

HUME'S INDIVIDUAL: AGENT OR BILLIARD BALL?

Hannah DAWSON*

Abstract. It is hard to make out the agent in Hume's science of man. For the most part, human beings appear operated on passively by the association and attraction of ideas, creatures of custom rather than creators of the future, more predictable even than the rising of the sun. However, by inserting Hume's theory of the artificial virtues into his science of man, an inventive, calculating agent strides into view. The paper does not conclude, though, that this anomalous figure represents a contradiction in Hume's philosophy, but rather that Hume's individual is a far complex character than might appear if one simply read, for example, about Hume's theory of induction – as one might spend a lifetime doing. Hume's individual is not only a rich mixture of reason and sentiment, artifice and nature, action and passion, but these dichotomies, that organise so much of Hume's polemic, evaporate. The result is that a rich, holistic picture of agency emerges, together with a view of 'the mind' that is not static, but rather evolves through time.

Keywords: Hume, agency, time, artificial virtues, false dichotomies

Introduction

It is hard to make out the agency in the Humean individual. Generally he (and he usually is a 'he') appears tied by Lilliputian threads – his will determined by a chain of causes, his mind mechanised by the involuntary attraction of ideas, more predictable even than the rising of the sun. There he goes, orchestrated by the unchanging principles of nature, ingrained habits of mind instigating his inferences about the world, inadvertent associations of perceptions leading him blindly down particular paths of thinking, and certain precise arrangements of qualities, objects, and relations calling up like clockwork the passions and sentiments that orient him.¹ And there he is with other human beings, further natural forces extending out affective filaments, the operations of sympathy, comparison, and vanity pushing people together and pulling them apart, entangling them in a social web.² He is the product of time, long experience having scored deep grooves of thought, his beliefs and judgements just sentiments, which not reason, but custom and other automatic imaginative processes raise up in him.³ As Hume says, "custom," not reason, "is the great guide of human life."⁴ His science of man seems populated by passive, temporally-worn, automata, rather than active individuals.⁵

* New College of the Humanities, 19 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3HH, email: hannah.dawson@nchum.org

I am going to argue, however, that if we look at Hume's account of the artificial virtues, sometimes with an emphasis on political allegiance, we find a far more assertive individual striding into view. At first, he seems unrecognisable: a dynamic inventor of artifice, rather than a subject of nature; a creator of experience, rather than a creature of it. Blinking and clear-eyed at the beginning of time, he sets about working out how to maximise his self-interest, himself the cause of his future, capable of radical self-reformation and moulding a world that suits him. On closer inspection he still bears the more familiar Humean marks of nature, habit, and passion, is still bound in "that determination of the mind, which is acquir'd by custom,"⁶ but holds his own, nonetheless, as a more complex figure than Hume's philosophy generally suggests.

The literature on Hume is as various as it is vast, but philosophers have tended to focus on the dominant architecture of his naturalism, sentimentalism, and anti-rationalism.⁷ By injecting his analysis of the artificial virtues back into this edifice, the aim of this paper is to show not only that rationality and invention have a place there, but also that the organising dichotomies of reason and passion, artifice and nature, freedom and custom collapse into each other. These opposites, that are so often pitted polemically against each other by Hume, turn out in his own hands to overlap and connect. What I hope to reveal is that Hume's individual is a more complex creature than might appear if one were simply to read, for example, about his theory of induction – and one could spend a lifetime doing just that. I argue that Hume gives us a rich, holistic portrait of ourselves that itself has a history. Moreover, it is at the beginning of time, when we meet human beings at their most unfettered, that we find them most unsteady on their feet. The forces of custom and time, then, far from suffocating us, are the sources of our liberation.

Agency

When we come to Book III, Part ii of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, we are struck by the introduction of "artifice or contrivance" into a work that has hitherto led us smoothly along the tracks of nature.⁸ Hume's need to elucidate the motivation for the artificial virtues – justice, promise-keeping, political allegiance, and chastity, things that don't come naturally to men – forces him to confront the decision-making, self-propelling capacities of human beings. Although we tend to think of Hume as sceptical of the state of nature and the contractarianism with which it is associated, his account of the artificial virtues brings out his inner Hobbes, and even Locke, in all sorts of ways as we will see.⁹ Of relevance here is Hume's claim that if we want to unlock these mysteries of human behaviour (chastity etc.), we need – in an act of reason that is itself wildly inventive – to surmise what life was like at the dawn of the world. This is an extraordinary moment in the book. Suddenly it awakes from its naturalistic slumber, and on to the pages walk giants of human agency.

At the first sunrise, Hume conjectures, relatively atomised individuals were forced to exercise their powers of deduction in order to survive and thrive, themselves the architects of an ever more elaborate and protective social and political edifice.¹⁰ They began by inferring that in order to keep themselves "from falling into that wretched and savage condition, which is commonly represented as the *state of nature*,"

they must construct certain rules of justice, whereby property is defended and determined, and the peace of society established.¹¹ While they reason, however, that justice represents their real interests, they also know, that as a species they are constitutionally myopic, fatally and predictably prone to prefer the immediate lesser pleasure to the remote but greater one. They cannot help themselves from picking the ripe apple which bobs in front of their eyes, or from renegeing on an inconvenient promise, even though they know that, in the longer term and in the wider scheme of things, respect for property and mutual trust are indispensable to their happiness. And even if they are exceptionally self-controlled, they can see that they would be fools were they, in a community of knaves, to keep to the rules of justice.¹²

Since no amount of agreement nor promises, nor internal resolution, nor consultation with friends, can bind them to the true good, they look outside themselves for sources of self-policing. Aware that they will always follow their nearest interest, they find a way of bringing the interest of justice closer. Unable to change their short-sighted nature, they conclude that they must change their circumstances and make justice in their immediate (rather than simply long-term) interest. They therefore set up magistrates to enforce justice, whose sanctions are palpable and induce them to obey, and who can be expected to execute justice impartially and equitably, not only because they are indifferent to the individuals they rule, but also because, delighted with the glory and power of their job, and eager not to lose it, it is in *their* 'immediate interest' too, to fulfil the office they have been charged with.¹³ Possessed of both authority and a fierce investment in the civic good, they are also able and inclined to organise public projects, which transform everyone's world, from one of huts, and bows and arrows, into one of bridges, harbours, ramparts, fleets and canals, and which could never be achieved by a disparate group of blinkered, opinionated and lazy creatures.

These individuals, then, possess rational foresight and creativity. They invent government, and they obey it, because they work out that it is in their interests to do so, affording them not only safety from the invasions of their naturally unjust neighbours, but also the almost miraculous expansion of their horizons. In their vigorous activity, they perform, it sometimes seems, nothing less than a social contract. "Government, therefore," announces Hume at one point, "arises from the voluntary convention of men," calling up the image of a conscious, consenting people.¹⁴

In his early essay, *That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science*, Hume enlarges on his confidence in the far-sighted inventions of men, praising legislators whose "wise regulations in any commonwealth are the most valuable legacy that can be left to future ages."¹⁵ And in *Of Parties in General*, he encourages us to "dignify legislators, such as Romulus and Theseus, only with the appellation of demigods and heroes."¹⁶ Hume therefore seems to have great faith in men as sage, political craftsmen, a faith which extends down to the very base of the state. Ordinary men want, invent, and contrive the artifice of government in order to remedy the inconveniences of nature.¹⁷ Both "the original motive" to institute government, and "the source of our obedience to it" is, as Hume says, "the interest I find to consist in the security and protection,

which we enjoy in political society, and which we can never attain, when perfectly free and independent.”¹⁸

Hume therefore paints a picture of a powerful people instituting government for their own purposes, a people in control, almost tricking their prince with the gift of power, when that gift is really a gift to themselves. This knowing, calculating, nearly haughty, image of the people is further adumbrated in Hume’s claim that the people are indifferent to the *form* of government. All they want is the safety that government – any government – brings. Here, as so often, Hume’s position looks very Hobbesian. As Hobbes had said of life in Lucca and Constantinople, “the Freedome is still the same.”¹⁹ Our interest, which designs and cements the artifice of the state, is relatively equally served by a range of individuals and constitutions. While Hume is less uncompromising than Hobbes, entertaining the merits of revolution and, in later writing, adjudicating between different forms of government, he agrees that “the advantages, which we reap from authority” tend to outweigh the disadvantages, and any government tends to be better for us than no government at all.²⁰ Hume makes the point again in the context of succession: “the interest of a nation,” he explains, “requires, that the succession to the crown shou’d be fix’d one way or other; but ’tis the same thing to its interest in what way it be fix’d.”²¹

The impression of canny subject-citizens calling the shots is confirmed in Hume’s attitude to resistance. Just as people reason to the rule that we owe allegiance to government, so do they go on to reason that there might come a time when a particular government is not in their interests, leading them to make a further rule that they should resist in such circumstances. They consider that, in the same way that their fellow subjects are passionate and myopic, tending when unconstrained to wickedness and injustice, so their rulers, despite having an immediate interest in the provision of justice, are also liable to “be transported by their passions into all the excesses of cruelty and ambition.”²² They therefore set a limit to allegiance, their interest providing the foundation for its dissolution as well as its *raison d’être*. This ratiocination, of which “all men,” even “vulgar” men, “have an implicit notion of” begins in the following way: “government,” he writes, “is a mere invention for the interest of society. Where the tyranny of the governor removes this interest, it also removes the natural obligation to obedience.”²³ Just as people submit to the magistrate because it is in their interests, so it is reasonable for them to resist when that submission becomes positively disadvantageous.

One final point to note about Hume’s robust account of political agency is his representation of individuals as masters of time, able both to see into and to transform their futures. This is a talent on which Hume elaborates in his essay *Of the Dignity and Meanness of Human Nature*. In comparison with animals (who here get an unusually harsh press from Hume), who are “without foresight,” “blindly conducted by instinct” and attaining very quickly the utmost of which their species is capable, men are “not limited by any narrow bounds, either of place or time,” but can look backward to the origins of the human race, cast their eyes forward and envisage the “influence of [their] actions on posterity,” trace long chains of cause and effect, and improve on and correct past behaviour.²⁴ A corollary of this capacity both to leap about imaginatively in time, and to transcend our present confines, is the possible

progress of man, and the dynamism of human nature. So committed is Hume to this organic view of society and politics, that before venturing to make any general pronouncement on the relative merits of “civil liberty and absolute government,” he voices “a suspicion, that the world is still too young to fix many general truths in politics.”²⁵

Hume’s individuals, then, are persons, shrewd, responsible and self-transforming artificers of a better life, who seem to me to sit so much at odds with the pliable and dim-eyed creatures who appear elsewhere in his work.

Nature reinserted

As striking as this story is, however, woven throughout it are the more recognisably Humean elements of experience, sensibility, nature, custom, imagination, vanity and passivity. In drawing out these elements, though, I do not want to suggest that Hume is guilty of contradiction, but rather that he himself in his treatment of politics is breaking down the dichotomies that at other times dominate and arguably problematise his philosophy, presenting us with a more credible concoction – or even unity – of nature and artifice, and custom, reason, and passion.

Hume’s characterisation of men as standing in front of their actions and futures, and able to conceptualise and weigh the options available to them, and then make rational choices to invent, obey and if necessary resist government, is softened and supplemented by his claims that the process of submission happens gradually, almost accidentally, effected as much by passion, experience and imagination as by reason, its benefits becoming apparent after the fact, rather than calculated from the start. In accounting for the first artificial virtue, the performance of justice, Hume explains that “in their wild uncultivated state,” men could not have conducted the train of reasoning that proves that justice is in our interest and which he has just expounded.²⁶ Rather than attaining this knowledge “by study and reflexion alone,” they learnt it because they became “sensible of its advantages.”²⁷ Rather than expressly, far-sightedly promising that I will abstain from your possessions if you abstain from mine, we each become “sensible,” as Hume says again, of each other’s interest in mutual abstention, developing a “common sense of interest,” which progressively gives rise to a convention of justice.²⁸ “Few persons can carry on this train of reasoning,” says Hume in the case of inferring political obligation and its limits, conceding that most are simply “sensible” of their interest in it.²⁹ The role of barely conscious sensation in generating a desire for government is also hinted at by Hume when he explains how subjects newly “under the shelter of their governors, begin to taste at ease the sweets of society and mutual assistance.”³⁰ In the more domestic domain of the family – for him, following Aristotle, the seed of sociability – Hume explains how children profit from the careful government of their parents, their tender minds becoming “sensible of the advantages, which they may reap from society.”³¹

Although Hume veers close at times in the *Treatise* to the idea of a social contract in the instigation of the very first governments, at others he suggests that they arose of necessity in the emergencies of inter-tribal conflicts, and of “usurpation and rebellion,” and that men, having felt the convenience of submission only then

warmed to it as a more permanent arrangement.³² Hume collects his evidence for this claim from a consideration of America. There, apparently

men live in concord and amity among themselves without any establish'd government; and never pay submission to any of their fellows, except in time of war, when their captain enjoys a shadow of authority, which he loses after their return from the field, and the establishment of peace with the neighbouring tribes. This authority, however, instructs them in the advantages of government, and teaches them to have recourse to it.³³

Government, and our commitment to it, then, are contingent on our fortuitous experience of it. "Camps are the true mothers of cities."³⁴ It is only once men have experienced at home and abroad the rewards of allegiance that they drift towards it, until finally they take it as a fact of life.

The steely invention of the first men, then, is further mollified by Hume's blurring of the lines between nature and artifice. This intimates an overlapping relationship between the two, and indicates that nature, which seemed sometimes to be eclipsed by the bright architecture of the state, shines brightly there. Even as he comes close to enunciating it, he dodges away from the divide between that "savage and solitary condition," and society, suggesting that men are originally and ineluctably social and sociable.³⁵ Like Locke before him, he entertains the prospect of civil society before government, of "society without government," of "peace and concord."³⁶ He also thinks that the conversion to the artifice of government is not irrevocable; as in those wilds of America, where government comes and goes as it is required. More generally, it is presented as developing bit by bit, first perhaps with a prince, then with ministers, followed eventually with complex and mutable constitutional arrangements.

This piecemeal portrayal of the introduction of government, and the location within natural individuals of social resources helps Hume out of the Hobbesian conundrum of the unsafeness of the social contract. Like Hobbes, whose language of artifice Hume's closely echoes, Hume's story of civilisation involves natural men constructing the artifice of the state, but unlike Hobbes, he evades the problem that the creation of Leviathan requires certain things – like trust and the reasonableness of covenanting – whose existence depends on the existence of Leviathan. Hume needs commit no such sleights of hand, the inauguration of government being an irregular and imperfect *process*, rather than a momentary and momentous flash after which things can never be the same again. Hume's proposal that nature and artifice are not so indistinct is not only part of his anti-contractarian polemic, but is also directed against the (often contractarian) natural lawyers.³⁷ Hume wanted to deny the metamorphosis from man to subject. Rather than find themselves juridically transformed, either into bound subjects at the birth of the state, or back into free men in the event of an illegitimate tyranny, as Locke had asserted, for Hume, men remain men throughout. Political allegiance is simply a means to natural end, that of interest, and waxes and wanes as the interest is or is not served.

The familiar naturalism bleeds further into the pristine design of the state when we probe the substance of the 'reason' that the first men used to improve their

lot. It is reasoning on the basis of facts and experience, rather than anything in the rarefied space of the deductive *a priori*.³⁸ Indeed, it is in Hume's estimation, "not in itself different, nor founded on different principles" from the reason of animals.³⁹ Just as the "dog [...] avoids fire and precipices", and the "bird [...] sits upon her eggs for a due time", so early men, "sensible of the misery" of unstable property, "seek each other's company, and make an offer mutual protection and assistance."⁴⁰ It is interesting that Hume calls this kind of reasoning "sagacity," the term that Hobbes, who is so often in Hume's ear, uses to describe the particular kind of "discursion of the mind" that men and beasts alike engage in when they are thinking of how to satisfy an appetite. "We may call it hunting or tracing," says Hobbes, "as dogs trace the beast by the smell [...] or as men hunt after riches, place, or knowledge."⁴¹

Moreover, and here we move even deeper into canonical Humean territory, it is not reason, but passion, that moves us, that drives us on towards ever more civilisation.⁴² (Again, one recalls Hobbes.⁴³) Just as the dog and the bird have their appetites, so men have theirs, and it is out of them that politics blooms. While this is easy to forget not only in his heavily rationalised account of the origin, source and limits of the artificial virtues, but also with the idea of rational self-interest reverberating still, interest, the driving force behind political society, is actually a passion.⁴⁴ As Hume explains in a discussion of the calm passions, they are often mistaken for reason because just as "reason [...] exerts itself without producing any sensible emotion," so the calm passions, having become settled habits of the mind, no longer produce the violent agitation we associate with passions.⁴⁵ "The general appetite to good" is so ingrained a passion that it has become a tranquil and almost constant disposition, directing us imperceptibly towards obedience.⁴⁶ The artificial virtues are simply "artful and more refin'd" ways of satisfying our passions.⁴⁷ Indeed, Hume goes so far as to ascribe to our passions the qualities and talents that are generally linked to reason and agency. "Nothing is more vigilant and inventive than our passions," he writes, suggesting that our interest itself has a kind of cognitive ability, a capacity to sniff out the means to its end.⁴⁸ Not only does Hume therefore assert the power of passion over reason in politics, but he also erodes this duality, intimating the rationality and agency of passion itself.

The interest, moreover, that is the passion motivating politics, is not always some miraculous telescopic passion that sees the future, far-off good, but rather the common or garden self-interest that we have in not breaking the law. It is because we do not want to be punished that we obey. As Hume explains,

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. They cannot change their natures. All they can do is change their situation, and render the observance of justice the immediate interest of some particular persons and its violation their more remote.⁴⁹

The expansive account of a collection of individuals binding themselves with a view to the greater good, begins to shrink to the pressure of "our nearest interest," and the gap between freedom and coercion closes tighter.⁵⁰

The final incursion into the prophetic logic of the state is the raft of natural principles of the imagination which pulls men to allegiance, almost despite themselves, and which threatens to reduce them to the passive subjects of the science of the mind who populate Hume's philosophy more generally. While the previous incursions retain the agency and instrumentality of men, this last represents them as instruments of nature. It includes the association of ideas, the magnetism of general rules, fictions, and custom, and all those involuntary reflexes of the mind which move us to obedience.

One of the most vigorous – and characteristically Humean – of these causes is custom: the facts of life which are wrought only by repetition and the passage of time but which themselves can have an overwhelming power over the will.⁵¹ In the case of allegiance, “long possession” of government, or of a particular form of it, causes subjects to obey that government. Here, then, the anomalous image we met above of men of piercing ratiocinative vision, scanning forward and back through time and transforming their futures thereby, is tempered by Hume's supplementary view of them as unthinkingly moved by what time has made “seem just and reasonable.”⁵² No longer masters of time, men become passive creatures of it. While Hume sometimes suggests that only the force of interest can subdue the “natural ambition of men” and cause us to obey, he is always clear that custom overlays interest by dictating the specific forms of our allegiance, so that we like and are loyal to what we are used to.⁵³

However, custom is not just a carapace. In itself it creates a *motive* for allegiance. “Nothing,” declares Hume, “causes any sentiment to have a greater influence upon us than custom, or turns our imagination more strongly to any object.”⁵⁴ We are drawn to obey the person we grew up with on the throne, whose line seems to have occupied that seat forever, and in whose presence everyone kneels. As Hume says of custom in general, “it not only reconciles us to any thing we have long enjoy'd, but even gives us an affection for it.”⁵⁵ In his essay *Of the Origin of Government*, he elaborates that

habit soon consolidates what other principles of human nature had imperfectly founded; and men, once accustomed to obedience, never think of departing from that path, in which they and their ancestors have constantly trod.⁵⁶

Unlike the other artificial virtues, all of which require continuing, tense, sacrificial contortions on the part of their adherents, allegiance is not so tightly sprung. Not only is it barely an action, custom having made it instinctive, but it is also often a stirring desire that derives not so much from the smug knowledge that it serves our turn, but rather from the imperceptible caresses of time and other influences on the imagination.

Moreover, an integral part of the motive to obedience is the belief that the government has the *right* to govern, without which few would be disposed to obey, and it appears that in the formation of this crucial belief custom and related automatic mechanisms do all the work. Like all moral entities, a magistrate's right to rule does

not really inhere in the supposed possessor but is a sentiment entertained about them, and neither interest nor reason seems to play a part in its generation. Instead, “time alone gives solidity to their right.”⁵⁷ In his essay *Of the First Principles of Government*, Hume explains that the key to unlocking the great mystery of why the many are content to be governed by the few is that governments are supported by “opinion only” – “opinion of interest, and opinion of right,” and in the case of the latter, “antiquity always begets the opinion of right.”⁵⁸ Later, in *Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*, he makes the point more strongly, explaining that “the bulk of mankind” is “governed by authority, not reason,” and no government can have authority without “the recommendation of antiquity.”⁵⁹

In addition to custom and time, there are other catalysts of allegiance outside our control. The “gentle force” of nature that associates ideas and that animates the *Treatise* as a whole, also plays its part in subjecthood.⁶⁰ We are programmed “by the natural transition of the thought” to turn our allegiance from a dead king to his son, and Hume is explicit that without this association of ideas there would be no motive to obey the son.⁶¹ Even a usurper in “present possession” of power benefits from the relation of resemblance to “constant possession” which constitutes the “right to authority.”⁶² Moreover, our mind is “naturally” dragged back up the line of succession, transferring that right to their ancestors.⁶³ In addition to these soporific principles of the understanding, there are others which bear us along a wave of love to the feet of our princes. As Hume confides in *Of the Protestant Succession*, while “an anatomist finds no more in the greatest monarch than in the lowest peasant or day-labourer; and a moralist may, perhaps, frequently find less,” we naturally think of them as towering above us in dignity and brilliance.⁶⁴ And in order that “due subordination in society” be maintained, one must not “undeceive the people.”⁶⁵

These fictions build allegiance. In expounding the economy of the passions, Hume explains that the pleasure-producing “quality” of the “beauty of the palace,” joined to the “subject” of the prince “by the relation of property,” causes love for the prince.⁶⁶ By the same token, conquerors are accorded “the title of sovereigns,” Hume says, because their “glory and honour” breed esteem, and since “men naturally favour those they love”, they are “apt to ascribe a right to successful violence.”⁶⁷ In *Of Parties in General*, Hume details the “unaccountable” violent attachment and “imaginary interest” which joins factions to their sovereigns, which springs from a supposed “intimate” relation between them, and the fictitious transfer of importance to ordinary men from “the splendour of majesty and power.”⁶⁸ And though our kings might flounder and ruin us, and our obedience defy rationality, we, born under their command, “imagine” them to be our “natural rulers” and cannot contemplate rebellion.⁶⁹ In the slumber of our consciousness, the mind dusts our princes with authority, prostrating us before them.

It appears, then, that interest, reason, and foresighted artifice, which seemed to mark out our relation to the state, are supplemented and fused with, if not often supplanted by, more typical Humean energies. According to the fundamental axiom that interest is the motive to allegiance, when that interest is no longer served, the motive ought to dissolve. However, so “mightily addicted” are we to “general rules [...] that we often carry our maxims beyond those reasons, which first induc’d us to

establish them,” and continue blindly to submit even as we destroy ourselves.⁷⁰ As Hume confesses, these general rules which regulate our judgement and the association of ideas, which we trust even when our senses scream otherwise, and which determine the objects of allegiance, “hold less of reason, than of bigotry and superstition.”⁷¹

Chipping away at the glassy rationale of his own Hobbesian city, Hume hints at the murky principles which hold it in place. As he announces in *Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic*: “though men be much governed by interest; yet even interest itself, and all human affairs, are entirely governed by *opinion*.”⁷² In this most sceptical of moments, Hume suggests that it is opinion, moulded by a mixture of unscrutinised, knee-jerk reactions, and itself shaping the face of reason and utility, that turns out to be the motive to allegiance.

Conclusion

An analysis of III.ii of the *Treatise*, in conjunction with other moments in his *oeuvre*, reveals that the character of Hume’s individual is far more multifaceted and intricate than a more general reading would suggest. What is more, it suggests that this ‘individual’ has a past, that Hume’s sometimes universalising talk about the mind is complicated and nuanced by an awareness that it is part of history.⁷³ “Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange,” writes Hume in the first *Enquiry*, but his examination of the origins of justice suggests otherwise.⁷⁴ There, human nature appears not as an eternal constant, but rather modified through time.

Of course, time has long been understood as important in Humean psychology. However, while for the most part historians of philosophy have tended to see Hume as having cut a synchronic slice through the mind, identifying the furrows of thought ploughed by protracted experience, what I have tried to show is the diachronic picture. An examination of the artificial virtues unveils minds at the very start, untilled as it were. With this new-born man thrown into relief, the question arises of what the mind was like before custom – this central element in Hume’s science of man – had laid its roots, before the patterns of inference and common points of view had been established?

On the one hand, as we have seen, this Adam seems more at liberty than his descendants. Rather than being thickly woven into time, the *product* of habit established not only by natural associations of the mind, but also by authority, tradition and institutions, we find him loosely bound, a *maker* of habit, who calculates how to better himself, and who might take any number of transformative paths. Before the sea monster of the state, and the illusions of property and regulation, have bewitched him, he sees things more as they are, not encrusted with the accretions of artifice. Rather than being the pliable effect of irrational causes, he is a lucid architect of his own reformation.

On the other hand, it is not necessarily a good thing to see things as they are, in all their brute dislocation and amorality. Adam is vulnerable and alone. Precisely because he lacks the thick fantasy of law, he falters, disabled, as Hume suggests in the first *Enquiry*, in “some new world; where the whole frame of nature is disjointed.”⁷⁵ He is insecure in his inferences and unable to trust his fellows, bereft of sources of

guidance. His children and his children's children only start to find their footing on the even ground of accumulated experience, established customs of mind and action, mature legal and political arrangements, and the internalisation of collective narratives and moral norms. Far from oppressing us, the accretions of artifice set us free.

This article has swooped in on Hume's account of the artificial virtues. At first, it looked like an anomaly, but then the more obviously Humean elements showed through in combination. This revealed an exceptionally holistic account of the individual, one who cannot be understood in terms of the traditional dichotomies that structure much of Hume's writing, and indeed of early-modern and enlightenment philosophy. In this individual, reason folds into passion and custom, morality into motivation, and nature into artifice. Moreover this individual is the child of history. In an almost evolutionary story, Hume shows us the agency that springs from the ties that bind.

References

¹ See, for example, Hume, D., *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975a), 82-96; Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 155-72, 277-9.

² See, for example, Hume, D., (1978), 575-6, 593-4, 491.

³ See, for example, Hume, D., (1978), 470-1.

⁴ Hume, D. (1975a), 43-4. For a major analysis of the relationship between custom and reason in Hume (and a Kantian critique), see Allison, H. E., *Custom and Reason in Hume: A Kantian Reading of the First Book of the Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵ For rewarding treatments of Hume's theory of freedom and responsibility, see Russell, P., *Freedom & Moral Sentiment: Hume's Way of Naturalizing Moral Sentiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Harris, J., *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 64-87.

⁶ Hume, D. (1978), 266.

⁷ In addition to the extensive commentary on Hume's metaphysics and epistemology that tends to focus on naturalism and sentimentalism, there is also a sizeable literature on his political thought. While much of this tries to work out where exactly he stood on the various political issues of his day, a number of commentators have probed the intersection between his philosophy and his politics. The ground-breaking study in this regard is Forbes, D., *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). See also, in addition to works cited in the course of this article: Miller, D., *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Whelan, F., *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Livingston, D. W., *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984); Baier, A. C., *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Robertson, J., *The Case for The Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Phillipson, N., *David Hume: The Philosopher as Historian* (London: Penguin, 2011); Sabl, A., *Hume's Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the History of England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Haakonssen, K. and Whatmore, R., (eds.), *David Hume* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

⁸ Hume, D. (1978), 477.

⁹ For examples of Hume's scepticism towards the state of nature and the social contract, see, for example: Hume, D., (1978), 493 ("This *state of nature*, therefore, is to be regarded as a mere

fiction”), 542 (where he calls the idea of government being established by “consent” “entirely erroneous”), Hume, D., *Of the Original Contract* in Hume, D., *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 465-87.

¹⁰ Hume, D., (1978), 477-569.

¹¹ Hume, D., (1978), 534.

¹² Hume, D., (1978), 535. Cf. Hume, D., *An Enquiry Concerning The Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975b), 282-284 for the richer, more ambivalent treatment of the sensible knave.

¹³ Hume, D., (1978), 537, and more generally 534-9.

¹⁴ Hume, D., (1978), 554.

¹⁵ Hume, D., (1985), 24.

¹⁶ Hume, D., (1985), 55.

¹⁷ Hume, D., (1978), 542-3.

¹⁸ Hume, D., (1978), 550-1.

¹⁹ Hobbes, T., *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 149.

²⁰ Hume, D., (1978), 554.

²¹ Hume, D., (1978), 560.

²² Hume, D., (1978), 552.

²³ Hume, D., (1978), 552-3.

²⁴ Hume, D., (1985), 82.

²⁵ Hume, D., (1985), 89, 87.

²⁶ Hume, D., (1978), 486.

²⁷ Hume, D., (1978), 486.

²⁸ Hume, D., (1978), 490.

²⁹ Hume, D., (1978), 552-3.

³⁰ Hume, D., (1978), 538.

³¹ Hume, D., (1978), 486.

³² Hume, D., (1978), 540, 556.

³³ Hume, D., (1978). 540.

³⁴ Hume, D., (1978), 540-1.

³⁵ Hume, D., (1978), 502. For an example of his repudiating the dichotomy of selfish and social, see Hume, D., (1975b), 281. For an adumbration of this point, see Stroud, B., *Hume* (London: Routledge, 1977), 193-218. For a view of Hume as a kind of proto-utilitarian, see Schneewind, J. B., *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 354-77. For a rich treatment of sociability after Hobbes, see Robertson, J., “Sacred history and political thought: Neapolitan responses to the problem of sociability after Hobbes”, *The Historical Journal* 56/1 (2013): 1-29.

³⁶ Hume, D., (1978), 541. Cf. Locke, J., *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277, 280.

³⁷ For divergent assessments of Hume’s reception of natural law, see Forbes, D., (1975); Haaksonssen, K., *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Buckle, S., *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Moore, J. W., “Natural law and the Pyrrhonian controversy”, in *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. P. Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 20-38; Westerman, P. C., “Hume and the natural lawyers: a change of landscape”, in *Hume and Hume’s Connexions*, ed. M. A. Stewart and J. P. Wright (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 83-104.

³⁸ Hume, D., (1978), 459. On the importance of political practice for political science in Hume, and more generally on the relationship between theory and practice, see the following

brilliantly bracing essay: Bourke, R., "Theory and practice: the revolution in political practice", in *Political Judgement*, ed. R. Bourke and R. Geuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 73-110.

³⁹ Hume, D., (1978), 177.

⁴⁰ Hume, D., (1978), 177, 503.

⁴¹ Hobbes, T., *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 32.

⁴² Hume, D., (1978), 415.

⁴³ For example: Hobbes, T., (1996), 90.

⁴⁴ Hume, D., (1978), 491.

⁴⁵ Hume, D., (1978), 417.

⁴⁶ Hume, D., (1978), 417.

⁴⁷ Hume, D., (1978), 526.

⁴⁸ Hume, D., (1978), 526.

⁴⁹ Hume, D., (1978), 537.

⁵⁰ Hume, D., (1978), 537.

⁵¹ On the importance of custom for Hume's theory of the passions and moral character, see Wright, J. P., "Butler and Hume and habit and moral character", in *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, ed. M. A. Stewart and J. P. Wright (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 105-18.

⁵² Hume, D., (1978), 556.

⁵³ Hume, D., (1978), 553, 556.

⁵⁴ Hume, D., (1978), 556.

⁵⁵ Hume, D., (1978), 503.

⁵⁶ Hume, D., (1985), 39.

⁵⁷ Hume, D., (1978), 556. Cf. 566.

⁵⁸ Hume, D., (1985), 32-3.

⁵⁹ Hume, D., (1985), 512.

⁶⁰ Hume, D., (1978), 10.

⁶¹ Hume, D., (1978), 559, 560. Cf. 510-13 on the right of succession in the context of property.

⁶² Hume, D., (1978), 557. Cf. 504-5 on the same relation in the determination of property.

⁶³ Hume, D., (1978), 566.

⁶⁴ Hume, D., (1985), 504.

⁶⁵ Hume, D., (1985), 504.

⁶⁶ Hume, D., (1978), 330.

⁶⁷ Hume, D., (1978), 558-9.

⁶⁸ Hume, D., (1985), 63.

⁶⁹ Hume, D., (1978), 548.

⁷⁰ Hume, D., (1978), 551.

⁷¹ Hume, D., (1978), 374, 562. Cf. 504 for a similar point with regard to property. For a view of the relation between Hume's political theory, superstition and enthusiasm, see Haakonssen, K., *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 100-28.

⁷² Hume, D., (1985), 51.

⁷³ For an example of Hume's general supposition of universality, see Hume, D., (1975a), 83-4.

⁷⁴ Hume, D., (1975a), 83.

⁷⁵ Hume, D., (1975a), 119.