plagues may arise as would leave even a perfect government a weak prey to its neighbours. We know not to what length enthusiasm, or other extraordinary movements of the human mind, may transport men, to the neglect of all order and public good. [...] Perhaps, rust may grow to the springs of the most accurate political machine, and disorder its motions. [...] *It is a sufficient incitement to human endeavours, that such a government would flourish for many ages; without pretending to bestow, on any work of man, that immortality, which the Almighty seems to have refused to his own productions.*<sup>75</sup>

In the real empirical world, there are many unforeseen contingencies.<sup>76</sup> In such a world, we can never expect a perfect and everlasting political state. Despite such a belief in the unavoidable imperfection of the real world, Hume is confident that we should seek the most advantageous—or the least disadvantageous—solution in each concrete case and ceaselessly try to render society more useful for its members *as far as possible in this real world*.

## Conclusion

According to Hume, the human being is a creature that is bestowed with the most ardent desire to make a society. Humans necessarily need a society to which they belong in order to live life to the full. Therefore, politics constitutes one very important branch of the inquiry into human nature, or, in Hume's words elsewhere, the science of man. The aim of this article was to explain Hume's thought about this branch; especially from the perspective of utility and reality.

To achieve such an aim, I first described Hume's moral theory as the basis of his political theory. Famously, his moral theory is founded not on reason but on feeling or sentiment. What ultimately decides, or can ultimately decide, the *universally* moral (and immoral) is not reason but the sentiment that the human being *naturally* possesses.

Thus, the moral means the pleasant or the agreeable. In addition, the moral/the agreeable is at the same time the *useful* or the *advantageous*. It is to be emphasized here that, according to Hume, the moral is useful or advantageous not just for oneself but also for society or humankind. That humans have a natural moral

sense means, therefore, that they have the inborn faculty to feel utility for society or humankind (and disadvantage for it) spontaneously.

Human nature has such a moral character, but this character is very limited. The human being is very selfish. This is the reason why, for the interest of society as a whole, the individual needs artificial social virtues (rules), which Hume calls justice. The significance of the existence of justice lies in nothing other than its utility; that is, its advantage for society as a whole. Justice is the embodiment of what is useful for society. On this point, it is to be noted that justice as a social utility can have its practical effects because it is human nature to feel the moral/the useful to be pleasant. Justice, or artificial virtue, is therefore the indispensable contrivance of man, which extends the function of moral sentiment beyond its natural border.

It is the task of the political thinker or philosopher to demonstrate how artificial virtue and, more generally, the artificial social and political system, can be most useful for society. What I emphasized in this article is that Hume's political thought is founded on such a utilitarian basis and, at the same time, on political realism.

The *raison d'être* of government lies in nothing other than its interest; namely, its utility for society. That is to say, if a government no longer has an advantage for its members, it loses its justification for existence. Conversely, the reason why individuals ought to obey a government resides only in the fact that a government is useful for them.

In broad terms, social utility means, ultimately, the safety and the peace of the members of society. To realize this utility, Hume believes we should take the real social and political situation into consideration. The purely rational political theory or the political system based on purely rational inferences is of no importance as far as it is inapplicable in the real, empirical world. It can be even harmful to the extent that it ignores what is really possible for human nature.

Hume does not deny that it could be better were the ideal and perfect political state attainable, but such a thought is utopian. For Hume, it is a matter of whether a political theory is actually effective to render a society better as opposed to the question of whether it features a perfect system from a purely rational and ideal point of view.

We cannot expect the perfection of human nature and society. For instance, it is of no use to expect the morally right origin of a nation because, at the emergence of any government in history, we can see only force and violence. Thus, we should evaluate it from the point of the view of its present utility. We also ought to admit some cases in which we resort to a vice to prevent another worse vice. What is important for politics is to attain thorough knowledge of the characteristics of human nature and of what real human society is capable or incapable. For Hume, the political task is to use such knowledge as a basis to render society more and more useful for its members in a realistic and realizable manner.

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- <sup>2</sup> Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), xix.
- <sup>3</sup> Hume, D., (1896), xix.
- <sup>4</sup> Hume, D., (1896), xx.
- <sup>5</sup> For Hume, logic means the psychological or epistemological foundation of the reasoning faculty, which he establishes in the first volume of the *Treatise* (1896, xix). Criticism means artistic criticism (1896, xi and xix). For Hume’s aesthetic theory, see, for example, Townsend, D., *Hume’s Aesthetic Theory: Taste and Sentiment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).
- <sup>6</sup> Hume, D., (1896), xix. See also Hume, D., “An Abstract of a Treatise of Human nature”, in Hume, D., *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding; with a Supplement, An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. C. W. Hendel (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), 181-198, here 184.
- <sup>7</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 1.
- <sup>8</sup> This does not mean that these components are specific only for the human being. Though Hume’s main interest lies in human nature, he argues that those components constitute the perception of animals also (See Hume, D., (1896), 176-179).
- <sup>9</sup> Christopher J. Berry points out that the coherence between Hume’s politics and epistemology lies in the gradual progression of thought that extends “*through habit* the experience of one case to another” (Berry, C. J., *David Hume* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 43). Italics mine.
- <sup>10</sup> See Aristotle. *Politics*, trans. E. Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10, (1253a2/1253a7).
- <sup>11</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 363. Duncan Forbes remarked once that such a “social phase of Hume’s science of man is liable to be played down or ignored by excessive or exclusive emphasis on the ‘individualistic’ ‘atomistic’, ‘mechanistic’ side of his thought – which is there” (Forbes, D., *Hume’s Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge/London/New York/New Rochelle/Melbourne/Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 104. Berry writes: “It is a central tenet of Hume’s social philosophy that humans do indeed have to be ‘fashioned’ for society” (Berry, C. J., (2013), 38).
- <sup>12</sup> Hume states: “’Tis by society alone he [man] is able to supply his defects, and raise himself up to an equality with his fellow-creatures, and even acquire a superiority above them. By society all his infirmities are compensated; and tho’ in that situation his wants multiply every moment upon him, yet his abilities are still more augmented, and leave him in every respect more satisfied and happy, than ’tis possible for him, in his savage and solitary condition, ever to become” (Hume, D., (1896), 485).
- <sup>13</sup> As note 5.
- <sup>14</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 541.
- <sup>15</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 541. According to Hume, the society without government comes to need a governmental order during warfare against another society. This order will disappear again once the warfare is over. However, it is such an order during warfare that first teaches men the advantages of *permanent* government (See Hume, D., (1896), 540-541. See also Hume, D., “On the Origin of Government”, in Hume, D., *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), (1987a), 37-41, here 39-40).
- <sup>16</sup> Hume, D., (1896), xx.
- <sup>17</sup> Hume, D., (1896), xxi, xxii, and 466.

<sup>18</sup> Here, we can see one important difference between Hume's and Kant's philosophy. Also, Kant warns us not to go beyond the limit of sensual experience so far as it is the matter of *theoretical* problems. However, the sphere of *moral* problems is, for him, not the sensual but the intelligible one.

<sup>19</sup> Hume's philosophy stands in the line of English philosophy, which was first motivated by Francis Bacon's "practical/utilitarian bent" (Berry, C. J., (2013), 13). The influence of Hume's utilitarian thought on the subsequent history of English philosophy is remarkable; especially on Jeremy Bentham's philosophical thought. In a very famous passage in *A Fragment on Government*, Bentham makes the following note: "That the foundations of all virtue are laid in utility, is there [in the third volume of *Treatise of Human Nature*] demonstrated [...] with the strongest force of evidence" (Bentham, J., *A Fragment on Government*, ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (Cambridge/New York/Oakleigh/Madrid/Cape Town: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 51n1). Bentham then writes concerning a part of Hume's *Treatise* (Book III, Part III, § 1 "Of the Origin of the Natural Virtues and Vices"): "For my own part, I well remember, no sooner had I read that part of the work which touches on this subject, than I felt as if scales had fallen from my eyes, I then, for the first time, learnt to call the cause of the people the cause of Virtue" (Bentham, J., (1988), 51n2).

<sup>20</sup> Hume, D., (1896), xxiii. Italics mine.

<sup>21</sup> For the further understanding of Hume's utilitarianism, see Hardin, R., *David Hume: Moral and Political Theorist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 155-172; Garrett, D., *Hume* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 324-326.

<sup>22</sup> Hume, D., "An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals", in Hume, D., (1975), (1975b), 167-323, here 179. See also Hume, D., (1975b), 213.

<sup>23</sup> Hume, D., "My Own Life", in Hume, D., (1987), (1987b), xxxi-xli, here xxxvi.

<sup>24</sup> Hume, (1975b), 218.

<sup>25</sup> See Stewart, J. B., *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992), 137.

<sup>26</sup> Hume, D., (1975b), 230.

<sup>27</sup> Hume, D., (1975b), 219.

<sup>28</sup> Hume, D., (1975b), 219n1. See also Hume, D., (1975b), 298n1.

<sup>29</sup> Hume, D., (1975b), 273. Italics mine.

<sup>30</sup> See Hume, D., (1896), 457-463; Hume, D., (1975b), 285-294.

<sup>31</sup> Hume D., (1896), 468.

<sup>32</sup> Hume D., (1896), 476.

<sup>33</sup> See Hume, D., (1896), 518-519 and 579.

<sup>34</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 481.

<sup>35</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 602.

<sup>36</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 484.

<sup>37</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 495.

<sup>38</sup> See Hume, D., (1896), 494-495; Hume, D., (1975b), 188-189.

<sup>39</sup> See Hume, D., (1896), 495-498 and 521-523.

<sup>40</sup> See Hume, D., (1896), 489-491 and 516-525.

<sup>41</sup> In the *Treatise*, Hume explains that the natural moral sentiment for social interest arises from the human faculty of *sympathy*, with which Hume invests major importance in the book in question (See Hume, D., (1896), 498-500).

<sup>42</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 500.

<sup>43</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 500.

<sup>44</sup> Hume, D., "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science", in Hume, D., (1987), (1987c), 14-31, here 24. Italics mine.

<sup>45</sup> On this point, Frederick G. Whelan writes: “His political thought is in large part historical rather than abstract, cautious in making general claims or asserting ideals, and skeptical about the applicability of rational principles in moral and political life [...]. [...] Much of Hume’s thought [...], even in his philosophical works, is historical, an orientation that kept him securely in touch with the world of actual political events and gave him a strong sense of the limits of rationalism in social life. These qualities in themselves give Hume’s thought a worldly, nonideal or realistic character” (Whelan, F. G., *Hume and Machiavelli: Political Realism and Liberal Thought* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 2). See also Haakonssen, K., “Hume’s Political Theory”, in Norton, D. F. and Taylor, J., (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hume. Second Edition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 356-357.

<sup>46</sup> Whelan, F. G., *The Political Thought of Hume and His Contemporaries. Enlightenment Projects Volume 1* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 6.

<sup>47</sup> See note 40.

<sup>48</sup> Hume, D., “Of the Original Contract”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987d), 465-487, here 471. See also Hume, D., (1896), 554-556.

<sup>49</sup> Hume, D., (1987d), 471.

<sup>50</sup> Hume, D., (1987d), 474.

<sup>51</sup> Hume, D., (1987d), 474.

<sup>52</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 556. As four other foundations of the government’s authority (which are not as fundamental as long possession but also valuable), Hume enumerates present possession, the right of conquest, the right of succession, and positive laws (see Hume, D., (1896), 557-568).

<sup>53</sup> See Hume, D., (1975a), 42-47.

<sup>54</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 566. See also Hume, D., “Of the First Principles of Government”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987e), 32-36, here 33.

<sup>55</sup> Hume explains: “No one can doubt, but such an equality is most suitable to human nature, and diminishes much less from the *happiness* of the rich than it adds to that of the poor. It also augments the *power of the state*, and makes any extraordinary taxes or impositions be paid with more cheerfulness” (Hume, D., “Of Commerce”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987f), 253-267, here 265).

<sup>56</sup> Hume, D., “Of Passive Obedience”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987g), 488-492, here 489.

<sup>57</sup> Incidentally, in the *Treatise*, Hume describes once “life and limbs” as “the most considerable of all goods” (Hume, D., (1896), 540).

<sup>58</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 538.

<sup>59</sup> Hume, D., (1987d), 481.

<sup>60</sup> Hume, D., (1987g), 490. See also Hume, D., “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987h), 512-529, here 512-513. Haakonssen describes Hume’s attitude towards the actual problem concerning rebellion as follows: “In a number of letters in the late 1760s and early 1770s, Hume expressed his fear and loathing for the London mobs rioting in support of the reelection to Parliament of the outlawed John Wilkes. Hume saw it as degeneration of the demand for liberty to an senseless fanaticism that English freedom allowed to feed on itself, thus creating factionalism and ‘barbarism’ of a sort that could endanger this very freedom” (Haakonssen, K., (2009), 345n3).

<sup>61</sup> Hume, D., (1987g), 490.

<sup>62</sup> Hume, D., (1987g), 489.

<sup>63</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 551. See also Hume, D., (1975b), 205. In relation to the dethronement of James II at the Glorious Revolution, Hume explains more concretely the same subject: “The deposition of a king, in such a government as ours, is certainly an act beyond all common authority, and an illegal assuming a power for public good, which, in the ordinary course of

government, can belong to no member of the constitution. When the public good is so great and so evident as to justify the action, the commendable use of this licence causes us naturally to attribute to the *parliament* a right of using farther licences” (Hume, D., (1896), 565).

<sup>64</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 569.

<sup>65</sup> Hume, D., (1896), 569.

<sup>66</sup> See Hume, D., (1896), 568-569.

<sup>67</sup> Hume, D., (1975b), 279.

<sup>68</sup> As argued here, Hume’s “conservatism” does not mean the mere persistence of tradition. For the understanding of Hume’s conservatism, see, for example, Miller, D., *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 200-205; Livingston, D. W., *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 306-342; Stewart, J. B., (1992), 194-223; Berry, C. J., (2013), 128-155.

<sup>69</sup> Hume, D., “Of the Independency of Parliament”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987i), 42-46, here 42.

<sup>70</sup> Hume, D., “Of Refinement in the Arts”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987j), 268-280, here 280.

<sup>71</sup> Hume, D., (1987i), 45n2.

<sup>72</sup> Hume, D., (1987i), 45.

<sup>73</sup> Hume, D., *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, vol. III in six vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1983), 135-136.

<sup>74</sup> Hume, D., (1983), 136. Actually, in this context, Hume talks of “every religion, except the true” (Hume, D., (1983), 135). Here, I do not enter into the delicate question: what does the “true” religion mean for Hume? For understanding of this question, see, for example, Sessions, W. L., *Reading Hume's Dialogues: A Veneration for True Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> Hume, D., (1987h), 528-529. Italics mine.

<sup>76</sup> See Hume, D., “Of remarkable Customs”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987k), 366-376, here 366; Hume, D., “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations”, in Hume, D., (1987), (1987l), 377-464, here 377-378.