History, Moral Philosophy, and Social Theory in David Hume's Intellectual Development, 1739-1752

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This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

The thesis is 78,433 words long, so does not exceed the word limit prescribed by the Faculty of History.

Abstract

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This thesis shows how David Hume developed his historical thought between the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) and the *Political Discourses* (1752). It approaches Hume's historical thought from two perspectives: historical method and historical structure. On the methodological side, the thesis investigates how Hume gradually developed the notion of historical 'general causes' and their role in assessing historical evidence. On the structural side, the thesis investigates how Hume transposed his initial philosophical narrative of the development of societies from rude to civilized into 'real history', particularly how he dealt with the status of classical antiquity. The thesis concludes that Hume's history of general causes dislocated classical antiquity towards the 'rude' pole of the developmental account: modern European commercial societies had almost entirely modern (that is, post-ancient) origins. The thesis places Hume's development within the context of the Quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns and the change in historical methods in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. On the methodological side, the thesis contrasts the critical method of Pierre Bayle's *Dicionnaire Historique et Critique* with the attempt to develop a new 'philosophical' approach to historical criticism at the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, which paved the way for philosophical history as practised by Hume. On the structural/narrative side, the thesis shows how the debates between Ancients and Moderns in turn-of-the-century France brought to the fore questions about the meaning of 'modern' and its relation to classical antiquity, opening the gates to new narratives of the modern. In connecting the development of Hume's historical thought to developments in early eighteenth-century France, the thesis opens an original approach to the history of philosophical history that explains the original contributions of early philosophical historians such as Hume and Montesquieu. Further, it identifies *historical* rather than merely *philosophical* questions at the origins of philosophical history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TRANSLATIONS, CONVENTIONS, AND ABBREVIATIONS

Translations

All translations from French are mine unless noticed otherwise.

Conventions and Abbreviations

The following referencing conventions and abbreviations will be adopted in the thesis:

Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*

The *Dictionnaire* will be cited according to the 1740 edition (5th Edition, Amsterdam, Leyde, La Haye, Utrecht; 4 vols. in-folio) as available in the ARTFL project (https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaire-de-bayle). Footnotes will refer to '*Dictionnaire*' followed by article name, remark letter in parenthesis, and volume and page number. Example: '*Dictionnaire*, Catius (D), 1:102'.

Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres **and** *Mémoires de Litterature de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*

The *Histoire* (summaries of memoirs read at the *Académie*) and the *Mémoires* (full memoirs) will be referred to as 'HAI' and 'MAI', respectively. References will cite the *Imprimerie Royale* editions printed in Paris. Texts will be referred to by author name and title followed by 'HAI'/'MAI', volume and page numbers, and the year in which the text was *read* at the *Académie* in parenthesis, if available.

Bernard de Fontenelle, *Oeuvres Complètes*

Fontenelle's works will be cited according to the Niderst edition of the *Oeuvres Complètes*. Texts will be cited by title, followed by the letter 'N' and volume and page numbers. Example: 'Fontenelle, "Sur l'Histoire", N 3.178.'

David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*

The *Treatise* will be cited according to the Clarendon edition. Footnotes will refer to '*Treatise*' followed by book, part, section, and paragraph numbers. Example: '*Treatise* 3.2.2.3'.

David Hume, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*

The 'second *Enquiry*' will be cited according to the Clarendon edition. Footnotes will refer to '*EPM*' followed by section and paragraph numbers. Appendixes will be re-ferred to as 'App' followed by paragraph number and 'A Dialogue' will be referred to as 'D'. Example: '*EPM* App 1.3'. When necessary, original editions will be referred to according to the usual conventions.

David Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*

The 'first *Enquiry*' will be cited according to the 2000 Clarendon edition. Footnotes will refer to '*EHU*' followed by Section and Paragraph numbers. Example: '*EHU* 8.10'. When necessary, original editions will be referred to according to the usual con-ventions.

David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*

David Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* will be cited according to the 1985 Liberty Fund (Miller) edition. Footnotes will refer to '*Essays*' followed by page numbers. Example: '*Essays* 273'. When necessary, original editions will be referred to first according to the usual conventions and subsequently by *Essays* followed by the year of publication in parenthesis and page number. Example: 'David Hume, *Essays, moral and political* (Edinburgh, 1741), pp. ii–v,' then '*Essays* (1741), p. 100'.

Other minor referencing adaptations will be noted throughout the text.

'I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling: like that singular organic jewel of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it and, worn by another, dulls and goes to dust. Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive.'

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
(1969)

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the late M. A. Stewart wrote that 'by 1752, when Hume is appointed Keeper of the Advocates' Library, his philosophical oeuvre is virtually complete. The rest, to coin a phrase, is History.'[1] Although he added the caveat that Hume's *History of Great Britain*, later *History of England*, was 'in important respects philosophical' and that Hume's philosophy was informed by history, 1752 was the moment his career as a historian began. Three years later, Moritz Baumstark drew the line in 1748: that was the year Hume read Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* while travelling in continental Europe and experiencing first-hand the diversity of political, economic, social, moral, and religious practices and institutions of the continent.[2]

In this thesis, I show how Hume developed his historical thought between the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) and the *Political Discourses* (1752). My interpretation focuses on two aspects of Hume's historical thought: first, his historical method, that is, how he dealt with historical knowledge and historical evidence; second, the 'historical structure' of Hume's historical arguments, that is, how Hume organized historical arguments into a framework within which individual historical events or periods could be understood. In sum, Hume developed a philosophical-historical approach to history that presented a new narrative of the modern.[3] His historical thought was philosophical because it was organized in terms of 'general causes'. An account of the relevant general historical causes provided the core elements of his historical structure as well as the background against which individual sources, testimo-

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[1] M. A. Stewart, 'Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711-1752', in Marina Frasca-Spada and P. J. E. Kail, eds., *Impressions of Hume* (Oxford, 2005), p. 47.
[2] Moritz Baumstark, 'David Hume: The Making of a Philosophical Historian. A Reconsideration' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 35–65.
[3] I am avoiding the more common 'narrative of modernity' to make it clear that I am referring to eighteenth-century understandings of 'modern' rather than debates about 'modernity' in the last century. On the tendency to conflate the two in contemporary and twentieth-century historiography, see John Robertson, 'Enlightenment and Modernity, Historians and Philosophers', *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*, 8 (2020), pp. 278–321.

nies, and other kinds of evidence could be judged. His narrative of the modern articulated a new conception of the relation between modern European societies and their past, particularly the classical Greco-Roman past. Hume's narrative of the modern repositioned classical antiquity, distancing it from modern Europe, and found most of the origins of modern European commercial societies *within* modern (that is, post-ancient) history.

Hume's historical thought was articulated in a fragmentary form and in a variety of textual genres: the 'conjectural history' of justice and morals in Book III of the *Treatise*; the political and economic debates of the *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741, 1742, 1748) and the *Political Discourses* (which included 'Of the Poulousness of the Ancient Nations', an exercise in historical criticism); the epistemological investigation of belief in miracles of the *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748); the question of moral diversity in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). Most of those interventions were not history texts, but as they addressed their topics and the relevant debates, they constructed historical arguments, examined historical evidence, or delimited the possibility of historical knowledge and the nature of its objects.

Each of the texts this thesis will examine was written for and within various contexts, many already well-known in Hume scholarship: British civic humanism, English constitutional and party-political debate, the luxury debate, the natural jurisprudence tradition, religious controversy, among others. The thesis places Hume in the context of the French debates about the nature of the modern in the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* and the development of a new historical method at the *Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*. In bringing this French context to the fore, the thesis presents Hume's historical thought as more European than British (or at least reminds us that the British context is also European). It shows that Hume's historical arguments were also shaped in a continental context, not just his philosophical arguments. Hume's philosophical approach to history and his narrative of the modern were part of a broader change in how European thinkers constructed historical knowledge and how they articulated the relation between their own historical age and the past. On

both counts, the interpretation of the development of Hume's historical thought proposed here is connected to a recent historiographical revision qualifying some of the predominant claims of twentieth-century historiography of the Enlightenment. Therefore, I start with that revision, moving to recent scholarship on Hume in the second part of the introduction.

In terms of historical method, the overarching twentieth-century interpretation established a fundamental break between seventeenth and eighteenth-century historical practices. Arnaldo Momigliano advanced the most emblematic expression of that argument in the 1950s.[4] The eighteenth century was marked by the 'great conflict […] between antiquarians or "érudits" and philosophic historians.'[5] The former were concerned with 'ascertain[ing] the truth of each event by the best methods of research;' the latter were more concerned with asking 'sweeping' questions about the development of human society and had little interest in the profusion of facts produced by the érudits.[6] The third quarter of the century—the period of the *Encyclopédie*—was the moment of triumph of philosophic historians, who had begun their attacks already in first half of the century. The 'age of great erudition' that culminated in Bayle, Le Clerc, and Leibniz was thus replaced by the philosophical age.[7] Erudition and philosophy would only *begin* to be reunited with Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789).[8]

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[4] See Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13 (1950), pp. 285–315, and Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 2 (1954), pp. 450–463.

[5] Momigliano, 'Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method', p. 451. See also Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian', pp. 307–309.

[6] *Id.,* p. 307.

[7] Momigliano, 'Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method', p. 452.

[8] *Id.*, p. 454. Mark Phillips, 'Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57 (1996), pp. 301–302, notices that Momigliano did not ask *why* Gibbon was capable of unitining philosophical and erudite approaches to history.

Blandine Barret-Kriegel restated Momigliano's thesis in 1988, this time high-lighting the role of scepticism—including that of the highly erudite Bayle—in destroy-ing the age of erudition.[9] The 'defeat of erudition' in the eighteenth century was pos-sible only because it had been weakened in the previous century by attacks from lib-ertines and Cartesian philosophers.[10] Libertines such as François de La Mothe Le Vayer questioned available historical accounts; Cartesian philosophers denied that his-torical knowledge could ever achieve the status of truth because it was not based on demonstrative reasoning.[11] The foundations of the great age of erudition were being sapped as it reached its peak, creating the space for the future victory of philosophical history.

In connecting the rise of eighteenth-century philosophical history to sceptical attacks on seventeenth-century erudition, Barret-Kriegel made explicit the link be-tween Momigliano's history of eighteenth-century historiography and dominant twen-tieth-century narratives of Enlightenment and modernity such as Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* and Paul Hazard's *Crise de la Conscience Eu-ropéenne*.[12] Such accounts (and their more recent variants) present the turn of the cen-tury as a moment in which sceptical philosophy attacked established authorities.[13] Er-udition, responsible for curating the tradition upon which those authorities were estab-lished, was defeated in the process. Eighteenth-century philosophical history was thus

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[9] Blandine Barret-Kriegel, *La Défaite de l'Érudition* (Paris, 1988), pp. 280–302.

[10] Carlo Borghero, 'Les philosophes face à l'histoire : quelques discussions sur la connaissance histo-rique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles', in Chantal Grell and Jean-Michel Dufays, eds., *Pratiques et con-cepts de l'histoire en Europe : XVIe-XVIIIe siècles : colloque tenu en Sorbonne, les 22 et 23 mai 1989* (Paris, 1990), p. 72.

[11] On Cartesianism and history see Carlo Borghero, *La certezza e la storia : cartesianesimo, pirronismo e conoscenza storica* (Milano, Italy, 1983), pp. 13–45, and Chantal Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie : Étude sur la Connaissance Historique à l'Âge des Lumières* (Paris, 1993), pp. 27–28.

[12] Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la Conscience Européenne* (2 vols, Paris, 1935), and Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. by Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove, (Boston, 1955). Hazard referred to the erudition of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* as 'cette triste sa-gesse, qui consiste à savoir qu'on ne sair rien', pp. 51-52.

[13] In Hazard's formulation: 'One day, the French people, almost to a man, were thinking like Bossuet. The day after, they were thinking like Voltaire.' Hazard, *La Crise de la Conscience Européenne*, p. v., translation by J. Lewis May in Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind: 1680-1715* (New York, 2013).

the offspring of the philosophical assailers of authority in the seventeenth century: either directly, because they continued the philosophical takeover of the historical realm, or indirectly, because they were only able to defeat erudition once it had been weakened in the previous century.[14] Their differences notwithstanding, those narratives of Enlightenment led to the conclusion that, on the one hand, the erudition that survived into the eighteenth century did not share the philosophical spirit of the time; on the other hand, philosophical history was more properly a philosophical than a historical enterprise.[15]

A revision of that narrative has picked up pace in the last three decades. Research in the history of scholarship has shown that the weapons employed by sceptics were often of very orthodox provenance. When Hobbes and Spinoza historicized the Old Testament, the innovation was not the historicization itself but the anticlerical conclusions they derived from it.[16] 'Secularization' was not the product of interventions by sceptic outsiders either; it was often the product of confessional disputes.[17] The age of erudition developed the tools of historical criticism in the confessional combats of the seventeenth century. The dynamic was 'convergent' in most cases (that

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[14] Even in Reinhart Koselleck's narrative of Enlightenment the continuity between seventeenth-century historical criticism and the much broader eighteenth-century notion of critique is marked by the moment criticism escaped the control of political and religious authority at the turn of the century. See Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 98–113.

[15] According to Barret-Kriegel, philosophical history (primarily Voltaire's, but not only his) was a 'mythohistoire de la raison' or 'le programme des Annales moins la méthode', see Barret-Kriegel, *La Défaite de l'Érudition*, pp. 291 and 302, respectively.

[16] Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, pp. 404–431. By the turn of the eighteenth-century, the idea that the Old Testament should be treated as a historical source (and as such amenable to the same rules of criticism and open to cross-referencing with other sources) was already firmly established and deemed as a way of strengthening revealed religion, see Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie*, pp. 53–56.

[17] Dmitri Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to Enlightenment', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (December 2012), pp. 1127–1140, argues that tensions within religious orthodoxies arose as their own members pushed the historicization of the Old Testament beyond what could be made compatible with their doctrines. John Robertson and Sarah Mortimer, 'Nature, revelation, History: Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy c. 1600-1750', in Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson, eds., *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, 1600-1750* (Leiden, 2012), p. 22, make the same point for theological disputes in general, not just historical criticism. A similar point is also made by Charly Coleman, 'Resacralizing the World: The Fate of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography', *The Journal of Modern History*, 82 (2010), pp. 368–395.

is, with doubts generating new answers rather than sceptical conclusions).[18] More recently, Dmitri Levitin has employed the revision of the original thesis of the 'defeat of erudition' to collapse the difference between the supposedly 'historical' seventeenth century and the 'philosophical' Enlightenment.[19] He suggests some features that would distinguish 'philosophical history' in the eighteenth century were developed within seventeenth-century erudition.[20] Before Levitin, other scholars also connected seventeenth-century erudition and antiquarianism, the eighteenth-century interest in 'manners' and nineteenth-century German cultural history.[21] The division between philosophical and erudite historians was real, but that did not prevent them from borrowing from each other (and not always with due credit given).[22] In the end, Momigliano's original argument was almost turned on its head: 'antiquarianism as a methodological force "disappeared" because it had conquered history.'[23]

While building on that revision, the thesis presents a different perspective.[24] Instead of collapsing the distinction between the Enlightenment and the humanist Republic of Letters, I argue that there was indeed a significant change between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historical methods, but it was not expressed in terms of Momigliano's opposition between antiquarians/*érudits* and philosophical historians. Both erudite and philosophical historians shared a similar notion of historical evidence developed by the *érudits* in the first half of the eighteenth century. The fundamental

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[18] Anton M. Matytsin, *The Specter of Skepticism in the Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2016), pp. 233–262.

[19] Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion', pp. 1140, 1158, 1160. For a critical view of Levitin's attempt, see Anthony Ossa-Richardson, 'Book Review: Ancient Wisdom in the Age of New Science: Histories of Philosophy in England, c. 1640–1700, written by Dmitri Levitin', *Erudition and the Republic of Letters*, 3 (January 2018), pp. 83–96.

[20] For a case of seventeenth-century 'conjectural history', see, for instance, Dmitri Levitin, 'Egyptology, the Limits of Antiquarianism, and the Origins of Conjectural History, c. 1680–1740: New Sources and Perspectives', *History of European Ideas*, 41 (August 2015), pp. 699–727.

[21] Peter N. Miller, ed., *Momigliano and Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences* (Toronto, 2007), pp. 4–6.

[22] Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie*, pp. 23, 38.

[23] Miller, ed., *Momigliano and Antiquarianism*, p. 52.

[24] My view was first presented in Pedro Faria, 'David Hume, the Académie des inscriptions and the Nature of Historical Evidence in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Modern Intellectual History*, 18 (2021), pp. 299–322, which served as the foundation for chapter 1, section 3 of chapter 2, and sections 1 and 3 of chapter 3 below. Some paragraphs of section 3 of chapter 2 were copied without change from the article.

change in relation to the seventeenth century can be best understood as a shift within the paradigm set by Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole in the *Logique ou l'Art de Penser* (1662).[25] Seventeenth-century scholarship was primarily concerned with the 'external' elements of testimony, that is, the transmission of testimony through time. The fundamental question here was whether the historical tradition transmitting a particular historical account could be defended. Eighteenth-century *érudits* began looking instead to the 'internal' side of historical testimony, asking whether a particular historical account represented events in a 'verisimilar' way, that is, in accord with 'experience'. Insofar as the philosophical foundation of historical method was concerned, erudite and philosophical historians were on the same side, despite the differences between the historical genres in which they wrote. Further, the change was not promoted by a philosophical takeover of the historical discipline: it was a philosophical innovation made by erudite historians themselves, who were keen on modernising their discipline after it had reached some dead ends in the previous century. As such, the thesis presents a perspective that contributes to the recent revision of Momigliano's position while not collapsing all distinctions between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historical practices. The differences were there, and eighteenth-century erudite historians were eager to stress them even as they acknowledged the merits of the body of knowledge and techniques their predecessors had established. Philosophical historians such as Hume contributed to the development of those methodological changes and employed them for their own purposes.

The thesis presents the change in historical methods by contrasting the approach to historical evidence in Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697, 1702) with eighteenth-century approaches. The eighteenth-century side of the equation starts with the debates at the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres between the 1710s and 1730s and then moves on to the development of Hume's historical method in the 1740s and early 1750s. Chapter one presents Bayle as the

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[25] Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 73–84, highlights the centrality of *Logique* in modern probability theory.

moment of exhaustion of the seventeenth-century historical paradigm.[26] Bayle created an image of the ideal historian based on Cartesian method and tried to hold the flesh-and-bone scholars of a deeply confessionalized Republic of Letters to that ideal standard.[27] Facing the failure of the Republic of Letters, Bayle did not turn to a concept of historical truth that could be agreed upon. Instead, he asked how to regulate the transmission and criticism of evidence in a community of power-hungry, quarrelsome, and greedy scholars. As with anything Bayle, the question is whether he was wielding scepticism to attack or save the Republic of Letters.[28] In this case, the question is whether the distance between ideal and real historians was meant to produce scepticism or to be a 'call for action'. I take Bayle's word for it that he was trying to save the Republic of Letters. Like most 'sceptics' we will meet in this thesis (François de La Mothe le Vayer, Hume, de Pouilly, Fréret), Bayle dedicated his life to knowledge and scholarship. It matters more that eighteenth-century erudite historians did not take Bayle's word. His compilation of the great scholarly quarrels of the preceding centuries sounded the alarm: it showed that an exclusive focus on the process of transmission was incapable of generating a definitive criterion of historical certainty.

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[26] Bayle featured as *the* turning point in twentieth-century narratives of Enlightenment. Momigliano lists Bayle as one of the last masters of the age of erudition, as we have seen. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 205, presented Bayle as a pursuit of the fact for its own sake, bringing the logic of seventeenth-century erudition to its logical extreme and thus opening the space for a philosophical approach to history. Koselleck, *Critique and crisis*, pp. 111–113, also placed Bayle as the turning point of historical criticism: although Bayle acknowledged the ultimate authority of the political sovereign (and religious authority in relation to the revealed word), he established a separate realm of critique that would be the space in which the 'pathology' of modernity would grow.

[27] Dario Perinetti, 'Ways to Certainty', in Aaron Garrett, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* (London, 2014), notices that historical pyrrhonism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was often the product of trying to impose exceedingly demanding standards of certainty to historical knowledge. The Cartesian foundation of Bayle's notion of the ideal historian has been discussed by Elisabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle: Hétérodoxie et Rigorisme* (Paris, May 1996) and Ruth Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition: a Study of the Historical Theory and Practice of Pierre Bayle* (Oxford, 2013).

[28] Mara van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 3–7, reconstructs a history of interpretations of Bayle's scepticism. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, p. 110, presents Bayle's method as producing knowledge by civil war. A similar view of critical conflict as creative is also in Elisabeth Labrousse, 'La Méthode Critique chez Pierre Bayle et l'Histoire', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 11 (1957), pp. 450–466, and Isabelle Moreau, 'La république des « humeurs » : Les querelles dans le dictionnaire de Bayle', *Revue de Synthèse*, 137 (December 2016), pp. 427–452.

Thus, Bayle may have been the 'ethical teacher' and the 'arsenal' of the Enlightenment, but he did not teach the Enlightenment its historical method.[29] Well before Hume reconnected the sceptic and the historian, the academicians at the Académie Inscriptions were answering the sceptic crisis they perceived in Bayle and the landscape he surveyed.[30] The academicians developed their historical method as an adaptation of John Locke's treatment of testimony in book four of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690).[31] Very much against Locke's own views, they argued that historical testimony could be judged in the same way Locke judged testimony in general: in terms of whether it depicted plausible causal relations. They thus shifted away from the criticism of transmission (the external side) to the criticism of the content (the internal side). That change also meant changing the focus away from repairing the canon (particularly the classical historical canon) and towards constructing what the academicians called the '*fond de l'histoire*': a truthful historical account constructed by their critical reinterpretation of sources. The main debates at the Académie turned around the form of that *fond de l'histoire*. Its mythological studies wing, where such debates were concentrated, initially settled on an event-centred Euhemerist approach, which eventually evolved towards a comparative method.[32] The Euhemerist

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[29] The 'ethical teacher' expression is Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 208. Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford, 2003), p. xx, reports Voltaire called Bayle 'the arsenal of the Enlightenment'.

[30] Richard H. Popkin, 'Skepticism and the Study of History', in David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis, 1965), p. xxx, attributed to Hume the task of switching from 'scepticism *against* history' to the sceptic as historian.

[31] The relevance of Lockean epistemology to erudite historians is highlighted by Borghero, 'Les philosophes face à l'histoire : quelques discussions sur la connaissance historique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles'. Gabriel Bonno, 'The Diffusion and Influence of Locke's "Essay concerning Human Understanding" in France before Voltaire's "Lettres Philosophiques"', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 91 (1947), pp. 421–425, noticed the role of eighteenth-century *érudits* in the reception and transmission of Locke's philosophy in France. Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie*, p. 75, also brings the Lockean foundation of the debates at the *Académie des Inscriptions* to the fore in her effort to show that the eighteenth-century erudite historians were not set completely apart from eighteenth-century philosophers.

[32] Chantal Grell, *Le Dix-Huitième Siècle et l'Antiquité en France, 1680-1789* (Oxford, 1995), chap. 10, provides a comprehensive account of the different erudite approaches to ancient paganism. Richard Serjeantson, 'David Hume's Natural History of Religion (1757) and the End of Modern Eusebianism', in Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson, eds., *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy,*

approach emphasized clearing the fabulous elements from the *fond*. The comparative method focused on constructing a *fond* of 'general causes', putting the *érudits* very close to philosophical historians such as Hume and Montesquieu. The academicians explicitly presented their new methods as distinct from seventeenth-century erudition (even if they acknowledged their debts to the age of erudition). They also connected their audacity of going beyond the authoritative classical canon to the 'philosophical spirit' of their century. More importantly, their attitude was not limited to a select group of freethinkers; it was widespread in the Académie.[33]

That audacious attitude of the *érudits* must be understood as part of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*.[34] Twentieth-century narratives of Enlightenment and modernity defined the *querelle* as a conflict pitching authority and tradition on the Ancient side versus reason and autonomy on the Modern side.[35] The Ancient party defended the superiority of timeless classical models in morals as well as in the arts. The appropriate attitude of modern thinkers and artists was defined by *emulation*: to rediscover the classical past and emulate its best examples. The Ancient party thus expressed the central message of Renaissance humanism. In History, erudite scholarship was meant to comment and fix the classical canon, not replace it. The idea that a

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1600-1750 (Leiden, 2012), pp. 267–295, also discusses the transition from seventeenth-century diffusionist theories to natural-historical approaches in the eighteenth century. Nicolas Fréret's 'comparative method has been emphasized by Frank Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (New York, 1967), esp p. 108, and Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie*, pp. 85, 112.

[33] The connection to the 'philosophical spirit' of the Enlightenment is usually limited to a few 'luminaries' at the *Académie* or treated as separate from the Enlightenment proper. J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 155 and 168, presents an erudite Enlightenment distinct from other Enlightenments that were relevant to the intellectual development of Edward Gibbon. Blandine Barret-Kriegel, *Jean Mabillon* (Paris, 1988), p. 206, acknowledges the philosophical side of Fréret—his studies on language were 'sketches' of a universal history (p. 187)—but denies that he could ever be 'un de ces philosophes des Lumières' who frequented the famous Café Procope in the eighteenth century *because* he was an erudite historian. Lionel Gossman, *Medievalism and the ideologies of the Enlightenment: the world and the work of La Curne de Sainte-Palaye* (Baltimore, 1968), p. 47, is a notable exception, arguing that the academicians'by no means a gathering of timorous and blinkered pedants.'

[34] 'Ancients' and 'Moderns' are capitalized when referring to the factions of the *querelle*.

[35] A brief history of the historiography of the querelle, starting with Hippolyte Rigault, *Histoire de la querelle des anciens et des modernes* (Paris, 1856), is available in Douglas Lane Patey, 'Ancients and Moderns', in H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson, eds., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Eighteenth Century*, 4 (9 vols, Cambridge, 1997), pp. 32–34.

modern account could replace Livy or Tacitus was considered absurd.[36] Modern historians could emulate that canon when writing political histories of modern polities, renewing—not replacing—the moral and political lessons of classical antiquity. The Modern party represented the 'liberation of criticism from the authority of the dead' which Renaissance Humanism had imposed on the European Republic of Letters.[37] In Jonathan Swift's metaphor, the Ancients were the 'bees', who went outside to gather the materials for their homes, whereas the Moderns were the 'spiders', weaving their webs from within.[38] From that perspective, the *querelle* was the moment when the Modern camp won the battle in the sphere of the arts, completing a conquest that had begun in the scientific and philosophical spheres.[39]

A more recent line of interpretation has focused on what François Hartog defines as 'regimes of historicity', shifting away from trying to organize the *querelle* in terms of well-defined Ancient and Modern parties based on the authority-reason pair. Hartog defines a regime of historicity as 'the way in which a given society approaches its past and reflects upon it.'[40] Although, in a broader sense, all societies may be said to have a prevailing regime of historicity at any given time, the notion is meaningful and useful as a 'heuristic tool' for historians when analysing periods 'whenever the way in which past, present, and future are articulated no longer seems self-evident.'[41]

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[36] Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian', pp. 291–292.

[37] J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: an Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (London, 1920), pp. 78–79.

[38] Marc Fumaroli, 'Les abeilles et les araignées', in Anne-Marie Lecoq, ed., *La querelle des Anciens et des Modernes: XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles. Précédé de Les abeilles et Les Araignées, Essai de Marc Fumaroli* (Paris, 2001).

[39] Another line of investigation sought to transform the conflicts between Ancient and Modern parties into a continuing feature of European letters since the Renaissance, see for instance Hans Baron, 'The Querelle of the Ancients and the Moderns as a Problem for Renaissance Scholarship', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20 (January 1959), p. 3. The idea that the querelle can be extended back to the Renaissance is also found in Levent Yılmaz, *Le Temps Moderne: Variations sur les Anciens et les Contemporains* (Paris, 2004), p. 24, even though he also joins the recent view of the querelle as a break from a previous regime of historicity.

[40] François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York, 2015), p. 9. The shift towards that understanding was not caused by François Hartog, *Régimes d'Historicité: Présentisme et Expériences du Temps* (Paris, 2003). Patey, 'Ancients and Moderns', p. 34, had already noticed that movement towards what he called 'new understanding of history'. Hartog connects the modern regime of historicity to the French Revolution, see François Hartog, *Anciens, Modernes, Sauvages* (Paris, 2005), p. 219. The querelle was the beginning of the change (p. 28).

[41] Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, pp. 15–16.

In those moments of crisis, the debate about the relation between past and present reaches beyond the discipline of History. Thinkers intervening in debates outside of the discipline of History acknowledge a necessity of presenting and defending the historical structures underlying their positions.[42] The *querelle* was the beginning of one such moment: one way of relating the present to the past was exhausted, and new forms were being debated. Even if Ancient and Modern parties could be identified in the earlier history of the European Republican of Letters, the *querelle* was the moment the regime based on a sense of continuity (or revival) between classical antiquity and modern Europe expired.[43]

The idea that the *querelle* was a moment of inflection in perceptions of historical time had begun even under the traditional authority-reason view. While still adopting that framework, Joseph Levine noticed how the Moderns in the Battle of the Books—the English version of the *querelle*—were advocating a fundamentally different relationship to the past.[44] More recent interpretations have relied increasingly less on the authority-reason distinction, stressing how both parties were proposing and debating new historical understandings that established a fundamental break with classical antiquity. Larry Norman argues that the otherness of the manners and art of classical antiquity was central even to the Ancients' defence of antiquity.[45] The attitude that Levine attributed to erudite historians of the Modern camp in England was equally

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[42] *Id*, p. 17.

[43] Hartog, *Anciens, Modernes, Sauvages*, p. 28.

[44] Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca, 1991), chap. 9. Moderns such as William Wotton were arguing that modern scholars could know more about the ancient past than their ancient sources because they had access to more sources than any individual ancient author would have had, see William Wotton, *Reflections upon ancient and modern learning: to which is now added a defense thereof, in answer to the objections of Sir W. Temple, and others ; with observations upon the Tale of a tub* (London, 1705), pp. 353–354. Elsewhere, Levine establishes a longer narrative in which modern historical criticism began with Lorenzo Valla in the fifteenth century and gradually undermined the idea of a fundamental continuity between classical antiquity and modern Europe, see Joseph M Levine, *Re-enacting the Past: Essays on the Evolution of Modern English Historiography* (Aldershot, 2004), p. xi.

[45] Larry F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient* (Chicago, 2011), pp. 1–6. The difference between Ancients and Moderns was more about their reactions to that otherness: Moderns expressed 'shock'; Ancients were attracted to that otherness.

common among the French academicians, who leaned Ancient.[46] At the same time, some Moderns could express their views in ways that did not establish a fundamental break, as was the case with the Modern Charles Perrault: according to Hartog, the parallel between ancients and moderns in his *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-1692) was an 'epistemological device' belonging belonging to that old regime of historicity because it presupposed a fundamental continuity between past and present.[47] Thus, the *querelle* has become not so much a conflict between an Ancient and a Modern party, but a dispute between two Modern factions debating different but equally modern views of the relation between modern European societies and their classical past.[48]

The disputes between the two modern factions defined central aspects of the Enlightenment's attitude towards the past.[49] The Enlightenment becomes, in that view, 'a *prise*, not a *crise de conscience*': not so much a crisis caused by a battle between the old and the new, but the moment when European thinkers debated new forms of approaching the past.[50] Chapter two investigates two thinkers who contributed to the development of those central aspects: Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757), a Modern, and Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670-1742), an Ancient. The chapter focuses on the narratives of the philosophical spirit, their philosophical foundations and their consequences. Fontenelle's call for a new kind of history—a 'histoire de l'esprit humain'

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[46] On the inclinations of the academicians see Claude Nicolet, 'Des Belles-Lettres à l'érudition : l'Antiquité gréco-romaine à l'Académie au XVIIIe siècle', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 145 (2001), pp. 1627–1637. Marcello Cattaneo, 'Traditions of learning around the English Battle of the Books', *The Seventeenth Century*, 33 (January 2018), pp. 87–112, argues against Levine that there were critical historians using the 'modern' methods of criticism among the Ancients in the Battle of the Books as well.

[47] The very idea of comparing achievements presupposed those achievements were in the same historical plan, see Hartog, *Anciens, Modernes, Sauvages*, pp. 197–198.

[48] Yılmaz, *Le Temps Moderne*, p. 29. To which he added later that 'la Querelle doit être entendue comme le prélude au régime moderne d'historicité' (p. 194). Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, p. 14, argues that 'the quarrel of the ancients and moderns is neither a quarrel nor about ancients and moderns,' insisting on the complexities and ambiguities permeating the two parties.

[49] Indeed, Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago, 2010), p. 23, argues that the Enlightenment is better defined in terms of those attitudes (which he traces back to the *querelle*) than in terms of philosophical changes. If we focus on philosophical matters, it would be impossible to exclude the philosophical innovations of, say, Bacon or Descartes from the Enlightenment.

[50] Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, p. 13.

focusing on the development of the human spirit and its expressions in the evolution of language, manners, and institutions—was central to the Enlightenment. Dubos was an example of how modern the Ancient party could be. His defence of classical art was inspired by the Lockean philosophy he pioneered in France and founded on a theory of climatic causes that reworked Fontenelle's account of the philosophical spirit.[51] There was no place for mere '*ancienneté*'; Both sides accepted the maxim of Molière's character Angélique: 'the ancients, sir, are the ancients, and we are the people of to-day.'[52]

The 'temerity of the critical art', as Hume would later put it, was situated in that context, which established a historical distance between the *érudits* and their objects of inquiry.[53] Like Fontenelle, they acknowledged that that distance meant adopting new historical approaches distinct from those of seventeenth-century erudition. However, they shared Dubos' distrust of the Cartesianism animating Fontenelle's view and preferred the Lockean alternative. Above all, both sides of the *querelle* and the academicians all agreed that they lived in a new historical age that required rethinking their relationship to the past.

That sense of speaking from a new historical position was essential to Hume's intellectual development. Chapters three to five reconstruct Hume's intellectual development between the *Treatise* and the *Political Discourses* to chart how he articulated the historical method and the historical structure underlying his understanding of his

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[51] The notion of 'philosophical spirit' was a 'floating signifier' during the *querelle*: different thinkers gave it different meanings, roles, and causes in their historical accounts, see Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, p. 71. Edelstein calls Dubos' position 'a dialectical synthetsis' of the early positions in the querelle, see p. 40.

[52] Molière, *Oeuvres de Molière: Les femmes savantes. Le malade imaginaire. La gloire du dôme du Val-de-Grâce. Poèsies diverses*, ed. A. D. Regnier (Paris, 1886), vol 9, p. 370. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 32, 127–128, also uses Molière's passage to summarise the spirit of the *querelle*: it captures the idea that all parties had a clear grasp of their modern condition but differed about what it meant.

[53] David Hume, *Political discourses* (Edinburgh, 1752), p. 218. Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie*, p. 81, also described the debates at the *Académie des Inscriptions* as 'la témérité des érudits', but her expression is not connected to Hume's.

historical position. That reconstruction takes place within a reaction to the predominant view of Hume's intellectual development. As James Harris outlines, Hume scholarship since the middle of the twentieth century has been based on an idea of a fundamental continuity between the *Treatise* and the later works.[54] In that view, the *Treatise* set out the foundational tenets of Hume's science of human nature, which was then 'applied' to different areas of investigation.[55] Abusing Hume's own metaphor, that view presents his intellectual biography as the conquest of the 'capital' of the science of human nature with the *Treatise* followed by the conquest of the provinces. The recast versions of the three books of the *Treatise*—the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), and the *Dissertation on the Passions* (1757)—are regarded as watered-down versions of his magnum opus aimed at increasing the reach of his philosophy in public opinion.[56] That view presented Hume 'as though he lived in a cocoon of his own spinning', as Duncan Forbes put it.[57] It fails in two aspects as a historical interpretation: first, it fails to relate Hume's later works to the specific contexts in which they were meant to intervene. Second, it presents a view of Hume's life as having stagnated: it seems as if he did not learn anything new after he finished the *Treatise*. From 1740 until his death in 1776, Hume remained the same, ploughing on with the application of the science of human nature.

Many twentieth-century interpretations avoid that static view of Hume's intellectual development, particularly in the history of political thought.[58] In the last two

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[54] James A. Harris, *Hume: an intellectual biography* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 10–11.

[55] Eugene Rotwein, 'Introduction', in Eugene Rotwein, ed., *David Hume: Writings on Economics* (Edinburgh, 1955), and Claudia M. Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (University Park-PA, 2003), are examples of that approach to Hume's intellectual biography applied to his economic and historical ideas, respectively. For a contrast between that perspective and previous nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interpretations, see Harris, *Hume*, pp. 2–9.

[56] Kate Abramson, 'Sympathy and the Project of Hume's Second Enquiry', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 83 (2001), pp. 45–80, p.45, footnote 1, lists a slew of references from the third quarter of the twentieth century that regard the second *Enquiry* as a 'more stylish' version of Book III of the *Treatise*.

[57] Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975), p. x.

[58] Forbes' comments on Hume's revision of 'Of Liberty and Despotism' and 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' are essential to section two of chapter four below. Besides Forbes, see Istvan

decades, interpretations of Hume's philosophical works have begun to catch up, with new research addressing the *Enquiries* and the *Dissertation on the Passions* as independent works with their own contexts.[59] James Harris' intellectual biography is perhaps the totalizing representation of that new research agenda: rejecting the view of Hume as a 'systematic thinker', Harris argues the unity of Hume's intellectual biography comes from his position as a 'philosophical man of letters'.[60] That position meant striving to achieve a degree of material and intellectual independence from factional divisions of many kinds (party-political, confessional, national). It also meant analysing his objects from a general point of view, seeking to point to the general principles at work in the different spheres of human life.

This thesis belongs to this new wave of interpretations that emphasize Hume's intellectual development after the *Treatise*. On its two fronts—historical method and historical structure or narratives—the thesis begin with the *Treatise*. However, it does not explain Hume's later works as applications or extensions of a set of principles and ideas developed in the *Treatise*.[61] Its key concept is the idea of 'reframing': although some of the basic elements of Hume's historical thought are in many ways present in

Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 339–353, and J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 135–140, on the evolution of Hume's views on public credit. The evolution of Hume's stance on threats of universal monarchy has also been a feature in interpretations of his political and economic thought. Besides the above quoted, see also John Robertson, 'Universal Monarchy and the Liberties of Europe: David Hume's Critique of an English Whig Doctrine', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993).

[59] On the first *Enquiry* and the *Dissertation*, see Peter Millican, ed., *Reading Hume on Human Understanding: Essays on the First Enquiry* (Oxford, 2002), and Amyas Merivale, *Hume on Art, Emotions, and Superstition: a Critical Study of the Four Dissertations* (London, 2018). On the second *Enquiry*, see Jacqueline Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects: Passion, Sympathy, and Society in Hume's Philosophy* (Oxford, 2015); Esther Engels Kroeker and Willem Lemmens, eds., *Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2021); and Jacqueline Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, March 2020). The literature on the second *Enquiry* will be discussed at length in chapter five below.

[60] Harris, *Hume*, pp. 2, 18–20.

[61] This is the view of Schmidt, *David Hume*: Hume's acknowledgement of the historical aspect of human life is present throughout his career, without much change.

the *Treatise* or sometimes even earlier, the period between the *Treatise* and the *Political Discourses* was marked by the adaptation and reframing of those initial ideas.[62]

In terms of historical methods, the *Treatise* already contained the notion that the science of human nature provides the general causal knowledge with which a historian judges the evidence. Hume's main treatment of historical testimony would only appear in his discussion of miracles in the *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, but it was most likely the part he had 'castrated' from the *Treatise*.[63] However, as with the academicians, the transition from causal knowledge to claims about historical sources was not merely a question of applying the general to the particular.[64] Causal knowledge had to be articulated in terms of general causes relevant to the historical phenomena at hand—the *fond de l'histoire* in Fréret's view. Chapter three reconstructs how Hume moved from epistemology to a critical history based on general causes. Between the *Treatise* and 'Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations' (1752), Hume confronted many questions such as what kind of 'general causes' mattered, what kind of historical phenomena could be approached from the perspective of general causes and how to extract general conclusions about historical phenomena from the very sources one is trying to examine. 'Populousness' was an exercise in constructing a complex 'fond' of social, political and economic causes based on the very same sources Hume set out to criticize. It finally turned the Port-Royal *Logic* on its head.[65]

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[62] I am applying to Hume's intellectual development the concept Mark Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton, 2000), p. 13, uses to define the emergence of philosophical history.

[63] As has been noticed by the literature, 'Of Miracles' can be read both as a polemic intervention in debates about miracles and as part of a longer argument about testimony and probability going back to the Port-Royal *Logique*. See David Wootton, 'Hume's "Of Miracles": Probability and Irreligion', in M. A. Stewart, ed., *Studies in the philosophy of the Scottish enlightenment* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 191–230, and David Fate Norton, 'History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought', in David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis, 1965).

[64] Schmidt, *David Hume*, pp. 381–382, defines the dynamic between politics and history in those terms. Relatedly, Rotwein, 'Introduction', pp. xxiv–xxv, xxxii, understood the relationship between the science of human nature and Hume's political economy in similar terms: the former provides the general causal conclusions, which are then applied by the latter in the analysis of specific historical circumstances.

[65] Hacking, *The emergence of probability*, p. 79, argued 'Of Miracles' turned Port-Royal on its head. Chapter three will argue the process was completed only with 'Populousness'.

Hume's philosophical history was more than the use of general causes for critical purposes. It was a historical account *of* general causes.[66] Chapter four reconstructs the development of Hume's views on the structure of that history of general causes. The chapter focuses on the reframing of the conjectural history of Book III of the *Treatise*. In that work, Hume presented the development of society as a movement from a rude to a civilized state—which he characterized as 'they' and 'us'. It was a conjectural history focused on a single passion: the interested affection.[67] Hume's interest in the transition from rude to civilized state remained a constant in his intellectual career, but the *Treatise*'s conjectural history faced a key difficulty when removed from its high level of abstraction: dealing with classical antiquity.[68] Whether classical antiquity was closer to the rude-they pole or the civilized-us one was a central question to Hume's social, economic and political theories. The chapter reconstructs how Hume gradually distanced classical antiquity from modern European commercial societies, a process that largely coincides with Hume's questions about the shape of the *fond de l'histoire* explored in chapter three: as Hume added complexity to his history of general causes (adding manners, science and culture, and economics on top of politics), the distance between ancient and modern grew. That process was encapsulated in the evolution of the notion of 'civilized monarchies', which appeared in the 1741 edition of the *Essays*. Between 1741 and 1752, Hume gradually reworked his history of the most distinctive aspects of modern European civilized monarchies—luxury, com-

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[66] As J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 185, writes, 'It follows that there are always two histories to be written, that of cultural change, and that of particular actions.'

[67] The one-dimensioned nature of the conjectural history of the *Treatise* is emphasised by Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 83–86; Annette Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue: Hume on Justice* (Cambridge-MA, 2010), p. 37, and *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge-MA, 1991), p. 220.

[68] I am here taking position on a debate about the nature of conjectural history in the Scottish Enlightenment. See the introduction of chapter four below for a view of how the different positions sprang from Dugald Stewart, 'An Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, L. L. D.', in W. P. D. Wightman, J. C. Bryce, and Ian Simpson Ross, eds., *Essays on philosophical subjects* (Oxford, 1980), the first description of conjectural history as a distinctively Scottish approach to history.

merce, politeness, personal liberty—as 'post ancient', that is, disconnected from classical antiquity.[69] The *Essays* and the *Political Discourses* were thus doing more than showing the inferiority of social, political, and economic ideas grounded on classical ideals: Hume was severing the historical connection between ancients and moderns. Articulating that view took twelve years.

The second *Enquiry* was intimately connected to that process of reframing the rude-civilized conjectural history in terms of the histories of classical antiquity and modern civilized commercial societies. Chapter five contributes to the burgeoning scholarly literature considering the differences between the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise*. Until recently, the debate had been focused mainly on Hume's accounts of the moral sentiment and the role of his associationist psychology.[70] More recently, the second *Enquiry*'s heightened awareness of historical diversity has come to the fore.[71] The chapter furthers this recent focus. It argues that the second *Enquiry* is a historian's moral philosophy in three distinct aspects: first, Hume no longer presented his argu-

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[69] J. G. A. Pocock, 'Perceptions of Modernity in Early Modern Historical Thinking', *Intellectual History Review*, 17 (January 2007), pp. 79–92, suggests that eighteenth-century narratives of Enlightenment were trying to articulate a view of modern Europe as 'post-ancient'.

[70] On the side of continuity between the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* see Abramson, 'Sympathy and the Project of Hume's Second Enquiry'; Rico Vitz, 'Sympathy and Benevolence in Hume's Moral Psychology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 42 (2004), pp. 261–275; Remy Debes, 'Has Anything Changed? Hume's Theory of Association and Sympathy after the *Treatise*', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 15 (2007), pp. 313–338; Remy Debes, 'Humanity, Sympathy and the Puzzle of Hume's Second Enquiry', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 15 (2007), pp. 27–57; and Anthony E. Pitson, 'Sympathy, Humanity, and the Foundation of Morals', in Jacqueline Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, 2020). Jacqueline Taylor has been the main interpreter stressing the differences between the two works in those regards, see her *Reflecting Subjects*; 'Hume on the Standard of Virtue', *The Journal of ethics*, 6 (2002), pp. 43–62; 'Hume's Revisions, and the Structure and Main Argument of EPM', in *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, 2020). See also Ryan Patrick Hanley, 'David Hume and the "Politics of Humanity"', *Political Theory*, 39 (April 2011), pp. 205–233.

[71] See the chapters collected in Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals*. See also Marc Hanvelt, 'History, Context, and the Conventions of Political Society', in Esther Engels Kroeker and Willem Lemmens, eds., *Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2021), and Ryan Patrick Hanley, 'Justice and Politics in the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals', in Esther Engels Kroeker and Willem Lemmens, eds., *Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2021). Harris, *Hume*, pp. 250–254, also stresses the historical character of the second *Enquiry*.

ment as a conjectural history. Instead, he referred to the fragmented histories of modern and ancient societies he had been developing.[72] That meant rearticulating the aspects of his moral philosophy that had been presented in a developmental form, such as the account of justice. Second, the book was itself a contribution to reframing the rude-civilized narrative in terms of the historical ancient-modern distinction, particularly in its distinction between modern humane virtues and ancient sublime and heroic virtues.[73] Finally, the second *Enquiry*, along with 'Of the Standard of Taste' (1757) proposed a theory of moral and aesthetic judgment founded on Dubos' *Réflexions* that took historical awareness seriously. Instead of aiming at definitive normative moral claims, Hume's moral philosophy showed how our moral judgments are historically situated and how a good judge deals with that.

The French context outlined above has been thoroughly neglected in previous studies of the topics covered by chapters three to five. Concerning the *Académie des Inscriptions*, only two authors have considered the possibility that Hume's discussion of testimony was connected to the debate about Pyrrhonism at the *Académie*.[74] Concerning the *querelle*, Hume does appear in the recent literature about the *querelle*, but the reverse is rarely the case.[75] Since Ernst Mossner's 1949 suggestion that Hume's

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[72] This is noticed by C. N. Stockton, 'Economics and the Mechanism of Historical Progress in Hume's History', in Donald Livingston and James King, eds., *Hume: a Re-Evaluation* (New York, 1976), who has been thoroughly neglected even by the recent literature highlighting attention to historical diversity in the second *Enquiry*.

[73] The connection between the second *Enquiry* and Hume's view of classical antiquity has been noted by Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, chap. 6, and Margaret Watkins, 'Virtues Sublime and Suspect', in Esther Engels Kroeker and Willem Lemmens, eds., *Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2021).

[74] Wootton, 'Hume's "Of Miracles": probability and irreligion'; Dario Perinetti, 'Philosophical Reflection on History', in Knud Haakonssen, ed., *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, (Cambridge, 2005), vol. 2, pp. 1117–1121, and Dario Perinetti, 'Hume at La Flèche: Skepticism and the French Connection', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 56 (2018), pp. 62–65. Perinetti is the only author to connect discuss Hume in the context of the *Académie des Inscriptions* and the *querelle*.

[75] For instance, Hume's discussion of gallantry appears in Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 119–126. His position in relation to Ancient and Modern factions appear in Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 106–107, as an example of the aftereffects of the querelle.

essay on population was a 'third wave' of the *querelle*, few Hume scholars have attempted to establish that connection on a sounder footing.[76] Peter Jones is the major exception, with a book-length treatment of Hume's French context and an entire chapter on Hume and Dubos.[77] That absence is surprising since, as Peter Jones notices, Hume was very interested in themes related to the *querelle* and in many of its participants. Hume probably owned a variety of books written by authors involved in the querelle: Perrault's *Parallèles*, the complete works of Boileau, Fontenelle and William Temple, and three works by Dubos including the *Réflexions*, just to name a few.[78] He also likely owned various books by members of the *Académie des Inscriptions,* including works by La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, de Pouilly, and the Abbé Vertot's histories of Portuguese and Swedish revolutions, besides other works by younger academicians.[79]

Beyond the books he might have owned, Hume cited participants of the *querelle* in a diversity of occasions, even outside of arguments that could be related directly to the *querelle*. The most prominent case is Dubos. Hume mentions Dubos in

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[76] Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'Hume and the Ancient-Modern Controversy, 1725-1752: A Study in Creative Scepticism', *The University of Texas Studies in English*, 28 (1949), pp. 139–153, argues that 'Populousness' redirected the conflict between Ancients and Moderns to the domain of economy and politics. Yasuo Amoh, 'The Ancient–Modern Controversy in the Scottish Enlightenment', in Tatsuya Sakamoto and Hideo Tanaka, eds., *The Rise of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (London, 2003), pp. 69–85, follows Mossner.

[77] Peter Jones, *Hume's sentiments: their Ciceronian and French context* (Edinburgh, 1982). Peter Jones, 'Hume on the Arts and "The Standard of Taste": Texts and Contexts', in David Fate Norton and Jacqueline Anne Taylor, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Hume* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 414–446, repeats the centrality of Dubos and the querelle. More recently, Moritz Baumstark, 'The Biographical Background of the Second Enquiry', in Jacqueline Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, March 2020), opened a new avenue of investigation in comparing Hume's techniques of 'otherization' of the ancients in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*.

[78] David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, *The David Hume Library* (Edinburgh, 1996). Other works include Houdar de la Motte's *Réflexions sur la Critique* (1715), a Latin version of Longinus' *On the Sublime,* and William Wotton's *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694).

[79] The list of younger academicians includes Charles Duclos, Nicolas Boulanger and Charles de Brosses. Another curious item in the Hume library was a copy of the academician Louis Dutens' *Recherches sur l'Origine des Découvertes attributes aux Modernes* (Paris, 1766). Dutens' book was a late attempt to answer Modern works such as Perrault's *Parallèles* in the same terms of the original opposition between ancient and modern achievements. In the *Recherches*, Dutens went about showing how many modern technological advances had actually been discovered by ancients (or at least depended heavily on discoveries made by the ancients). On Dutens' *Recherches*, see J. W. Lorimer, 'A Neglected Aspect of the "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes"', *The Modern Language Review*, 51 (1956), pp. 179–185.

the 'Early Memoranda', which confirms an interest in the *Réflexions* in the late 1730s or even earlier.[80] References to arguments made in the *Réflexions* also appear on all new instalments of the *Essays* published between 1742 and 1757.[81] The persistence of references to Dubos is connected to the persistence of themes that had been at the centre of the *querelle*. There are at least half a dozen essays or parts of larger works that are framed in terms of the *querelle*: 'Of Eloquence' and 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' (1742); 'Of National Characters' (1748); 'A Dialogue', part of the second *Enquiry*; 'Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations' (1752), 'Of the Standard of Taste' (1757). References to Fontenelle and other quarrellers are less frequent but still present. Fontenelle comes to mind particularly as a background to Hume's *Natural History of Religion.*[82]

From the presence of those writers, we can portray Hume as well-read in polite French letters, something that also transpires from what we know about his early life.[83] It seems the prevalence of interpretations of the *querelle* as either a minor literary scuffle or as the victory of blunt Modern rationalism may have inhibited scholars from focusing on possible connections between Hume and the *querelle*. The same effect could be attributed to the 'defeat of erudition' thesis. Given such interpretations, they

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[80] Working on the hypothesis that the memoranda were notes from earlier notes (this seems to be a scholarly consensus, regardless of differences concerning the dating of the manuscript, see Harris, *Hume*, p. 146 esp. n. 11. Hume's interest in Dubos can be dated back to as far as the late 1720s, see Emilio Mazza and Gianluca Mori, '"Loose Bits of Paper" and "Uncorrect Thoughts": Hume's Early Memoranda in Context', *Hume Studies*, 42 (2016), pp. 9–60. Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The life of David Hume* (Oxford, 1970), p. 79, commented that Dubos' influence on Hume's pre-*Treatise* years was neglected. That claim was grounded on his dating of the Memoranda to Hume's early life. Yet, even if with the new dating, we can still say Dubos' influence has not been sufficiently noticed, pre- or post-*Treatise*.

[81] That is, the 1742 and 1748 volumes, as well as the *Political Discourses* and the *Four Dissertations*. There are passages in the *Treatise* that could also be connected to Dubos. See section 3.2 below for a full discussion of Hume's interest in Dubos.

[82] Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, p. 169. Hume's interest in French debates about ancient paganism *could* also explain the presence of many works by French erudite historians of a later period not covered here: Nicolas Sylvestre Bergier, Charles de Brosses, Nicolas Boulanger, among others.

[83] Stewart, 'Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711-1752', pp. 36–41.

do not look like the kind of readings that would interest an enlightened sceptic philosopher and philosophical historian. A different picture emerges once we reject those views.

In any case, the goal of this thesis is not to provide an exhaustive account of Hume's connection to authors that participated in the *querelle* or the debates at the *Académie des Inscriptions*. In some cases, I have altogether skipped notable connections between Hume and the authors mentioned in chapters one and two: from Bayle on the problem of evil to Dubos and Fontenelle on tragedy, there are a few instances that would have to be included if the point here was to fully reconstruct Hume's relation to those authors and their works. The point of relating Hume to the *querelle* and the academicians is to use those neglected connections to show how central that reformulation of the relationship with the past, particularly the classical past, was to his intellectual development.

The French context is relevant not just because the biographical connections were there and have been neglected. It is important because it reminds us that the development of Hume's historical thought had a European background, even if his works were often written as interventions in British or Scottish debates. The British context dominates the scholarship on Hume's work as a historian and as a historically-minded political thinker. Since Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, the major contexts for Hume's historical and political thought have been English historiography, British political discourse (primarily around the question of civic humanism) and the Scottish natural jurisprudential tradition.[84] That prevalence has a good reason, of course. Hume was a historian of England, and most of his political essays are either about British or English domestic politics or Britain's position in international affairs.

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[84] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, ed. Richard Whatmore (Princeton, 2016), chap. 14, published around the same time, emphasizes the British political landscape. Hont, *Jealousy of trade*, Introduction, structures his views of Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment in terms of the interaction between the civic humanist tradition and natural jurisprudence. On the contrasts between those two interpretations of the Scottish Enlightenment, see J. G. A. Pocock, 'Cambridge paradigms and Scotch philosophers: a study of the relations between the civic humanist and the civil jurisprudential interpretation of eighteenth-century social thought', in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: the Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983).

However, as Duncan Forbes argues, the '*History* is not a history of the English people, or of English civilization: it is a history of civilization in England.'[85] Now, that history of civilization was a European question. However, that 'European' element of Scottish histories of civilization is often reduced to Montesquieu's 'sociological' politics.[86] The origins of the Scottish histories of civilization only reach beyond Scottish or British limits by means of the *philosophical* debates about sociability, natural law, and the social contract.[87] Hume is supposed to be a major element of the transition between Samuel Pufendorf's 'temporalized philosophy' and Adam Smith's 'historical mode' of natural jurisprudence, but the only properly historical inputs into that process are English history and Montesquieu.[88] Thus, interpretations of Hume's works sit today in

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[85] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, p. 298.

[86] Phillips, *Society and sentiment*, p. 171, calls Montesquieu the 'father of the genre' of conjectural history. Richard Sher, 'From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue and Commerce', in David Wootton, ed., *Republicanism, liberty, and commercial society, 1649-1776* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 382–383, says Montesquieu 'defined the central question [of the Scottish Enlightenment] and suggested the most productive means of pursuing their answers.' Baumstark, 'David Hume', and Tom Pye, 'Histories of Liberty in Scottish Thought, 1747-1787' (Thesis, University of Cambridge, October 2018), also limit their investigations to Montesquieu, Baumstark later extended the importance of the French background to the *querelle*, as mentioned above. Fania Oz-Salzberger, 'The Political Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment', in Alexander Broadie and Craig Smith, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 168, connects the Scottish perspective to Montesquieu, particularly to the concept of 'esprit'. Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (Basingstoke, 2013), starts her account from Montesquieu and Hume. Aaron Garrett, 'Anthropology: The "Original" of Human Nature', in Alexander Broadie and Craig Smith, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 78, points to Lafitau and Charlevoix's colonial histories but does not develop the point.

[87] John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 256–261, connects Hume's views on sociability to Bayle's claim that a society of atheists was possible in the *Pensées Diverses sur la Comète*. Scottish historical thought is also connected to the continent via natural jurisprudence. Hume's relation to the natural law tradition has been dealt with extensively by the literature, see Stephen Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume* (Oxford, 1993); Pauline Westerman, 'Hume's Reception of Grotius', *Grotiana*, 9 (January 1988), pp. 64–78; Pauline Westerman, 'Hume and the Natural Lawyers: a Change of Landscape', in M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright, eds., *Hume and Hume's connexions* (Penn State, 1995); Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: the Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge, 1981); and James A. Harris, 'Hume on the Moral Obligation to Justice', *Hume Studies*, 36 (2010), pp. 25–50.

[88] The expression comes from Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', p. 18. Hont, *Jealousy of trade*, pp. 183–184, discusses the transition from Pufendorf to Smith, emphasizing particularly the fact that Smith added the fourth, commercial stage, breaking it off from the agricultural stage.

that confluence between the Scottish adaptation of natural jurisprudence, the exhaustion of civic humanism in commercial Britain, and Montesquieu. In connecting Hume's process of rethinking the connection between classical antiquity and modern Europe to the *querelle* and his historical method to the *Académie des Inscriptions*, I am making a new case for a more extended European background of his development as a historical thinker.[89] That French historical background is fundamental to Hume's repositioning of classical societies and, consequently, to most of his moral, political, economic, social and, most certainly, historical arguments. After this thesis, I hope it will be clear that 'Montesquieu' in the triad above will be replaced by 'early eighteenth-century French historical thought'.

Indeed, the French context is the same for the development of both Hume and Montesquieu's historical thought.[90] In showing that the French context was relevant to Hume, this thesis confirms Pocock's suggestion that Hume must be considered a contemporary of Montesquieu and Voltaire.[91] Those three philosophical historians, along with lesser-known thinkers such as Fréret, coalesced a variety of forms of historical argument—natural jurisprudential theories of the origins of property, histories of the arts and sciences, histories of religion, theories of sociability, histories of commerce, constitutional histories in the style of '*histoire raisonée*'[92]—into 'philosophical history' as a more coherent framework. That framework would be the basis upon which later Enlightenment thinkers—Scottish conjectural historians such as Adam Smith and

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[89] Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 104–115, argues that bringing the French querelle to the fore should not be taken as claiming that France is the sole origin of the Enlightenment. The shifts in historical narratives served as a point of reference to which other national traditions added their own concerns. The Scottish adaptation was much more focused on commerce or the rule of law than Dubos', he notices (p. 107). The querelle was a particularly strong 'catalyst' of reflections about the structure of history and the relation between past and present, he argues (p. 45).

[90] On the *querelle* as a context for Montesquieu's account of the French monarchy, see Harold A. Ellis, 'Montesquieu's Modern Politics: The "Spirit of the Laws" and the Problem of Modern Monarchy in Old Regime France', *History of Political Thought*, 10 (1989), pp. 665–700.

[91] Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government*, p. 180.

[92] Perinetti, 'Philosophical Reflection on History', pp. 1117–1121, notices that philosophical history is the product of the confluence of natural jurisprudence and the *querelle*. Miller, ed., *Momigliano and Antiquarianism*, p. 35, presents philosophical history as the confluence between natural jurisprudence and antiquarianism.

John Millar or Frenchmen such as Turgot and Condorce—developed their more clearly defined stadial theories and theories of progress.

My decision to interrupt my interpretation in 1752, right when Hume began preparing the *History of Great Britain*, must be understood as the obverse side of my decision to make Hume's French context more than Montesquieu.[93] Given constraints of time and length, including the *History* would limit my ability to explore in detail both the pre-1748 part of Hume's historical thought and, in consequence, the French context before Montesquieu. This will be clear if the reader contrasts this thesis with two other PhD theses (to which I am deeply indebted): those of Tom Pye and Moritz Baumstark.[94] My analysis of Hume's reassessment of classical republics in the *Essays* and the *Political Discourses* is indebted to Baumstark's reconstruction of the 'fragmentary history' of classical antiquity in the *Political Discourses* and the second *Enquiry*.[95] However, Baumstark limited the development of Hume as a historian to the period after his contact with Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* in 1748. History had played only an 'auxiliary' role in Hume's science of politics before that, according to Baumstark.[96] Again, chapter four shows precisely that the 'fragmentary history' of classical antiquity had begun much earlier than 1752. The 1752 version of that history had begun in the 1741 *Essays*. Another version of that history, based on more traditional views of classical societies, was present in Hume's earliest extant text.[97] There is a similar situation concerning Hume's historical method. Baumstark moves forward from the second *Enquiry* and the *Political Discourses*, whereas this thesis reconstructs

[93] I have made a couple of exceptions to that time frame: the discussion of Hume's essay on the Ossian poems in chapter three, the revisions of the *Essays* in the 1760s and 1770s in chapter four, and an incursion into 'Of the Standard of Taste' in chapter five. All of them are meant mostly to stress points made based on writings from the relevant period.

[94] Baumstark, 'David Hume'; Pye, 'Histories of Liberty'.

[95] Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 97–98.

[96] Baumstark, 'David Hume', p. 25. argues that 'one does get the sense that it is employed mainly as an auxiliary science that provides a resource of factual information to be utilized in his "science of politics"' of the 1740s volumes of the *Essays*.

[97] The 'Historical Essay on Chivalry and Modern Honour' is Hume's earliest extant text. It contains both a traditional view of the decline of the Roman Empire as the consequence of luxury and hints of an early interest on Mandeville. See John P. Wright, 'Hume on the Origin of "Modern Honour": A Study in Hume's Philosophical Development', in Ruth Savage, ed., *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain* (Oxford, 2012), p. 201.

how Hume got there.[98] In contrast with Baumstark, the thesis thus shows that Hume's historical thought was not a product of his interaction with Montesquieu. That certainly was an important part of it, but it was not the whole story. Insofar as Hume is concerned, Pye's main argument is that Hume understood British liberty to be the product of luxury and the consequent change in manners, not parliaments.[99] Like Baumstark, he connects this to Montesquieu, particularly to Hume's clever reading of Montesquieu's account of why the French monarchy could be considered a 'moderate' government.[100] Again, in showing that Hume's narrative of the modern, with luxury and modern civilized monarchies at its core, was being developed since 1741, I show that the French context must go beyond the *Spirit of the Laws*.

In conclusion, there was history before the *History,* and there was French historical thought before Montesquieu. This thesis explores the development of Hume's historical thought before the *History* and places it as part of a change in European historical thought that neither began with Montesquieu nor could be reduced to merely a continuation of the seventeenth century. It provides the first bloc of an adequate understanding of Hume as a European historical thinker. It is also the first bloc of a new history of philosophical history.

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[98] Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 76–92.
[99] Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', pp. 172, 182.
[100] Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', pp. 116, 172, 177. Before Pye, James Moore, 'Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment', in Rebecca Kingston, ed., *Montesquieu and His Legacy* (Albany, 2009), pp. 181–184, also drew attention to Hume's attentive reading of Montesquieu.

Chapter 1

PIERRE BAYLE ON HISTORICAL CERTAINTY AND THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

Pierre Bayle may have been the 'arsenal of the Enlightenment' in its attempt to confront religious dogmatism.[1] He may have been an inspiration to or a formative influence on many a character in this thesis. The relentless, often ruthless, scrutiny of historical evidence in his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* may have been the source of many eighteenth-century historians' desire to probe the historical records available to them and to put historical knowledge on a sounder footing.[2] He influenced many aspects of Hume's thought, either directly or through other thinkers such as Bernard Mandeville. However, Bayle was not the foundation upon which Enlightenment historians built their historical method and approach to historical knowledge.

This chapter reconstructs Bayle's approach to historical knowledge. It shows how Bayle gave almost exclusive attention to the 'external' side of testimony and evidence, that is, the transmission of testimony and evidence through time and the quality and character of those involved in it. The chapter then shows how Bayle's emphasis on external circumstances led to proposals about regulating the transmission of historical knowledge based on the profile of an ideal historian. Those proposals were insufficient by Bayle's own standards, but he could only hope they would work. As we will learn in the next chapter, the academicians at the *Académie des Inscriptions* would acknowledge those limitations and develop a different historical method based on assessing the internal side of testimony and evidence. Thus, we will conclude that Enlightenment historical methods must be understood as distinct from that of Bayle and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Republic of Letters he depicted in the *Dictionnaire*.

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[1] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, p. xx. Popkin attributed the 'arsenal of the Enlightenment' expression to Voltaire.

[2] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 208, named Bayle the 'ethical teacher' of Enlightenment historians.

Bayle's approach to historical knowledge was formed within a Cartesian world in which the epistemic status of history was contested. Descartes demoted history from the rank of knowledge by downplaying the role of memory in the discovery of truth. The only path to certain knowledge is 'manifest intuition and necessary deduction.'[3] Memory, like sense-perception and the imagination, can be a hindrance to knowledge. It is 'weak and unstable,' so any reasoning that depends on too many conclusions demand a constant 'refreshing' of its previous steps kept in our memory.[4] Even though Descartes acknowledged the importance of knowledge of the ancient world, in particular as an antidote to prejudiced views, he warned that, as a traveller eventually becomes a stranger in his own country, 'one who is too curious about the practices of past ages usually remains quite ignorant about those of the present.'[5] Malebranche, the Cartesian-in-chief of the second half of the century, also condemned the 'science of memory' for filling the mind with useless knowledge about the actions and opinions of the past. This kind of knowledge produced endless quarrels among proud men who thought their intellects were as vast as the expanses of space and time from which they had collected such useless information. All the while, indivisible, immutable truth, the only thing that could unite them, received no attention.[6]

The Cartesian attack on History has been a constant feature in twentieth-century historiography. Ernst Cassirer argued that 'the entire dimension of the historical [was] thus eliminated from the field of the Cartesian ideal of knowledge.'[7] Paul Hazard similarly identified the Cartesian critique as one of the sources of the 'crisis of the European mind' within History.[8] Since those 1930s interventions, this theme has been

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[3] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge, 1985) vol 1, p. 48. The authority on the relation between Cartesianism and history is Borghero, *La Certezza e la Storia*, see chaps. 1 on Cartesianism and 6 on Bayle.
[4] *Id.*, 38.
[5] *Id.*, 114.
[6] Quoted by Grell, *Le Dix-Huitième Siècle*, vol. 1, p. 388.
[7] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 201.
[8] Hazard, *La Crise de la Conscience Européenne*, p. 46.

riffed repeatedly.[9] However, this theme supposes that it was the Cartesian attack on History that ushered in the crisis that would eventually open the space for the intellectual innovations of the Enlightenment. This chapter approaches the matter otherwise. Although Descartes and some Cartesians were indeed hostile to historical knowledge, Bayle's approach to historical knowledge was an attempt to transpose a Cartesian theory of knowledge into the domain of history so that historical knowledge could attain a high degree of certainty.

To that purpose, Bayle expanded and applied the best Cartesian attempt to save historical knowledge with the utmost rigour: Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole's *Logique, ou l'Art de Penser* (1662), which is described in section one below. As we will see in section two, Bayle made historical knowledge almost entirely dependent on what the *Logique* called the 'external' aspect of testimony, that is, the circumstances relating to the transmission of testimony. The *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* was an inexhaustible, relentless assessment of historical facts according to the external circumstances of their reporting. Bayle made the 'fact' the goal of the historian, as Cassirer put it.[10] He sought to verify every statement about a past state of affairs, going through its chain of transmission as far as possible and comparing the witnesses and reporters to an ideal historian. The *Dictionnaire* showed clearly that most historians were not up to the task. The fallenness of human nature did not spare the Republic of Letters. The last part of section two deals with Bayle's answer to the grim reality of the Republic of Letters, with its passionate, proud, greedy, and power-hungry scholars. He was pessimistic about the ability of the Republic of Letters to regulate itself. Appealing to the sovereign was often the only alternative but also involved considerable risks to historical truth.

Bayle's theory of historical knowledge of Cartesian extraction and his theory of human nature did not bode well for History. As such, Bayle was not the beginning of a new cycle—Enlightenment Historical thought— that began in the attacks against

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[9] See, for instance, Grell, *Le Dix-Huitième Siècle*, vol. 1, pp. 387-392 ; Peter Burke, 'Historical Facts and Historical Fictions', *Filozofski vestnik*, 15 (1994); and Matytsin, *The Specter of Skepticism*, p. 236.
[10] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp. 205–206.

Humanist history, but the last attempt to save historical knowledge from a turbulent century in the Republic of Letters, an attempt that accepted the foundations of the critiques that were levied against history and tried to invert them. As we will see, in the eyes of eighteenth-century historians, it failed.[11] They would find an alternative in the other, neglected side of Arnauld and Nicole's theory of testimony.

1. PORT-ROYAL BEFORE BAYLE

La Logique ou l'Art de Penser, first published by the Jansenists Antoine Arnauld (the main author) and Pierre Nicole in 1662, was the most cogent attempt within Cartesianism to free historical knowledge from the appellation of mere memory.[12] The importance of the *Logique* cannot be underestimated: it went through four new editions during the lifetime of its authors and remained a standard textbook in France and the United Kingdom well into the nineteenth century. Its treatment of probability—or rather its ability to condense major contemporary discoveries in probability into a textbook—was ground-breaking and also remained the standard framework up to the mid-eighteenth century.[13]

Chapters 11-15 of the fourth part of the *Logique* were devoted to beliefs that depend on the authority of others, not on reason. That is, they provided guidance on how to form judgments about events not apprehended by our senses or derived from our own reason. Although we can infer from the arguments and some examples that

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[11] On the reception of Bayle in the early eighteenth century, see Elisabeth Labrousse, 'Reading Pierre Bayle in Paris', in Alan Charles Kors and Paul J. Korshin, eds., *Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany* (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 7–16. Barret-Kriegel, *La Défaite de l'Érudition*, p. 285, agrees that Bayle was read as a sceptic. We will meet with Fréret's and Hume's views in chapters two and three below.

[12] Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La Logique, ou l'Art de penser : contenant, outre les regles communes, plusieurs observations nouvelles propres à former le jugement.* (Paris, 1662). Hereafter, the *Logique*.

[13] Jill Buroker, 'Port Royal Logic', in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2017). Wootton, 'Hume's "Of Miracles": probability and irreligion', pp. 196–197. On the relation between the *Logic* and seventeenth-century developments in probability theory, see Hacking, *The emergence of probability*, pp. 73–84.

historical knowledge in general is at stake, the purpose of the chapters was apologetic: they were aimed at justifying belief in (some) miracles. Belief in past miracles is perhaps the paradigmatic kind of judgment dependent on the authority of others: we read the testimonies in, say, St Augustine's *Confessions* and are invited to believe in something that is clearly 'above reason', as Arnauld put it.[14] Reason cannot comprehend the workings of miracles but can conclude that they must be believed nonetheless—it is rational to believe there are things reason cannot judge.[15]

In those circumstances, 'common sense' usually leads to two extreme positions: people either naively believe in *every* miracle, regardless of its circumstances, because God is all-powerful and benevolent and therefore could perform any miracle, or they reject all miracles because reason cannot comprehend them. Arnauld retorted that those two positions misunderstand the nature of the judgment involved: they judge based on the *possibility* of the event happening, rejecting or accepting them because they consider miracles in general possible or impossible. In the case of belief based on authority, however, the mere possibility is not sufficient reason to believe; we must consider not the event in itself but as embedded in its circumstances. Crucially, Arnauld divided circumstances into internal and external. Internal circumstances refer to the event itself, that is, what happened; external circumstances refer to the circumstances of the testimony, that is, who is reporting and in what circumstances.[16] Judgment is cast based on the balance of circumstances favouring and against the testimony, both internal and external. It can take the form of belief based on 'moral certainty' if circumstances weigh heavily in favour of the fact; belief based on probable grounds if circumstances incline towards it but are not conclusive (and if judgment must be cast); suspension of belief if circumstances are weighing against the fact; or denial, if circumstances are entirely against it.

Within this paradigm, Arnauld directed the reader's view towards belief rather than suspension of judgment or denial: the burden of proof falls to the sceptic, not to

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[14] *Logique*, pp. 435-436.
[15] *Logique*, 435-436 and 446-447.
[16] *Logique*, 439-442.

those who believe. 'We must put the evidence together, not separate it,' so even when there are a few circumstances that stand against the fact, it should not lead us to the suspension of belief.[17] We begin the evaluation of evidence with the 'common circumstances,' which generally incline us towards belief in testimony, and then subtract from that initial inclination. Further, in an exception to his own rule, he conceded that we could make conjectures about the fact to correct for contrarieties presented by individual testimonies or for gaps in the available testimonies, as long as the fact is well attested and the conjectures are themselves possible and verisimilar.[18] As such, the burden of proof left to the sceptic is quite heavy: she must present a large volume of evidence against the fact so that, put together, they make it impossible for even conjectures to save the whole.

The *Logique* emphatically directed the reader to the external circumstances of testimony. In his discussion of miracles reported by St Augustine, Arnauld opened his analysis by saying 'because, supposing that things happened as he [Augustine] reports them, no reasonable person would deny the influence of God [*doigt de Dieu*].'[19] In other words, he began his analysis completely disregarding any discussion of the internal circumstances of the fact, that is, whether a miracle is possible in the first place—the opposite of what Hume would do, as we will see in chapter three. He argued that St Augustine took care to collect testimonies well and that his own good faith could not be challenged because his reputation was well known, and such notorious and public statements could have easily been contradicted at the time of the events. To be sure, Arnauld was willing to use internal circumstances to some limited extent in the case of non-miraculous events. When we see a document signed by two notaries, the external circumstances concerning the contract tell us that it is very likely to be genuine. Notaries depend on their reputation, so they tend not to stamp false contracts.[20] On some occasions, we might know that a particular notary has been involved

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[17] *Logique*, 456-457.
[18] *Logique*, 444.
[19] *Logique*, 454.
[20] *Logique*, 459-460.

in fraudulent business, so the external circumstances would present a weakness. But internal circumstances could weaken belief in the contract even against the reputation of the notaries: for instance, if we know the parties could not possibly possess the amount of money mentioned in the contract, that would count as evidence against it.

Still, Arnauld's approach leaned strongly towards the external circumstances of testimony. Internal circumstances come into play mostly to lead towards some adjustment of narrative. When miracles were concerned, they were discarded altogether. That was precisely the point where sceptics like François de la Mothe le Vayer (1588-1672) chose to attack historical knowledge.[21] In an essay titled *Du Peu de Certitude qu'il y a dans l'Histoire* (1668), la Mothe le Vayer explored how a careful analysis of the circumstances of the historian leads to scepticism towards historical knowledge.[22] First, we only get to know the victor's history: la Mothe le Vayer asked what would happen to our knowledge of Ancient Gaul or Carthage if we had access to their testimonies?[23] Would they contradict Caesar's *Gallic Wars* or Polybius's *Histories*?

Furthermore, there was still the question about the passions of the historians. In a characteristic Augustinian view, Arnauld acknowledged that man is a fallen being prone to lie and that this is enough to demand an investigation on whether to assent to belief based on authority.[24] La Mothe le Vayer argued that the historian is always between a rock and a hard place: if he were distant enough from the events, his passions would not get in the way of his narrative, but then he would be relying on the authority of others; if he were close enough to the events to be a direct witness (or perhaps even a participant), then he would be too close to be disinterested.[25] He concluded that the

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[21] Burke, 'Historical Facts and Historical Fictions'. Notice that Burke includes Bayle in his roster of sceptics. As we will see below, while I agree that Bayle did indeed give all emphasis to the external side of testimony, I disagree that he must be understood as a historical pyrrhonist.

[22] François de La Mothe Le Vayer, 'Du Peu de Certitude qu'il y a dans l'Histoire', in Gérard Ferreyrolles, ed., *Traités sur l'histoire : 1638-1677* (Paris, 2013), pp. 215–250.

[23] *Id*, 237-239.

[24] *Logique*, 433. On neo-Augustinianism and Epicurean-Augustinianism see Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France* (Princeton, 1980), chap. six; Dale van Kley, 'Pierre Nicole, Jansenism, and the Morality of Enlightened Self Interest', in Alan Charles Kors and Paul J. Korshin, eds., *Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany* (Philadelphia, 1987); and Robertson, *The Case for Enlightenment*, chap. 5, esp. pp. 216-225.

[25] La Mothe Le Vayer, 'Du Peu de Certitude...', p. 241.

only way to avoid this situation is to never write a history of one's own time for one's contemporaries: historians must commit the facts to paper and leave it to posterity to cast judgment upon their work.[26] This way, however limited, was the only way history could retain its title of 'sage teacher of life.'[27] La Mothe le Vayer's position here completed the full cycle of radicalisation of his position on historical knowledge.[28] If historians limited themselves to writing memoirs of their own time addressed to posterity, history could retain a moral and political pedagogical role, but it did so at the cost of a higher claim to certainty.[29] Arnauld's emphasis on the external side of testimony proved to be an 'unstable equilibrium', as Carlo Borghero put it: while it opened the possibility of assessing testimony in probabilistic terms, avoiding an extreme Cartesian position, it still left an exposed flank open to sceptics like la Mothe le Vayer.[30]

2. PIERRE BAYLE ON HISTORICAL CERTAINTY AND THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

The Port-Royal *Logique* and François de la Mothe le Vayer's *Du Peu de Certitude qu'il y a dans l'Histoire* defined the boundaries within which Pierre Bayle oscillated in his treatment of historical evidence in the *Dictionnaire*. Regardless of whether Bayle sided with la Mothe le Vayer's doubts or with Arnauld's claim that historical testimony could achieve moral certainty—and he did both, as we will see—the one thing that did not change throughout his intellectual career was the belief that

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[26] *Id,* 249.
[27] *Id*, 247.
[28] Gérard Ferreyrolles, ed., *Traités Sur l'Histoire: 1638-1677* (Paris, 2013), p. 38. This change is probably related to la Mothe le Vayer's move away from the court, where he worked as a historian and preceptor, see pp. 111-112.
[29] On the use of 'memoirs' left to posterity as a means to counter royal control over historiography, see Marc Fumaroli, 'Historiographie et Épistémologie à l'Époque Classique', in Gilbert Gadoffre, ed., *Certitudes et Incertitudes de l'Histoire: Trois Colloques sur l'Histoire, de l'Institut Collégial Européen* (Paris, 1987), p. 90.
[30] Borghero, 'Les philosophes face à l'histoire : quelques discussions sur la connaissance historique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles', p. 77.

it is the witness, not the testimony, that creates or destroys the truth of what she conveys. For, as Bayle said, agreeing with Arnauld's 'very judicious' remark, we believe in a particular opinion if we find some 'exterior marks' associated with truthfulness. To be sure, he did complain that most people are satisfied with the more easily grasped markers such as the prevalence or antiquity of an opinion, which should not be automatically equated with truth, instead of searching for the more 'solid and essential' reasons that could give complete assurance of the truthfulness of said opinion.[31] These exterior marks and the process that creates them were the central aspects of Bayle's take on historical certainty. Indeed, he was almost solely concerned with finding *who* was in the right condition to tell the impartial truth about historical facts. In this section, we will navigate through Bayle's understanding of history and historical certainty. We will first visit Bayle's conception of history and then explore whether it was likely to achieve any degree of certainty.

Three characteristics define Bayle's conception of history. First, history is the *total* knowledge of past *facts*. In the preface to the first edition of the *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697), Bayle claimed that the perfection of a work meant to correct the errors of past historians and critics was to correct *all* errors, large or small, in the same manner that the perfection of a map is to show all towns and villages.[32] In the introduction to the *Projet et Fragmens d'un Dictionnaire Critique*, published in 1692 as a test-case for the complete dictionary, Bayle insisted that the completeness he aimed at was not only the ultimate perfection of this kind of work but also an encouragement to other authors to go after it, to guard themselves against all past errors.[33] Further, he wanted his dictionary to be a complete library to his readers: since it would be either unaffordable or at least inconvenient to go after all of the books he cited, he

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[31] Pierre Bayle, *Pensées diverses sur la comète: édition critique*, ed. A. Prat (Paris, 1911), vol. 1, chap. 100, p. 272. Hereafter, *Pensées*.
[32] *Dictionnaire*, Préface, 1:i. See also Pierre Bayle, *Projet et fragmens d'un dictionaire critique* (Rotterdam, 1692), Introduction, part IV. Hereafter, *Projet*. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 202, highlighted that 'within this world, nothing [was] indifferent or unimportant' to Bayle.
[33] *Projet*, introduction, part VII.

subjected himself to a 'servitude to citation' so that his readers could have total knowledge of the facts he was discussing as accessibly as possible.[34] With a complete reference of this kind in their hands, readers themselves could subject other authors to similar scrutiny and scrutinize Bayle's handling of the sources. Total knowledge of the past, on the side of the reader as well as the writer, was the aim of his project. The search for completeness meant that Bayle exposed himself to the reaction of authorities. The *Dictionnaire* attracted the attention of the Consistory of the Walloon Church in Rotterdam, which demanded that Bayle withdraw some passages depicting impudent behaviour or presenting irreligious arguments.[35] In his answer, Bayle insisted it was his duty to present all facts as they were.[36]

Bayle distinguished between the statement of past facts and other elements of historical knowledge such as causal investigations, conjectures, and the historian's judgment. The laws of history dictate that the historian report every historical fact, but he was more ambiguous about other elements of historical writing that we would take for granted.[37] He tried to draw a strict division between history, on the one side and historical critique and judgment, on the other. Some modern historians seem to forget to add the epithet 'critique' to their histories, he complained, because they switch continuously between narrative and (often unwarranted) critique without letting the reader know.[38] Bayle emphasised that the historian must make it explicit when moving into conjectural terrain: 'let him conjecture, if he wishes, but he must not narrate his conjectures as if they were History.'[39] 'Conjectures and proofs' could be a substitute for the 'véritables Autheurs' when the effects of time destroyed the written proofs, but if the historian is not sure of the veracity of the report or if he is relying on conjectures (especially other people's conjectures), he must add an 'on dit' before telling the

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[34] *Dictionnaire*, Préface, 1:iv-v.

[35] On the history of Bayle's exchanges with the Consistory, see Hubert Bost, *Pierre Bayle Historien, Critique et Moraliste* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 429–439.

[36] Bayle answered the Consistory with the four 'Eclaircissements' appended to the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*, where he argued it was his duty to report all facts.

[37] Bayle defined the basic laws of history following Cicero: that the historian 1) not tell anything that is false and 2) tell everything that is true. See *Dictionnaire*, Préface, 1:vii.

[38] *Dictionnaire,* Timée (L), 4:369.

[39] *Dictionnaire,* Beaumont (I), 1:493.

story.[40] The innovative structure of the *Dictionnaire* itself was meant to draw a line between the facts and the conjectures, critiques and commentaries: the main article was 'purely Historical, a succinct Narration of the Facts;' the remarks contained all the rest that was not a strict list of relevant facts.[41]

Another of Bayle's concerns was the analysis of causes in historical writing. As Labrousse argued, Bayle's view of history was not 'modern'; that is, he took events to be caused by the actions of great men and that the latter's actions were, in turn, the product of their temperament, passions, and habits, which were contingent and not subject to further historical analysis.[42] In the *Pensées Diverses*, Bayle argued that people spent unnecessary time wondering about the causes of major events when they were actually caused by 'some tiny hidden springs, moved by envy, interest, love or any other secret passion.'[43] Against those who claimed that comets could change human history, Bayle retorted (among other things) that history is dependent on the fickleness of the human will, not on the movements of celestial bodies.[44] Bayle warned his readers that 'we must first ascertain the fact, only then we search for the causes,' since there is no point in searching for the causes of something whose existence is uncertain.[45] That was not restricted to comets and other superstitious attributions of causality: the dictionary article on the Renaissance historian Francesco Guicciardini quoted La Popelinière and others complaining about the Italian's excessive 'concern with finding the causes and motives of the incidents he considers,' besides spending too much ink with unnecessary (and fictional) 'harangues', yet another matter in which Bayle suggested caution, as seen above.[46] Indeed, Labrousse argued that the only narrative history Bayle ever penned, an unfinished *Discours Historique sur la vie de*

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[40] *Dictionnaire,* Haillan (G), 2:681, and Gregoire I (R), 2:601.

[41] *Dictionnaire,* Preface, 1:ii.

[42] See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, pp. 455–457, 472.

[43] *Pensées,* vol. 2, chap. 236, p. 247,.

[44] *Pensées*, vol. 2, chap. 213, pp. 202-204.

[45] *Dictionnaire,* Ochin (U), 3:525.

[46] *Dictionnaire,* Guicciardin (B, C), 2:634. The possibility of using fictional speeches to convey the (supposed) opinion of a person was a common topic of discussion in '*Ars Historica*' guides to the historian's craft in the early modern period. See Anthony T. Grafton, *What was History?* (Cambridge,

Gustave-Adolphe, reflected a perception of history as the mere chronological organization of facts, without any concern with broader forms of causality beyond individual action.[47]

Bayle's lack of interest in historical causality presents a significant difference between his approach to historical knowledge and that of the academicians of the *Académie des Inscriptions* and Hume. Although we can observe in Bayle a clear rejection of an approach that attributes historical events to direct divine intervention (or, for that matter, any supernatural phenomenon such as comets), he maintained a form of occasionalist/Malebranchian view that preserved a role for a 'general providence.'[48] Providence dispensed qualities and their consequences according to general laws: 'God, as the dispenser of events and good or bad fortunes, did not submit virtue and innocence to general laws any less than health and riches,' Bayle argued.[49] He further added that the world 'is truly a game of see-saw […] we must admire in this game the workings of a very sage Providence, & the activity of our passions.'[50] It is not the point of the chapter to delve into Bayle's naturalism but there are relevant conclusions here concerning his understanding of how historical certainty can be achieved: first, regardless of the conclusion we choose in the cyclic 'is Bayle a fideist or unbeliever' debates, that is, whether the general providence mentioned here is simply a cover-up for atheism or a sincerely held belief, what matters is that Bayle was drawing the limits of the

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2007), pp. 34–49. The debates opposed those who thought history must be limited to confirmed facts and those who thought the historian could take some liberty to depict verisimilar speeches for rhetorical or philosophical reasons. Bayle, as we can see, was firmly situated in the former camp. However, that was limited to the 'historical' element of the *Dictionnaire*. As Antony McKenna, 'Pierre Bayle Historien de la Philosophie: un Sondage', *Lexicon Philosophicum: International Journal for the History of Texts and Ideas*, 5 (October 2017). shows, Bayle reconstructed and manipulated the history of philosophy in the remarks of the *Dictionnaire* to form debates around the topics of his interest. On the use of 'guests' in the Remarks, see also Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, pp. 46-48.
[47] Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, pp. 31–32.
[48] On Bayle's 'occasionalism' and history, see Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, pp. 465–467.
[49] *Dictionnaire,* Brutus (Marc Junius) (D), 1:685.
[50] *Dictionnaire,* Esope (I), 2:404. See also *Dictionnaire,* Periclès (L) 3:670-673.

study of historical causality at individual characters.[51] In other words, history is a consequence of how qualities are distributed among men, and there is nothing to be scrutinized beyond the distribution itself. As we will see, Hume had a lot to say about how the distribution of qualities was a phenomenon worth analyzing in terms of its psychological mechanism (as he did in the *Treatise of Human Nature*) and in historical terms (as he did in his later works). Second, and because of the first, there are no 'structural' causes (to speak anachronistically) in history. That is, history is wholly derived from the God-given (or nature-implanted, depending on how we choose to read Bayle's references to divine providence) endowment of characters, temperaments and passions. Although there was something to be learned from the providential distribution of character traits and temperaments (for instance, that Providence wisely infused the qualities that lead to greatness with the means of its own downfall, as suggested in Esope (I)), Bayle denied that analyzing the distribution was a relevant element of historical analysis. Further, he was not interested in analyzing whether the distribution of character traits and temperaments changed over time or according to historical circumstances. History remained a matter of listing and correcting facts.

The second element of Bayle's conception of history is its fundamentally collective nature. The pursuit of the total knowledge of past facts is a collective endeavour. The *Dictionnaire* was meant to be a repository of corrected errors so that present and future historians would not repeat them. The corrections it contained were not meant to belittle those who were found wrong; quite the opposite, Bayle insisted that his work was meant to further the contribution made by those whom he corrected, notably Louis Moreri, whose *Grand Dictionnaire Historique* (1674) was the official 'target' of Bayle's work.[52] The whole literary genre of critical-historical compilations

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[51] On Bayle's 'occasionalism' and his understanding of history, see Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, pp. 462–467. For a summary of the sceptic-or-fideist debates, see Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, pp. 1–14.

[52] On Bayle's comments on Moreri's contributions to the return of the 'lumières' in France, see *Dictionnaire,* Préface, 1:vii-x. Bayle also welcomed other compilations of corrections, such as Jean LeClerc's edition of Moreri's work, see Preface, 1:x.

to which the *Dictionnaire* belonged was a testament to the collective nature of histor-
ical knowledge. Compilations are never finished and get better with every reprinting,
either by the author himself or others, because every reprint brings in more facts and
corrections.[53] Bayle sided with Joseph Scaliger in rejecting the idea that compilations
were mere 'egouts de recueils', collecting the wastes of the Republic of Letters. Rather,
compilators were the 'crocheteurs des hommes doctes', manufacturing a connected
tissue out of loose pieces, even if their products did not receive the same status as
narrative histories.[54] Bayle's critical work was there to remind authors to strive for
factual accuracy individually and to engage in the collective process of historical writ-
ing and historical critique.[55]

The search for completeness and its collective nature point to the third element
of historical knowledge: historical truth must be defended from the moment direct
eyewitnesses pass on the first account of the events. It is wrongly assumed, Bayle ar-
gued, that falsehood is a corruption of truth, that is, there was once a time when truth
reigned alone, and that falsehood crept in as the quality of evidence decayed, by addi-
tions, embellishments, or errors in the process of transmission. That is a false assump-
tion since eyewitnesses themselves often did not report what happened correctly, and
a tradition develops on top of the initial disruption. Frequently, 'true & false [tradi-
tions], were formed at the same moment' and are thus equally old.[56] That meant false-
hood had to be resisted from the moment of the event; a true tradition had to be created
in a deliberate effort, not just assumed to be the natural state of affairs that could even-
tually be corrupted. Thus, beyond writing a *Dictionnaire* of past errors, Bayle acted to
prevent falsehood from establishing itself in the present. A most remarkable instance
of this energetic desire to destroy falsehood in its roots is found in the article on the
Dutch scholar Marcus Zuerius van Boxhorn (1612-1653). In 1694, Pierre Jurieu, a

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[53]This appears in yet another praise of reference works, this time William Camden's *Britannia* (1586),
see *Dictionnaire,* Camden (D) 2:27.

[54] *Dictionnaire,* Préface, 1:x.

[55] Indeed, the *Dictionnaire* was a product of Bayle's constant exchange with other scholars, see Bost,
Pierre Bayle Historien, Critique et Moraliste, p. 392.

[56] *Dictionnaire,* Usson (F), 4:487.

Huguenot theologian and Bayle's friend-turned-archenemy, preached two sermons on hatred towards God's enemies (mostly Catholics, in Jurieu's view). Bayle reacted with a pamphlet titled *Nouvelle hérésie dans la morale touchant la haine du prochain*. Jurieu cancelled the publication of the sermons and instead published a pamphlet in reaction to Bayle after other thinkers joined the latter's side.[57] In a remark added only to the first posthumous edition of the *Dictionnaire* (1720), but likely written soon after the events, Bayle tried to set the record straight, given that Jurieu had tried to deny he had preached what his accusers described.[58] Throughout the twenty-one claims against Jurieu, covering the contents of the sermons and its circumstances, Bayle repeatedly expressed his exasperation in the face of a prominent public person denying what he had done in front of a 1200-strong audience. Contemporaries, he said, must settle the matter while things are 'still fresh' and while it is still possible to discern confidently between truth and falsehood—which meant, crucially, while the witnesses were still alive. Then 'an intractable Pyrrhonist could not object that it was impossible to determine whether, during a dispute in the year 1694, a minister preached certain doctrines to an audience of twelve hundred.'[59] In his conclusion, he stated again that Pyrrhonism in the future could be avoided if care is taken now to preserve the historical record: 'If anyone took the trouble to clarify things while they were still alive as I did with this incident, we would not be forced to adopt historical pyrrhonism [*Pyrrhonisme Historique*] in so many occasions.'[60]

Thus, if historians stuck to the stuff of their trade—the record of past facts—and worked together to establish an accurate record from the very moment an event happens, there would be no historical pyrrhonism. Indeed, in the introduction to the *Projet*, Bayle stated that historical truths could be brought to a degree of certitude akin

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[57] For an account of the episode, see Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, pp. 146–148. Chapter 3 of van der Lugt's book covers the controversies between Bayle and Pierre Jurieu.

[58] *Dictionnaire,* Zuerius (P), 4:562-568.

[59] *Id.,* 563.

[60] *Id.,* 567.

to that of geometrical truths if we pay attention to the 'genre de certitude' that is adequate to each form of knowledge.[61] The 'foundation of the certainty and evidence' by which we know that there was a Roman republic is 'a science proper, it is the conclusion of a syllogism in which the major and minor are clearly and necessarily [*clairement & nécessairement*] true propositions.'[62] That is, provided the facts were not 'of the same nature as those reported by Ariosto or any other storyteller,' they would not be exposed to any of the difficulties Pyrrhonists raised concerning most metaphysical matters: historical facts are what they appear to be and exist outside of our mind. If we could prove the apparent existence of a fact, its real existence was incontestable. Although Bayle did not expand on what exactly shows that a fact is not of the nature of those told by Ariosto, he concluded that 'even though we cannot reject historical pyrrhonism concerning a multitude of facts, surely there are many others which we can prove with full certainty.'[63]

Bayle's caveat that facts must not be of the same nature as those reported in Ariosto's stories did not lead him to an investigation about the *internal* nature of different kinds of factual statements. His main concern was the ability of the *subject* to determine whether statements were true or not. In an explicit reference to Descartes (in a context of arguments about historical evidence), Bayle affirmed that

> Mr. Descartes very well said that, in philosophical matters, the most common source of error is to overextend our judgment beyond what our distinct ideas present to us. We could add that nothing begets more falsehood in critical writings [*Ecrits de Critique*] than the licence we take to overextend the authorities upon which we rely.[64]

That is, once we overextend the information provided by our authorities, our ideas about the past may not be clear and distinct. Determining whether the major and minor propositions of historical 'syllogisms' are true is not a matter of investigating whether their internal content is probable. As Arnauld put it, demonstrative reasoning could demonstrate whether something was necessary or impossible, but most testimonies

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[61] *Projet,* Introduction, part IX.
[62] *Dictionnaire,* Beaulieu (F), 1:490.
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Dictionnaire*, Cassius Longinus (A), 2:75-76.

consisted of statements that were possible but not necessary. As we saw above, the investigation of causes will only take us so far as the inscrutable distribution of character by Providence(-cum-nature). Thus, the 'syllogism' is about articulating sources and keeping to what they inform us. From here, the main focus of Bayle's historical method was *who* was capable of keeping strict adherence to the sources, tracing back the transmission back to the event itself, rather than extrapolating the 'authorities.' Bayle's translation of the geometric 'genre de certitude' into history had to rely on a psychological portrait of the subject capable of knowing.[65] Instead of asking what kind of *idea* could beat the evil genius' deception, Bayle's attempt to apply Cartesianism to history asked what kind of personal qualities made the *knower* immune to the evil genius' deception. Once the ideal witness/historian is defined, a large share of the work of critique becomes a matter of anatomizing the witnesses and historians and comparing them to this ideal subject of historical knowledge.

Bayle delineated the character of the ideal historian in a web of cross-references within the *Dictionnaire*, which are represented in figure one below.[66] Before we proceed, it is essential to notice the centrality of the structure of Bayle's argument about the character of the ideal historian.[67] It is constructed through commentary on the life and works of many historians and scholars and their quarrels with one another, with cross-references linking disperse chunks of texts that together build the whole we

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[65] A point made by Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, p. 68. Or as Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie*, p. 67, put it, Bayle's historical method was based on the *Discourse*, not the *Meditations* (a similar claim can be made about Fontenelle's Cartesianism, as we will see below). On Bayle on Cartesianism and history, see Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie*, pp. 67–69; Grell, *Le Dix-Huitième Siècle*, vol 1, 405-407; and Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, pp. 45–68.

[66] The two figures in this chapter (see figure 2 below) represent cross-references within the *Dictionnaire*. Arrows indicate that the origin box (representing a remark, main text of the article, or dissertation) refers to the target box. The inspiration for representing cross-references in the *Dictionnaire* as in figures one and two comes from Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, see pp 42-44 for examples. Unlike van der Lugt's diagrams, the diagrams represented here *do not* show all cross-references in the included articles/remarks/dissertations; they show only the cross-references relevant to this chapter.

[67] The centrality of the 'webs' in the *Dictionnaire* and the relevance of the form to the content of the argument are issues raised by Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, pp. 18–67.

will see here. Most secondary literature on Bayle's *Dictionnaire* ignores the importance of this structure. In the case of the ideal historian, the very structure of its construction refers back to Bayle's understanding of history delineated above: the collective nature of historical knowledge is mirrored in the fragmented nature of his argument. Bayle could well have added to his preface a long comment on the *ars historica*—like many of his time did—its method and the necessary training to be a good practitioner, and then referred back to it every time one of the characters featuring in the body of the *Dictionnaire* failed to meet the standards. Instead, as readers peruse the *Dictionnaire* or open it to gather information about a particular person, they are invited to embark on a journey across multiple articles in which they learn by example what the ideal historian must be. This learning process happens mostly by observation of the interactions between scholars of the past: how a scholar failed or succeed in writing history because he was partial in such or such way; how a second scholar failed to quote the work of that first scholar correctly; how a third one corrected the mistake but was still partial in other matters. Readers are guided by Bayle through the process of discovery and confirmation of facts, observing (mostly) the faults of past historians and scholars, sometimes their successes.
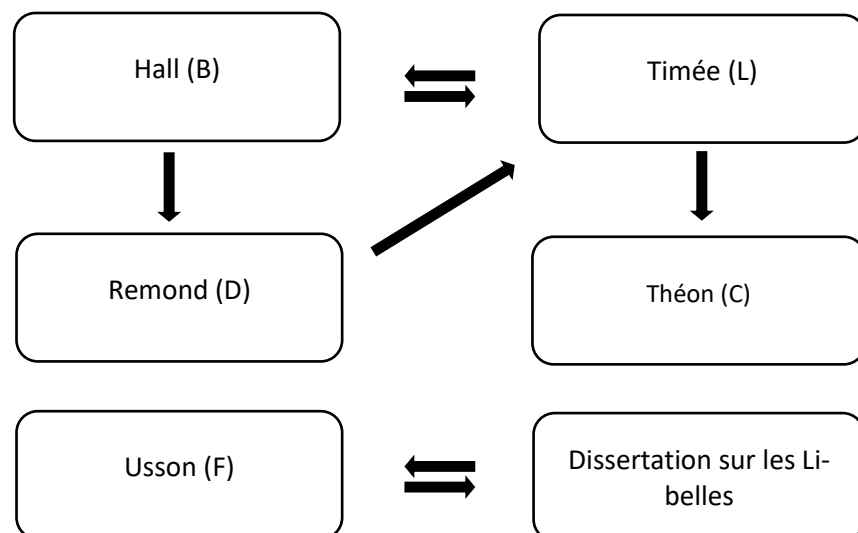
Figure 1 - The Ideal Historian

The starting point of this web is the article on the Greek historian Timaeus ('Timée'). The first thing to notice is that one of the central nodes of the web related to a historian whose works were not extant, as Bayle himself reminded us.[68] That showcases Bayle's emphasis on the external circumstances of historical testimony: since Timaeus' writings did not survive, Bayle is judging the quality of his writing *solely* based on his character as depicted by other ancient historians. There was no attempt to judge whether the references to Timaeus or the fragments quoted by other historians were probable statements. Because Bayle considered the sources referring to Timaeus trustworthy, what they said about his writings and character must have been right. Throughout the remarks, Bayle systematically characterized Timaeus as a historian full of passions and prejudices, prone to satire and calumny, notably against Agathocles, the tyrant of Sicily who sent him to exile in Greece.[69] Regardless of his other qualities as a historian, the fact that he possessed such character traits invalidated his works. Indeed, it is difficult even for the most moderate, modest, and virtuous persons to write a truthful history involving the ruler sent them to exile: they would fear that 'the inconveniences of exile would conjure the mists that cloud the original [naïf] state of events.'[70] What are we to expect then from a historian like Timaeus?

Timée (L) refers at this point to Hall (B).[71] Even though Hall's partiality was so to speak of 'second degree', Bayle did not acquit him from his verdict of unfitness to write history: 'a Historian must be perfectly disinterested; From the moment a man has any resentment against a Nation, he must abstain from writing its History, especially if, by indulging his peevishness never so little, he gives great pleasure to another People to which he ought to be grateful.' Indeed, he proceeded, 'History ought not to be touched by impure hands. It must be written by those who have no blood in their hands, figuratively or literally. One must at allow time to clear the stains and heal the

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[68] *Dictionnaire,* Timée 4:365-366.
[69] See especially Timée (L), 4:368-369.
[70] *Ibid.* Again, attention to the adjectives is important: Timaeus passions corrupt the 'naïf' or natural, virgin, original state of the facts.
[71] Richard Hall, an English Catholic theologian who fled to the Netherlands due to Elizabethan laws against Catholics and then wrote a history of the Dutch war of independence against Phillip II of Spain.

scars.'[72] That seems to have included being stained by one's *own* blood spilt by the hands of tyrants, figuratively in Hall's case.

Hall (B) refers the reader back to Timée (L) and to Raemond (D).[73] Bayle hammers home again the point while talking about Raemond's *Histoire de la naissance, progrès et décadence de l'hérésie de ce siècle* (1605): history is the 'most difficult' of all compositions an author can attempt, because it comes with many prerequisites:

> It demands a man with great judgment; a clear, noble, & concise style; a straight [droite] conscience, proven probity, copious material of quality, & the art of arranging them well. But above all, it demands the force to resist the instincts of religious zeal that push us to disparage what we consider false and to embellish what we consider true.[74]

Beyond the rhetorical and scholarly skills, history requires probity and a clear and straight conscience to resist one's own religious zeal. Regardless of the historian's ability to write good history—he admitted against some of Raemond's critics that he did possess them—'his most important duty was to examine his conscience thoroughly,' and here Raemond failed.[75] Indeed, Raemond was the 'least adequate man in the world to succeed in the enterprise' of writing a history of Protestantism.[76]

But who would be fit to write such history then? Definitely not a Protestant, Bayle insisted: 'You [Protestants] have a lacerated heart […] you feel hatred against your persecutors.'[77] Some people suggested that perhaps a Pagan historian like Livy or Polybius would fit the task since they would not have any religious zeal to heed. Again, Bayle dismissed the case, for paganism was closer to Catholicism than Protestantism, and the Pagan writer would therefore lean towards the former. Generalising the argument, he concluded that everyone would have his or her own '*préventions*', privileging certain forms of government or certain maxims of morality or politics, so there would always be partiality even when the historian was writing the history of an

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[72] *Dictionnaire,* Hall (B), 2:689.
[73] Florimond de Raemond (1540-1601), a French Catholic historian who replaced Michel de Montaigne at the Parlement de Bordeaux.
[74] *Dictionnaire,* Remond (D), 4:46.
[75] *Ibid*, emphasis mine.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Id.*, 4:47.

ancient people or a distant empire.[78] Bayle insisted that those who do not have a straight conscience or the required probity 'commit fraud against the Historian's craft'—notice Bayle did not speak of a possibility, the historian writing a history unaware of his '*préventions*' is already committing fraud.[79]

To make things even worse, people who can 'overcome the illusions of their prejudice' and are thus fit to write good history often shy away from the task because the only thing they can expect is to be abused twice, exposing themselves to the indignation of all the sides of the quarrel.[80] Bayle compared it to throwing oneself into the sea to avoid taking sides in a maritime battle: those who take a side at least can stay in a ship and take their chances at winning the battle; those who try to be neutral only expose themselves to the raging sea or cannon fire from both sides.[81]

Thus, although Bayle closed remark D of the Raemond article saying that the definition of a (good) historian is merely '*un honnête homme qui sait narrer les événemens*,' he was asking for much more than that.[82] The unworldliness of Bayle's ideal historian appeared at its most explicit in Usson (F). He argued that a historian must 'free himself of the spirit of flattery and calumny, and remain as much as possible in the state of mind of a Stoic, undisturbed by any passion.'[83] To achieve this state of perfect *apatheia*, the historian must free himself from all ties with patrons, country, religion and even family:

> A Historian as such must be a Melchizedek: without father and mother, without ancestry. If anyone asks 'Where are you from?', he ought to answer 'I am neither French nor German, English, Spanish or anything else. I am a citizen of the world [habitant du monde]. I serve neither the Emperor nor the King of France, I serve Truth alone. She is my Queen; to her only have I sworn my allegiance.[84]

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[78] This point is emphasized by Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition*, p. 73.
[79] *Dictionnaire,* Remond (D), 4:47.
[80] *Ibid.*
[81] *Dictionnaire,* Eppendorf (C) 2:380. Even though Scripture says '*beati pacifici*', happiness and peace seem to be found together only in the otherworld, he commented in the same page.
[82] *Dictionnaire,* Remond (D), 4:47.
[83] *Dictionnaire,* Usson (F), 4:486.
[84] *Id.,* 487, italics in the original.

Truth alone ought to be the historian's master; he ought to be from nowhere; he ought to have no family; his craft ought not to be a trade. The more he tied himself to any of those, the worse would be his history. '*Nec malus est civis, nec bonus historicus*'—the worse the patriot, the better the historian – Bayle said in the case of patriotism.[85]

Couple such demanding requirements with Bayle's understanding of the failures of Stoicism, we are halfway into the path of concluding that historians ought to be disembodied souls, pure thinking substances whose existence in the real world seems all but impossible. For as he argued in a comment on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Stoics were not wrong in supposing that once the sage freed himself of his passions, he would follow the laws of order and honesty unequivocally. Instead, they were wrong in supposing that freeing oneself from all passions is possible in the first place— there is always chaos within, a 'visceral war we feel within ourselves' going on in our souls.[86]

If the ideal historian seems almost impossible, what are the consequences of the less-than-ideal but real historians? Usson (F) brought this discussion to the table.[87] Here Bayle pointed out that truth and falsehood are coetaneous, as mentioned above. Worse still, he remarked that the factions formed around great men and women also form a kind of 'schism' in history, extending historical pyrrhonism even further.[88] Once two diverging traditions are established, it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to discern which one is true, given that both are equally ancient. Usson (F) then refers to section VIII of the *Dissertation sur les Libelles Diffamatoires*, added to the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*. The dissertation refers back to Usson (F) midway through a discussion of the same topic, namely, how factions in politics create factions in history. Bayle compared the historians who take sides in political disputes to 'Harpies'

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[85] *Id.*, p. 486.
[86] *Dictionnaire,* Ovide (H) 3:560-561.
[87] This article is one of the few articles in the *Dictionnaire* referring to a place, not a person. The article delved into the polemics surrounding the imprisonment of Margaret of Valois, wife of Henri IV of France, in the château d'Usson and the consequent annulment of their marriage.
[88] *Dictionnaire,* Usson (F), 4:487.

that disgrace everything they touch, torturing and tormenting historical facts. The saying that the Muses would prostitute themselves even to slaves was most accurate in the case of Clio, the muse of history—a 'scortum triobolare' (three-penny whore) selling herself on the roads to the first passerby who tosses a piece of bread at her direction.[89] If the muse of history is selling herself on the roads, there are certainly plenty of buyers. After all, politics is dominated by belief in the maxim attributed to Catherine de Medici that 'false news, believed for three days, can save a State.' History itself attested the truth of this maxim, Bayle suggested.[90] If those lies were kept out of print, the problem could be lessened. However, once committed to print, they are eternalized and become the 'foundation for future historians, which throws History into a chaos of impenetrable uncertainty, and robs from posterity the knowledge of truth.'[91] That chaos of sources is compounded if a period of 'ignorance and barbarism' intervenes: reflecting on the difficulty of sorting out the controversies around the life of pope Gregory VII, Bayle speculated on the nightmare future historians would face when trying to discern truth and falsehood about the period in which he lived. 'We have been duped by this kind of polemic works before,' he affirmed, 'it seems so will be posterity. Patience.'[92] There seemed to be no solution; the past seemed bound to repeat itself.

Indeed, Bayle's 'philosophy of history' (we should not read this in nineteenth-century terms) was profoundly pessimistic. That pessimism was most evident in his account of the schism between Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius, archbishop of Constantinople in the fifth-century Council of Ephesus. The story of Nestorius portrayed, among other things, how power would meddle with truth and force its own position *even* when that position could carry the day by itself.[93] St Cyril's position, Bayle argued, was aligned to the natural superstition of the people, so there was no risk to it. Nestorious' highly complex Mariological arguments would never become

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[89] *Dictionnaire,* Dissertation sur les Libelles Diffamatoires, 4:584.
[90] *Dictionnaire,* Dissertation sur les Libelles Diffamatoires, (remark B) 4:582.
[91] *Ibid*.
[92] Gregoire VII (T), 2:608.
[93] For a more complete account of this story and of its consequences, see Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition*, pp. 32–55.

orthodoxy.[94] However, St Cyril still resorted to the power of the emperor, thus behaving in the way Christians accused Muhammad and his successors of behaving: imposing faith by brute force and power.[95] Historical writing thus becomes a 'portrait of human misery', in which 'the number of evil and impious men, like that of the fools, is infinite.'[96] It becomes a list of the endlessly repeated errors and violence of humankind.

History always walks a fine line wading through politics and religion. Every misstep risk turning it into satire—even though the two could not be further apart, 'not much is needed to transform one into another.'[97] History requires that historians tell the truth, narrating all the consequences of our fallenness, so it is hard to demand from the historian the same cold blood we ask from a judge sentencing homicides and thieves—'a few livelier reflections would suit him well,' Bayle admitted.[98] However, once the door is open and the historian lets in all our fallenness, it is hard to keep the balance and narrate without loathing—an '*esprit d'aigreur*' kicks in. Thus, even when historians are not obviously partial, the vicissitudes of the trade may lead them away from the strictest truth. Intentional satire is even more damaging, for it has some unintended consequences. Satirists misrepresent the actions of others; when they cannot misrepresent the action, they misrepresent the motives. Later, historians will struggle to sort satire from fact, particularly concerning motives to action. Satirists create yet another unintended consequence: 'we begin to doubt even the clearest truth when it comes out of their mouths,' Bayle said, referring the reader to his archenemy Pierre

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[94] *Dictionnaire,* Nestorius (E), 3:492-493.

[95] On Bayle's use of Islam to bash Christians defending conversion by force (and the web of dictionary articles in which he articulated it) see Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, pp. 117–155. As Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition*, pp. 51–52, notices, Bayle articulated his account to align, on the one side, St Cyril, Catholicism, Islam, and his archenemy in the Refuge Pierre Jurieu as oppressors using force to impose their faith upon others and, on the other, the early church, Protestantism and himself as those who relied on the power of the word to spread their beliefs.

[96] *Dictionnaire,* Orose (G), 3:548.

[97] *Dictionnaire*, Bruschius (D), 1:682. On Bayle's concept of satire and libel and how to detect it, see Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, pp. 100–102. We will return to Bayle's answer to the conflicts and quarrels in the Republic of Letters below.

[98] *Dictionnaire,* Bruschius (D), 1:682.

Jurieu's attack on Antoine Arnauld.[99] That is, even when satirists say something we know to be true from other circumstances, their reputation for satire and falsehood may generate scepticism about something that had been deemed true before they referred to it.

Less-than-ideal historians can cause harm to the truth in yet another plethora of ways connected to the technologies and pedagogical techniques of the age. Bayle slammed the printing press itself for making writing too accessible: what would become of the enemies of historical pyrrhonism in the age of printing if this evil was already present in the ancient world, when putting something to paper and circulating it was much more difficult and inaccessible? Thankfully the printing press was a relatively recent invention, so the damage was still limited.[100] Bayle reproached other careless users of the printing press, such as 'continuateurs' who added new chapters to famous books of history without checking whether the original was sound in the first place, or writers of universal histories and summaries '*in usum studiosae juventutis*,' who cared little about historical truth.[101] He blamed even famous contemporary historians such as Antoine Varillas, who reported amusing intrigues and private facts whose truth no one could check. The modern use of inscriptions and medals, which one would think could mitigate the problem of historical pyrrhonism, was instead guided by caprice, without the support of a 'real fact', and thus only furthered the problem.[102]

The bleak picture of historical writing painted in the *Dictionnaire* was not new. In his review of Varillas' *Histoire de France* in his *Nouvelles de la Republique des*

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[99] *Dictionnaire,* Periclès (H), 3:668.

[100] *Dictionnaire,* Dissertation sur les Libelles Diffamatoires, 4:584. On the use of magazines see Remark B of the 'Dissertation sur les Libelles Difamatoires' and Guicciardin (B), where Bayle affirmed that the use of magazines by historians is 'entirely inexcusable'.

[101] *Dictionnaire,* 'Dissertation sur les Libelles Diffamatoires', 4:581. Contrast this to what he had to say about people who re-edited and added to compilations of critique like Camden's *Britannia*, as discussed above.

[102] *Id.,* 584. It is not clear why medals and inscriptions are not a 'real fact'. The *Académie des Inscriptions* – its very name suggests – took the 'reality' of medals and inscriptions very seriously. Although it will not be our focus in chapter two below, academicians such as the Abbé Anselme insisted that more intense use of material evidence was one of the ways to avoid historical pyrrhonism, see Abbé Anselme, 'Des Monumens qui ont suppléé au deffaut de l'écriture, & servi de Memoires au premiers Historiens', MAI 4.380-399 (1715), and 'Seconde dissertation sur les Monuments qui ont servi de Memoires aux premiers historiens', MAI 6.1-13 (1720).

Lettres almost a decade before, Bayle had compared history to the uses of meat in different cuisines:

> Each nation prepares them in such a way that the same cut becomes as many different ragouts as there are Nations in the world. Almost always they find the best to be that to which they are accustomed. Alas, the fate of History: each nation, each Religion, each Sect takes the same brute facts and cut and season them according to their taste. Thus, the facts, true or false, resemble respectively what is convenient and what is repugnant to their prejudices.[103]

A historian can write a panegyric or a satire in the same way a cook can grill or roast the same piece of meat depending on the diners' taste. Four years before, Bayle had complained that 'I never read Historians with a view to instruct myself in things past, but to know what is said by each nation and party about those things.'[104] A dozen pages later, he added that he was not the only one who shows 'that kind of Historical Pyrrhonism'—some even extended it to ancient history, he said, referring to François de La Mothe le Vayer. [105]

So far, so bad. As Bayle said in yet another instance of politico-religious quarrels that were carried into historiography, 'Il fait bien que le Pyrrhonisme est le parti de la sagesse.'[106] However, Bayle lifted some scholars from this quarrelsome crowd that made up the Republic of Letters and held them as role models. Richard Popkin suggests three names: the twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Maimonides, the early seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuit Rodrigo de Arriaga and the obscure sixteenth-century French humanist Pierre Bunel.[107] The latter example is particularly relevant for

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[103] Article IV, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, March 1686, in Pierre Bayle, *Oeuvres diverses de Mr. Pierre Bayle, Professeur en Philosophie, et en Histoire, à Rotterdam: Contenant tout ce que cet Auteur a publié sur des matières de Theologie, de Philosophie, de Critique, d'Histoire, & de Litterature; excepté son Dictionnaire Historique et Critique.*, ed. Pierre Desmaizeaux (4 vols, La Haye, 1737), vol. 1, p. 510a.

[104] Pierre Bayle, *Critique generale de l'Histoire du calvinisme de Mr. Maimbourg* (Amsterdam, 1682), p. 16.

[105] *Id.*, 27.

[106] *Dictionnaire,* Esope, 2:402.

[107] Richard H Popkin, *The high road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego, 1980), pp. 25–37. It is important to say that Bayle's positive comments about the character and works of other scholars is not limited to the three persons mentioned here. We have already mentioned Bayle's praise of William Camden (which are furthered in the Camden article, see *Dictionnaire,* Camden (G), 2:29), but François de la Mother le Vayer, Hobbes and Erasmus (although Bayle criticizes his behaviour in some scholarly quarrels) could be added here.

our current purposes, for it provided elements to think what would have been Bayle's response to the apparently inevitable historical pyrrhonism caused by less-than-ideal historians. Bayle highly exalted Bunel: a scholar who renounced the world of wealth and status that his ascending career as secretary to the French ambassador in Venice promised him in favour of learning—a model of Christian virtue as rare in the Republic of Letters as in society in general. Because he refused to join academic 'cabals' and refused to live an earthly life, he never reaped the academic honours his work rightly deserved—which only increased his dignity in Bayle's opinion.[108]

The portrait of Bunel reveals Bayle's notion of independence in the scholarly realm. It was indeed possible for a scholar to judge facts correctly and search for truth. There had been scholars who succeeded in doing so, even if their success meant giving up praise and honours. It also reveals a cleavage within the world of the 'doctes': if Bayle divided the world into the superstitious masses and the select learned few who were capable of rising above superstition in the search for knowledge and truth, we now see here that not all learned men were equal, indeed, that the majority of them seemed rather unfit for the task.[109] However, was picking a few who managed to come close to the ideal of the Stoic scholar a solution to the problem of historical pyrrhonism? It was not, and Bayle knew it.

Was there a solution, though? The dismal chances of finding a solution notwithstanding, Bayle spent considerable time in the *Dictionnaire* ruminating about how partiality (and consequent satires and calumnies) could be contained in the Republic of Letters. Those reflections were framed in terms of a typically seventeenth-century contractualist political vocabulary, often evocative of Thomas Hobbes.[110] In another

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[108] *Dictionnaire,* Bunel (C) 1:706-707.

[109] Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition*, chap. 1, discusses Bayle's 'peuple/docte' division (chapter 1). Bayle had no expectations that the superstitious populace would ever free themselves from superstition. The issue here is that even most of the 'doctes' could not rise above their passions.

[110] Of whom Bayle had a good opinion, as the Hobbes article in the *Dictionnaire* suggests, see *Dictionnaire*, Hobbes, 2:774-777. It is important to notice that I am not proposing a reading of Bayle's political thought in general here, but rather discussing his thoughts on the politics and sociability of the Republic of Letters. Of course, that is part of Bayle's political ideas and for some, an important part of it, see Sally Jenkinson, 'Introduction', *Bayle: Political Writings* (Cambridge, 2000), for instance. On how

web of articles, represented in figure two below, Bayle articulated a precarious balance between the 'natural freedom' of the Republic of Letters and the need to appeal to the political sovereign as the final arbiter of scholarly quarrels.[111]

In the first editorial of the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* in 1684, Bayle presented his vision for the Republic of Letters. Speaking of the obituaries he would publish in the journal, he proposed that:

> It is not a matter of Religion, it is a matter of Science: we must bring down everything that divides men into factions, & consider that which unites them, that is, the quality of man of eminence in the Republic of Letters. In this sense, all savants must regard themselves as brothers, or from equally good families. They must all say,
>
> We are all equal, as children
>
> We are all relatives of Apollo[112]

The Republic of Letters was a fraternity where everyone must disregard differences of religion and faction and consider only intellectual contributions. From that 1684 editorial to the first volume of the *Dictionnaire*, Bayle's views of the Republic of Letters changed quite starkly.[113] In the latter, he described the Republic of Letters as a kind of state of nature in a war of all against all:

> This Republic is an extremely free State. It acknowledges no empire but those of Truth & Reason, and under their auspices, it makes war innocently to anyone. Friends must guard themselves against each other, fathers against children, relatives against their in-laws: it is as in the Age of Iron:
>
> - - - *Non hospes ab hospite tutus,*
>
> *Non socer à genero.*
>
> There, each is both Sovereign and subject to the justice of others. The Laws of Society have not done any prejudice to the independence of the State of Nature, with respect to error and ignorance.[114]

The Republic of Letters, it turned out, was not a republic at all. The institution of civil society seems not to have happened in the domain of knowledge; it was left in the state

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Hobbes dealt with issues of historical criticism, notably concerning sacred history, see Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, pp. 383–431.

[111] The upper half of figure 2 is an expansion of the 'Colomiès web' discussed by Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, pp. 102–110. See van der Lugt's figure 2.1 on p. 104.

[112] Preface, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* in Bayle, *Oeuvres diverses* vol. 1, p. 2b.

[113] Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, p. 81, notices the change of stance between the first volume of the *Nouvelles* and the *Dictionnaire*.

[114] *Dictionnaire,* Catius (D), 1:102.

of nature, everyone was free to wage war against anyone else, including to one's relatives, and there was no judge to settle the disputes.[115] It was, as the quote suggests, the intellectual equivalent to Ovid's Age of Iron. Indeed, in Ovid's account, the Age of Iron was the moment man first established property distinctions and created governments. The task the Republic of Letters had to solve was in some sense similar: to define what were the boundaries of their free exchange, who would adjudicate conflicts when one scholar infringed the other's rights and what would be the punishments for violation of the rules.

Regulating the Republic of Letters was a complex business. Scholars behave very much like princes: 'the wars of Scholars have their chicaneries as much as those between Sovereigns,' Bayle said at one place, complementing elsewhere that everyone claimed to follow peace treaties religiously and accused others of breaking the peace.[116] Worse, since scholars do not put their lives on the line, they tend to be willing
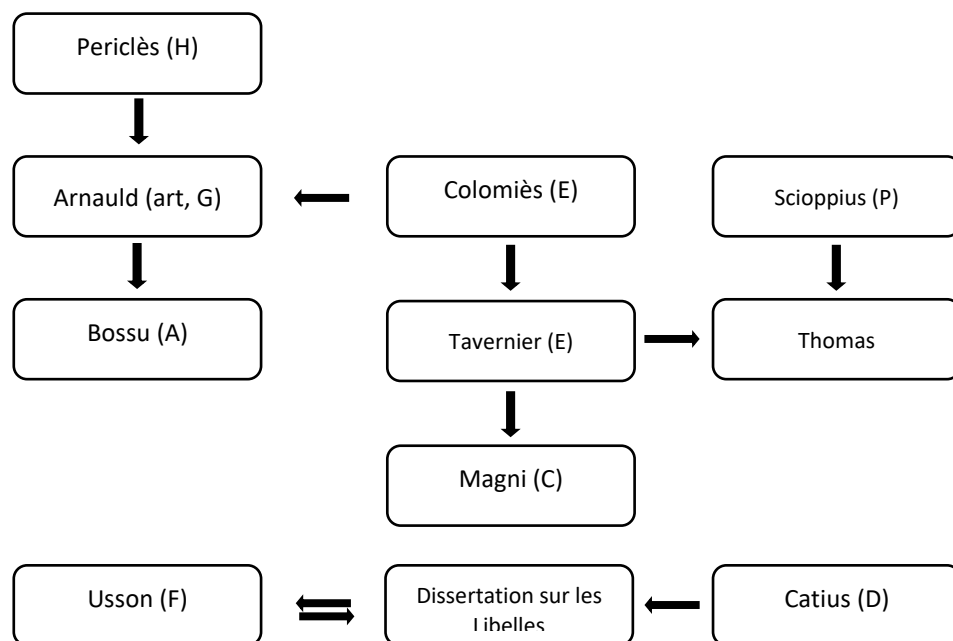

Figure 2 - Regulating the Republic of Letters

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[115] Koselleck, *Critique and crisis*, p. 110, suggested Bayle understood the Republic of Letters a form of government based on eternal civil war—a view Koselleck received positively, unlike the Bayle's eighteenth-century readers, as we will see.
[116] *Dictionnaire,* Thomas (B) 4:353 and Eppendorf (B) 2:380, respectively.

to quarrel and to extend their quarrels for longer than 'men of war'.[117] Even though life was not (usually) on the line, there were rules concerning what could be the object of scholarly quarrels. As the quote above suggested, the Republic of Letters was in the state of nature only insofar as *error and ignorance* were concerned. Satire, calumny and libels needed to be dealt with because they were '*une espece d'homicide civil*': they deprived the victim of something that was outside the state of nature, namely his reputation of '*honnête homme*', his privileges as a citizen and member of society, which 'depend entirely on the majesty of the State.'[118] Exposing a scholar's ignorance could not damage his or her property or rights, which were created and regulated by the civil magistrate. Thus, as long as the debate did not descend into calumny and libels, '*la justice naturelle*' of the Republic of Letters remained the valid jurisprudence. When the quarrel reached the domain regulated by the State, natural freedom was over.

Bayle considered a variety of approaches to the question of libel and satire. The 'Dissertation sur les Libelles' rejected the idea that attacks on the person (instead of the argument) could have a deterrent effect. Libellous attacks always appear disguised as austere morals directed at scholars who may indeed deserve some blame.[119] They seem to have good intentions but, if let loose, they spread like fire—and when you see a fire in your neighbours' house, you do not blame their vices, you put out the fire. In his survey of reactions to the 'fire', Bayle first considered the line of action adopted by Pericles, the Greek statesman: to put yourself above the fray and refuse to answer. This approach, however, seems to suit only those with Pericles' power.[120] Letting satirists and libelants on the loose means their power will get out of control, with the associated historical pyrrhonism growing apace. Pierre Jurieu's attack on Antoine Arnauld was Bayle's prime example: the Jansenist philosopher managed to sustain his defence even against the most impressive war machine of the Republic of Letters, the

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[117] *Dictionnaire,* Eppendorf (D) 2:380.

[118] *Dictionnaire,* Catius (D) 1:102. We cannot fail to miss the Hobbesian tone of this argument: all of our civil rights *depend* upon the State.

[119] *Dictionnaire,* Dissertation sur les Libelles Diffamatoires, 4:579-581.

[120] Indeed, Bayle argued that letting satirists on the loose gave Athenians an impression of freedom while Pericles governed the city with an iron fist with little actual resistance, see *Dictionnaire,* Periclès (F), 3:666-667.

Jesuits, but was finally silenced by Jurieu.[121] Whether Jesuits or Jurieu, Bayle was clear that those kinds of attackers tended to expand their domains and tactics, to the point they become a threat to sovereign power itself if unanswered.[122] Merely claiming '*mentiris impudentissime*' would not do either.[123] Demanding proof of the accusations from the accusers would not restrict them in any way.

Indeed, clemency, though a 'very amiable virtue' in general, ought to have no place in certain occasions. The evil of libel and calumny require exemplary punishment, for their absence opens the door to new miseries—'if this is true in political Societies [*Etats politiques*], it is also true in the Republic of Letters.'[124] In the face of behaviour like Jurieu's, it is necessary to 'invoke the Praetorian Guard of the Parnassus' to preserve the life of the Republic of Letters. Such affairs must be settled as they happen not afterwards, Bayle argued.[125] That, we have already learned, was crucial to keep historical pyrrhonism at bay. Cases like Jurieu's require that all those involved—Arnauld, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Colomiès (who was himself guilty of mistakes of the same kind[126])—answer in unison, providing evidence of Jurieu's lies. There must be no clemency, Jurieu must be held accountable, his falsehoods must be exposed, his natural freedom in the Republic of Letters ceased.

Colomiès (E) referred to Tavernier (E) to show that there are limits to what can be done within the free realm of the Republic of Letters. The 'laws of the Republic of Letters' require that authors oppose only book to book. Critique is a process in which an author is brought before his 'natural judges': the public.[127] The public is the first

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[121] See *Dictionnaire,* Arnauld (G), 1:341. Elsewhere Bayle commented that Jurieu's behaviour 'makes him suspect of being an alien in the Republic of Letters,' see *Dictionnaire,* Colomiès (C), 2:196.

[122] *Dictionnaire,* Bossu (A), 1:623.

[123] Bayle bases this approach on the behaviour of the Capuchin friar Valerianus Magnus against the Jesuits, as reported by Blaise Pascal, see *Dictionnaire,* Magni (C), 3:255.

[124] *Dictionnaire,* Colomiès (E), 2:197.

[125] *Ibid.*

[126] See *Dictionnaire,* Colomiès (main article, D), 2:195-197.

[127] Although I will not explore this connection, the reader should notice the importance of 'the public' as the natural judge here and in Jean-Baptiste Dubos' discussion of art criticism, which we will discuss in the next chapter. Dubos was a friend of Bayle. In December 1695, Dubos informed Bayle that Paris eagerly awaited the publication of the *Dicitonnaire*, see Bost, *Pierre Bayle Historien, Critique et Moraliste*, p. 393. Dubos was also a pioneer in making 'the public' a central category of the Enlightenment,

and only court; appeals must be made to the public itself; appeals to the magistrate must only be made if the attack is not a genuine scholarly critique. In this case, the course of action Henri of Eppendorf took against Erasmus is the most appropriate: he asked the magistrate to impose a fine on Erasmus, to be donated to the poor if the latter insisted on attacking him. By asking for a fine that would not benefit himself, Eppendorf made it clear that the issue was no longer a scholarly dispute between him and Erasmus, but a matter between Erasmus and the State: the quarrel no longer took place in the natural freedom of the Republic of Letters, it was now under the jurisprudence of the civil magistrate.[128]

Appealing to the magistrate against genuine scholarly critiques is admitting defeat and moving the process to the wrong jurisprudence.[129] Here, Tavernier (E) referred to the article 'Paul Thomas'.[130] Bayle compared the unfair appeal to the magistrate to fleeing from a duel and favouring the civil magistrate, especially when the coward has the '*lumières*' to fight the intellectual battle.[131] The imagery is again significant: the Republic of Letters is associated with the duel, the non-civil method of conflict resolution, and the magistrate is the representative of the law, the post-state-of-nature situation. After enjoying the natural freedom of the Republic of Letters, Pierre Costar wanted to deny his opponent Paul Thomas the same benefit, 'a mark that he does not trust his pen and knowledge.'[132] Further, Bayle compares Costar's moves to imposing a military dictatorship in the Republic of Letters. Costar and the friends of Voiture wanted to make the latter a kind of 'Pope of the fine arts', the owner of the 'infallible rule of orthodoxy' seeking to impose forced conversion to the heretics— 'Is

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see Céline Spector, 'The "Lights" before the Enlightenment: The Tribunal of Reason and Public Opinion', in Anton M. Matytsin and Dan Edelstein, eds., *Let There Be Enlightenment: The Religious and Mystical Sources of Rationality* (Baltimore, 2018), pp. 86–102.

[128] *Dictionnaire,* Eppendorf (D), 2:380.

[129] *Dictionnaire,* Tavernier (E), 4:324-325.

[130] Paul Thomas (?-1663), French nobleman who was involved in a quarrel with Pierre Costar over the works of Vincent Voiture. Tavernier (E) also referred to Magni (C) and the way of '*mentiris impudentissime*' discussed above.

[131] *Dictionnaire,* Thomas (D), 2:354.

[132] *Dictionnaire,* Scioppius (P), 4:178, which cross-references the discussion in Thomas (D, E)

it not similar to the French Dragonade' that Loius XIV used to convert Huguenots by force and fear?[133]

If the courts fail to deliver justice, perhaps because of the accused person's power or because his behaviour is questionable but not criminal, Bayle reserved the final say to history. The ingenious poets would deliver the justice the courts failed to deliver, he concluded quoting Cicero.[134] As we have seen repeatedly, however, history seems not always to be in a condition to deliver this final impartial judgment that will last for posterity. Thus, 'It must be left under the care of History, & History must be left under the care of persons chosen and authorized by those who govern.'[135] If sacred history was written by those who received a commission directly from God, then civil history must be written by those commissioned by the civil authority; only then will it have the legitimate right to cast the final judgment over a citizen's character.[136] That was perhaps the riskiest of all movements in Bayle's discussion of the politics of the Republic of Letters. We have already seen the risks of the proximity between politics and scholarship. Bayle's choice seems to dissolve all that had been discussed before: if the answer was so simple as having government-appointed official historians, why did we need to walk this tortuous path through the passions of scholars, the corridors of power and the making of historical pyrrhonism?

Bayle's conclusion about the Republic of Letters parallels his political views. Within the Huguenot Refuge, Bayle positioned himself against active resistance to Louis XIV, despite his explicit acknowledgement of the despotism of the French crown's persecution of Protestants—he was forced to exile and lost his brother to it. However, he still thought an absolute king was the lesser of two evils when compared to anarchy.[137] Concerning scholarship, he acknowledged that despite the obvious disadvantages of giving the government the final word, 'considering all together, we

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[133] *Dictionnaire,* Thomas (I), 4:356.
[134] *Dictionnaire,* Dissertation sur les Libelles Diffamatoires, 4:581.
[135] *Ibid*.
[136] *Ibid*.
[137] On Bayle's view of absolute monarchy and his position on Louis XIV see Luisa Simonutti, '"Absolute, Not Arbitrary, Power": Monarchism and Politics in the Thought of the Huguenots and Pierre Bayle'

avoid the greatest disadvantages, like that multitude of writers who today sully Historical Facts [*les Faits Historiques*] with their impure hands.'[138] However, just because scholars ought to acknowledge the ultimate power of the sovereign, it does not follow that they must abdicate the discussion about how they can self-regulate as far as possible the Republic of Letters by having a clear conception of the ideal scholar. The Republic of Letters must have an answer to the government-appointed historians even if they ultimately abide by their decision. That is what the *Dictionnaire*—that '*égout de recueils*'—tried to do: it was not without reason that Bayle called it the '*chambre d'assurance*' of the Republic of Letters.[139]

On the certainty of historical knowledge, the chapter concludes that Bayle *did* believe historical knowledge was possible and that there was not a single instance in which he disparaged its possibility. There is no logical necessity forcing us to conclude Bayle was arguing for a sceptic position concerning history, whatever we may conclude about his theological or metaphysical views. Indeed, he believed history could achieve a degree of certitude not available to geometry (though a certitude of a different kind). Bayle took Arnauld and Nicole's emphasis on investigating the external aspects of testimony with the utmost seriousness. He believed that careful criticism of the transmission of historical testimony could, in many instances, generate a warranted belief in past facts. Bayle's own *Dictionnaire* was a painstaking exercise in obtaining a clear and distinct grasp of past facts. Perhaps modern commentators have unnecessarily overextended Bayle's scepticism in metaphysics and religion to history.[140] *That* Bayle's approach to historical criticism discovered uncertainty in much of what passed for historical knowledge should not be understood as an attack on historical knowledge

and Sally Jenkinson, 'Bayle and Hume on Monarchy, Scepticism, and Forms of Government', both in Hans Blom, John Christian Laursen, and Luisa Simonutti, eds., *Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Common Good* (Toronto, 2007).

[138] *Dictionnaire,* Dissertation sur les Libelles Diffamatoires, 4:581.

[139] *Projet*, 'Raisons & but de cette entreprise', section IV.

[140] See, for instance, Matytsin, *The Specter of Skepticism*, pp. 237–239.

itself.[141] As Ruth Whelan puts it, we must not read Bayle as the 'herald and the voice' of the crisis of the European conscience, but rather 'as the cri de coeur, perhaps even the swan-song, of an age at variance with itself.'[142]

Still, Bayle's two-pronged answer to the causes of historical uncertainty was, by his own acknowledgement, a weak solution at best. On the side of the sovereign, he concluded the intervention of the sovereign would be better than its absence, despite evidence that it could end in 'military dictatorship' in the Republic of Letters. On the side of the natural freedom of the Republic of Letters, he had to hope the few scholars imbued of a Christian mission like Pierre Bunel would somehow carry the day against the odds. If anything, Bayle's social theory suggested that even atheists could form a functioning society without the Holy Spirit's '*grâce sanctifiante*'.[143] Our 'grace ré-primante,' that is, our desire for rewards and fear of punishment, could still do the job.[144] However, his account of the Republic of Letters suggested that perhaps scholars were less capable of forming a stable society than atheists.

Eighteenth-century historians would not consider Bayle's solution sufficient. Nicolas Fréret, as unorthodox and irreligious as one could be while still being a member of the Parisian academies, would regard Bayle as the chronicler of the failures of seventeenth-century scholarship—a chronicler who was suspiciously keen to empha-size the conflicts, for that matter. As we will learn, the problem was that Bayle focused

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[141] The conclusion here thus diverges from the positions expressed in Popkin, 'Skepticism and the Study of History'; Perinetti, 'Philosophical Reflection on History', pp. 1109–1110; and Barret-Kriegel, *La Défaite de l'Érudition*, pp. 280–285. In Perinetti's case, it is important to notice that he classifies as 'likely to be described and denounced [by contemporaries] as "historical pyrrhonism"' even those en-tertaining some doubts about specific aspects of the evidentiary record or exercising 'critical scrutiny of accepted historical facts through rigorous assessment of testimony,' see pp. 1108-1109. So even Fréret and Hume end up classified as historical pyrrhonists of some sort. In that scale, La Mothe Le Vayer appears as the arch-historical pyrrhonist. Although Bayle is classified as a 'major exponent of historical pyrrhonism,' Perinetti suggests his scepticism 'did not recommend a suspension of judgment about all historical facts,' see pp. 1110.

[142] Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition*, p. 231.

[143] Bayle discusses the 'society of atheists' throughout the *Pensées Diverses*, see especially chapters 129-138. The terms 'grace sanctifiante' and 'grace réprimante' are used in the *Dictionnaire,* 'Eclair-cissement sur les Athées', 4:629, added to the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*. See also the article on Epicurus (*Dictionnaire,* Epicure, 2:364-376). For an interpretation of Bayle's theory of sociability, I refer the reader to Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 217–225.

[144] *Dictionnaire,* 'Eclaircissement sur les Athées', 4:629.

only on the scholars and their interactions, the external circumstances of testimony. He did not look for *internal* criteria upon which scholars could agree. The academicians, and later Hume, would do exactly that, thus setting them apart from Bayle.

Chapter 2

ANCIENTS, MODERNS, AND HISTORY

On 27 January 1687, Charles Perrault read the poem *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand* to the *Académie Française*. The poem praised the intellectual and artistic achievements of Frenchmen under the glorious leadership of Louis XIV, comparing them favourably to the greatest achievements of classical antiquity. Although comparisons between ancient and modern achievements had been a fixture of European intellectual life since Petrarch, Perrault's poems launched an intense conflict within the sphere of the Parisian academies, the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, which would last until 1719, divided into two main phases.[1] The first phase was dominated by the poem and Perrault's subsequent expansion of its argument into the four-volume *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-1697). As the title of Perrault's work suggests, that phase was focused—on the surface at least—on comparing the achievements of ancient and modern societies in different branches of the arts and sciences. The second phase was the *querelle homérique*, which can be dated roughly between the publication of the second edition of Ancient partisan Anne Dacier's translation of the *Iliad* (1711) and the publication of her translation of the *Odyssey* (1719), with most of the exchanges taking place around the time of the publication of the Modern Houdar de la Motte's translation of the *Iliad* in 1714. That phase turned around the different approaches to Homer: Dacier wrote an erudite translation in prose, seeking to preserve in French the original spirit and meaning of the text; Houdar de la Motte, in contrast, wrote an abridged translation in verse which in fact adapted Homer to modern French rules of poetry regarding both style and content.[2]

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[1] On debates about the merits of ancients and moderns before Perrault's *Siècle*, see Yılmaz, *Le Temps Moderne*.

[2] A full chronology of the main events of the *querelle* is available in Anne-Marie Lecoq, ed., *La querelle des Anciens et des Modernes: XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles. Précédé de Les abeilles et les araignées, essai de Marc Fumaroli* (Paris, 2001), pp. 853–861. Dating of the *querelle* varies, with different historians choosing different events to mark the beginning and end of the two phases. The division in two main

Although the second phase was more overtly 'historical' (that is, more explicitly concerned with the way modern men and women of letters related to the past), this should not deceive us about the import of the *querelle* as a whole on historical thought.[3] As a whole, regardless of parties, the *querelle* broke with the traditional view of history as the *magistra vitae* and the underlying presupposition that there is a fundamental continuity between past and present: 'the achievement of the quarrel of the ancients and moderns was to sunder the past from the present, not only in order to better know that past, but to better experience it,' as Norman puts it.[4] This chapter follows three main characters who presided at different moments the three main French academies of the first half of the eighteenth century (the *Académie Française*, the *Académie des Sciences*, and the *Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*): Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757), Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670-1742), and Nicolas Fréret (1688-1749).[5] The chapter has two main goals: first, to reconstruct how French thinkers of this period sundered the established connection between ancients and moderns *and* developed new accounts of that relation. More than a question of whether ancients or moderns were superior—the parallel presupposed an underlying comparability—they articulated how they were different and how that difference had come about. They could, indeed Dubos and Fréret did, still think that ancient art, philosophy, even virtues and laws, were objects of admiration, but they were keenly aware they could not

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phases, however, is mostly uncontroversial. On some occasions, an intermediate English 'phase', the 'Battle of the Books' is interposed between the two French phases. On the Battle of the Books see Levine, *The battle of the books*. It should be noted that the Battle of the Books was also of interest to Hume, who referred to William Temple and William Wotton in his essay on population, see chapter three below. Copies of Temple and Wotton's books are present in the Hume library, suggesting that Hume may have owned the copies, see Norton and Norton, *The David Hume Library*, pp. 131 and 137.
[3] On the historical import of the *querelle homérique* see Chantal Grell, 'La Querelle Homérique et ses Incidences sur la Connaissance Historique', and Francis Assaf, 'La Deuxième Querelle (1714-1716): Pour une genèse des Lumières?', both in Louise Godard de Donville and Roger Duchêne, eds., *D'un siècle à l'autre--anciens et modernes: XVIe colloque, janvier 1986* (Marseille, 1987).
[4] Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, p. 8. Yılmaz, *Le Temps Moderne*, p. 34, also highlights the increased 'historical distance' between past and present, with the consequent death of the notion of *historia magistra vitae*.
[5] The centrality of the academies is emphasized by Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 69–71. Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 21–23, emphasizes that the academies, not the *philosophes* were responsible for the shift in historical views central to his view of the Enlightenment. The philosophes followed that shift, they did not create it.

simply return to antiquity. Second, the chapter shows how the academicians, inspired by the 'philosophical spirit' of the *querelle*, began developing a new 'philosophical' historical method that could answer the crisis of the seventeenth-century Republic of Letters as reported by (and, in Fréret's view at least, fostered by) Bayle, with which we met in the previous chapter.

Fontenelle's intervention in the *querelle*, starting with the *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688) introduced the idea that human history could be regarded as the progressive unfolding of human reason towards the 'philosophical spirit' of his own age, which he connected to the Cartesian 'revolution'. In later works, he issued the clearest call to action for a new kind of historical writing: a '*histoire de l'esprit humain*' focusing on manners, language, and the development of the arts and sciences.[6] Fontenelle's account established the idea that we, the moderns, were in a historical situation fundamentally distinct from the past, including the classical past: that past was in many ways closer to the infancy of humanity than to modern Europe.[7] More importantly, the very position of the modern offered a vantage point from which to understand the history that had created it: the history of the human spirit was also the history of history; our knowledge of the past was also affected by the philosophical spirit.[8]

Dubos accepted the outline of Fontenelle's historical structure while rejecting its foundations, creating a combination that would become the 'defining attitude of the Enlightenment.'[9] The modern world was indeed characterized by a 'philosophical spirit', but he rejected any connection to the Cartesian revolution. He instead adopted the modern empiricism of Locke. Dubos associated knowledge with the accumulation and systematization of experience, often made possible by serendipitous scientific discoveries. In the arts, the great masters and the *siècles* they created were equally outside

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[6] For the later history of the *histoire de l'esprit humain* in France see Jean Dagen, *L'histoire de l'esprit humain dans la pensée française de Fontenelle à Condorcet* (Paris, 1977).
[7] For arguments placing the ancients as part of the 'infancy of the world' in the *querelle*, see Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 63–67.
[8] Yılmaz, *Le Temps Moderne*, p. 198.
[9] Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, p. 42.

of human control: they were the product of climatic causes. However, the public could improve their 'comparative taste' and increase their stock of artistic experiences. Critics, very much like natural philosophers, were there to systematize and extract principles from the judgments of the public. In both arts and sciences, antiquity remained a fruitful source of experience to be absorbed. In the arts, historical awareness was essential to a well-developed comparative taste, particularly to avoid the kind of self-infatuation displayed by the more extreme Moderns who were trying to reduce everything to their Cartesian Reason. Thus, although Dubos still held the ancient world in high regard, his broader historical picture presented modern Europe as capable of looking back to the past not as masters to be imitated, but as a source of knowledge and experience for its own judgements.[10]

A central consequence of the sundering of the past was to make it clear to modern historians that their task was not merely to repair and preserve the evidence of that past, but actively reconstruct it according to their own perspective.[11] The *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* debated historical methods that were up to the task throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. They were not an unfashionable company of unphilosophical *érudits* as they have been painted since then, not least by Fontenelle. Quite the opposite, they were among the first to respond the call to action for a history of the human spirit focused on manners, language and the development of the arts and sciences. However, like Dubos they rejected the Cartesian foundation Fontenelle gave to the modern philosophical spirit.[12] Philosophical history, the mode of historical argument associated with the Enlightenment, had (one of) its origins there. And although Nicolas Fréret is the main character of section three, it presents that renewal as a collective effort of the *Académie* as a whole. Other scholars were not less

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[10] Spector, 'The "Lights" before the Enlightenment: The Tribunal of Reason and Public Opinion', p. 96, argues that Dubos was central to the creation of the notion of 'public opinion', which would be a critical concept later in the Enlightenment.

[11] Truth in the new regime of historicity was not a given (*donné*), it had to be built (*construit*), Yılmaz, *Le Temps Moderne*, p. 35. Later, Yilmaz notices that the French academies worked under the principles of experience and demonstrations, not mere *ancienneté*, as had been the case before in the 'philological' Republic of Letters of the early modern period, see p. 107.

[12] Patey, 'Ancients and Moderns', p. 61. notices that Dubos' work was well-received at the *Académie des Inscriptions*.

modern just because they were less brilliant and innovative.[13] Later Enlightenment men and women of letters would of course create their own versions of the new historical narratives and historical methods proposed during the *querelle*. As we will see, Hume would in turn connect the histories of the arts and sciences to commerce, which was somewhat alien to the *querelle*.[14] But the foundation was laid there.

1. FONTENELLE AND THE HISTORY OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL SPIRIT

Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757) lived an extremely long life, less than a month short of a hundred years. At the height of his intellectual career, he was a member of the three main Parisian academies: the *Académie Française* (elected in 1691), the *Académie des Sciences* (of which he became perpetual secretary in 1697), and the *Académie des Inscriptions* (elected in 1701). From that privileged position, Fontenelle contributed significantly to the construction of the self-perception of French Republic of Letters at the turn of the century, which would become the cornerstone of the predominant eighteenth-century views of the place of modern European societies in history.[15]

In this section, I argue that Fontenelle contributed to the formation of the self-understanding of the Enlightenment by *articulating* the connection between ancients and moderns that would become a foundational element of narratives of the modern in the eighteenth century. The word 'articulate' cannot be emphasized enough: Fontenelle combined an account of the modern revolution in European arts and sciences with an account of historical progress from the earliest days of human history to the present. Unlike his fellow Modern partisan Charles Perrault, Fontenelle's historical schema

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[13] As Gossman, *Medievalism and the ideologies of the Enlightenment*, p. xi, shows that the *Académie* was 'fully alive to the latest critical methods, eager to carry them forward, and determined to renovate historical scholarship along the lines accepted by most Enlightenment thinkers.'

[14] Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 107–108. emphasises the adaptability of the French narratives.

[15] The importance of Fontenelle's long life span to the transition towards the Enlightenment is noticed by Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: an interpretation. Vol. 1, The rise of modern paganism.* (2 vols, London, 1967), p. 317, and Ira O. Wade, *The Structure and Form of the French Enlightenment: Esprit Philosophique* (2 vols, Princeton, 2015), vol. 1, p. 28.

was not a calcified opposition between ancients and moderns. Whereas Perrault's parallelism presupposed a static comparability between ancients and moderns, Fontenelle added historical movement and historicity to the relation between ancient and modern, inserting classical antiquity and modern Europe within an account of the progress of the human spirit. His account was centred around the notion of the philosophical spirit and its connection to what he termed the Cartesian revolution in geometry. The philosophical spirit of modern Europe distinguished it from the previous development of the human spirit and created a vantage point from which a new kind of history could be written, the 'history of the human spirit' ('*histoire de l'esprit humain*'). The idea that modern European thinkers must take their historical situation (and its relationship with classical antiquity) into account would become central to later Ancient partisans in the *querelle* such as Dubos, the critical historians at the *Académie des Inscriptions*, and philosophical historians such as Hume, even though they reworked some aspects of that historical structure and moved it away from the Cartesianism Fontenelle adhered to until his final days.

Fontenelle articulated the notion of a philosophical spirit in his accounts of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century science. As the perpetual secretary of the *Académie des Sciences*, Fontenelle was tasked with writing a yearly account of the academy's proceedings, highlighting new discoveries and experiments that its members produced and discussed, and providing eulogies of recently deceased members and correspondents. In the eulogies and in other works, he constructed the idea of a scientific revolution in mathematics with the discovery of infinitesimal calculus.[16] Be-

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[16] In the eulogy of Michel Rolle (1652-1719), Fontenelle described how all mathematicians were 'gradually turning towards the new infinitesimal geometry [*géometrie de l'inifini*]' whose elegant and concise demonstrations were making 'a remarkable revolution in the world of geometry', Fontenelle, 'Éloge de M. Rolle', N 6.483. In the preface to his own *Élemens de la Géométrie de l'Infini* (1727), Fontenelle added that the discovery of differential calculus in the era of Bernoulli, Varignon, and l'Hôpital led to 'an almost complete revolution in Geometry,' see Fontenelle, 'Préface des Eléments de la Géometrie de l'Infini', N 7.362-363. Simone Mazauric, *Fontenelle et l'invention de l'histoire des sciences à l'aube des Lumières* (Paris, 2007), pp. 214–215, observes that Fontenelle created the idea of a 'scientific revo-

hind this revolution in mathematics stood the towering figure of Descartes. In his eulogies, Fontenelle continually employed the 'encounter with Descartes' as a *topos* to describe the life of the thinkers he eulogized and explain how they had reoriented their intellects towards such a fruitful path.[17] The encounter with Descartes is characterized as a moment of enlightenment that makes the person aware of the true approach to scientific and philosophical pursuits. [18] In some cases the 'encounter with Descartes' was raised to the level of a life-changing experience, as Fontenelle described in his eulogy of Malebranche.[19]

But what exactly was that 'light' enlightening the revolutionary mathematicians and scientists of the turn of the century? Mazauric argues that Fontenelle's writings on the history of science can be called a history of science proper—indeed, she attributes to Fontenelle the merit of being the pioneer of the discipline—because Fontenelle *theorized* about the history he was writing. That is, more than simply chronicling the events of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century science, Fontenelle elaborated a *theory* of scientific development. The 'encounter with Descartes' in the eulogies was the narrative front-end of a theory of modern science.[20] And although Descartes was the towering figure of the seventeenth century, it was clear to Fontenelle that this was not a one-man job. Descartes stood, in a certain sense, as the metonymy of the revolution in mathematics and physics, which then expanded to knowledge in

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lution' as a 'historiographical category'. He reserved that category *exclusively* to the revolution in geometry. We must notice that Fontenelle's scientific revolution was related to mathematics, not to astronomy as is the norm in current scholarship.

[17] The encounter with Decartes is discussed by Mitia Rioux-Beaulne, 'What is Cartesianism? Fontenelle and the Subsequent Construction of Cartesian Philosophy', in Steven Nadler, Tad M. Schmaltz, and Delphine Antoine-Mahut, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Descartes and Cartesianism* (2019), p. 483, and Mazauric, *Fontenelle et l'invention de l'histoire des sciences à l'aube des Lumières*, p. 232.

[18] For instance, the mathematician Pierre Varignon (1654-1722) 'was struck by that new light [nouvelle lumière] that has since become widespread in the learned world,' see Fontenelle, 'Éloge de M. Varignon', N 7.20.

[19] After picking up one of Descartes' books by chance at a bookstore, Malebranche was 'struck by a new light completely unknown to his eyes.' He read the book 'in such a transport, that his heart pounded on his chest.' That light allowed him to foresee a whole new science, of which he had no idea until then', see Fontenelle, 'Éloge du Père Malebranche', N 6.338-339.

[20] Mazauric, *Fontenelle et l'invention de l'histoire des sciences à l'aube des Lumières*, pp. 7–8, 13. Indeed, Mazauric defines the 'encounter with Descartes' as the element of Fontenelle's 'history of science' that inscribes theory in history, making it historical.

general. As Mazauric notices, Fontenelle often refers to 'Descartes et quelques autres Modernes' or 'Descartes et d'autres grands Hommes' who transformed modern physics and mathematics: Descartes is a 'writing strategy' meant to convey the beginning of modernity in the sciences.[21]

More than a particular discovery or theory, Descartes (followed by the 'other great men') revolutionized what Fontenelle called the 'manner of reasoning'. Before the seventeenth century, mathematics had been stuck with 'an almost superstitious admiration' for the works of the mathematicians of classical antiquity; modern mathematicians only used their reason to imitate their predecessors: multitudes worked on the same problems, multiplied books endlessly, 'without ever committing the crime of thinking by themselves.'[22] Descartes left the ancients behind and put reason to a new, autonomous use, following only its own lead, not that of past thinkers. Eight years before, Fontenelle had argued in his direct contribution to the *querelle* that before Descartes introduced the 'new method of reasoning [...] we reasoned more carelessly [*plus commodément*].' Descartes' new method was much more important than the things he reasoned about: his own philosophy was being proved wrong 'according to rules he himself had taught us.'[23] Indeed, Fontenelle warned his contemporaries not to give Descartes the kind of unlimited authority that had been attributed to Aristotle until the previous century.[24]

The new Cartesian method of reasoning created what Fontenelle called the 'geometric spirit' (*esprit géométrique*). However, the effects of the geometric spirit were not confined to mathematics. Mathematics and physics were just the most obvious object of that kind of reasoning. Acquaintance with the burgeoning new discoveries in mathematics was promoting a new approach to knowledge in general: it created a new *habit*, sometimes imperceptible even to those who acquired it, of independent truth-

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[21] Mazauric, *Fontenelle et l'invention de l'histoire des sciences à l'aube des Lumières*, pp. 231–232. Quotes are from Fontenelle, 'Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes Habités', N 2.21, and 'Préface de l'Histoire de l'Académie des Sciences Depuis 1666 jusqu'en 1699', N 7.338-339, respectively.
[22] Fontenelle, 'Préface de l'Analyse des Infiniment Petits de M. le Marquis de l'Hôpital', N 3.239.
[23] Fontenelle, 'Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes', N 2.420.
[24] *Id.*, N 2.430.

seeking and a familiarity with complex chains of argument. The effects of that habit could reach well beyond the realm of mathematics and physics: 'a book on morals, politics, and perhaps even eloquence will be more beautiful, everything else being equal, if it is written in the manner of geometers [*de main de Géomètre*].'[25] The geometric spirit is the foundation of the conciseness, accuracy and exactitude that 'have reigned supreme in more recent books', communicating itself even to those who do not know any geometry at all.[26] Sometimes, he concluded, a great man gives the 'tone' of the century: the man of the seventeenth century was a geometer; the tone he gave to the century was that of a new 'art of reasoning'.

When the geometric spirit reaches beyond the confines of mathematics, it receives a new name: philosophical spirit (*esprit philosophique*). The concept appears twice in Fontenelle's work, once in his eulogy of Leibniz and another in his speech in answer to the Bishop of Luçon's first address to the *Académie Française* (which is actually a eulogy of his friend and fellow Modern partisan, the poet Antoine Houdar de la Motte, whose place the bishop now occupied). In both instances, the philosophical spirit appears as the extension of that 'manner of reasoning' associated with Descartes and the geometrical spirit to disciplines that had until then not received the new philosophical *lumières*. Fontenelle weighed into the *querelle homérique* with a praise of de la Motte's approach to Homer. In his disguised eulogy to de la Motte, Fontenelle complimented the poet for the audacity of his attempt to modernize Homer, throwing the blame on the source, rather than the translator/adaptor. We read the ancients 'as if it were a duty,' Fontenelle argued, whereas we only read modern books for pleasure. The reception of de la Motte's *Iliad* was negative because people read it as an ancient classic we read for obligation, not a modern adaptation everyone should read for pleasure—were it not a version of the *Iliad*, everyone would have enjoyed it.[27] Fontenelle welcomed de la Motte's translation-adaptation as a contribution to the expansion of 'a

[25] Fontenelle, 'Préface sur l'Utilité des Mathématiques et de la Physique et sur les Travaux de l'Académie des Sciences', N 6.44.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Fontenelle, 'Réponse à l'Evêque de Luçon', N 5.504.

philosophical spirit almost wholly new, a light that had not enlightened [*éclairé*] our ancestors.'[28] The same light that had struck Michel Rolle and Malebranche was now reaching the belles-lettres. De la Motte was spreading across the French Parnassus the seeds of a new poetry that rejected clichéd references to classical mythology in favour of unusual references to philosophy and metaphysics—'he puts plenty of reason in his works,' Fontenelle concluded.[29] The response to Luçon ends by opposing de la Motte and Anne Dacier as 'Esprit' versus 'Savoir'. Although Fontenelle avoided the content of the controversy, he observed that the spirit of the Moderns had been 'sweet, modest, tranquil, sometimes cheerful, always respectful to the venerable Savoir', whereas the Ancients had been aggressive, immoderate, quick tempered and bitter.[30]

Fontenelle's second reference to the philosophical spirit explored its effects on the erudite 'Savoir' prized by Ancients such as Anne Dacier. In his eulogy of Leibniz, Fontenelle surveyed the achievements of the co-inventor of differential calculus. Leibniz's historical works represented exactly the expansion of the geometric spirit to other forms of knowledge, bringing those disciplines under the aegis of the philosophical spirit. In his historical enquiries Leibniz took great pains to read every mediocre and unknown book that could provide the details he needed. However, his feat was not having amassed enormous amounts of information about the genealogical trees of German noble families, but rather 'having put that much philosophical spirit into such an unphilosophical matter [*une matière si peu philosophique*]' [31]. Leibniz's philosophical spirit 'discovered order and connection only he could see' in 'that confusing mess of facts' that characterized unphilosophical erudition.[32] He went beyond the facts and

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[28] *Id.*, N 5.506-7.
[29] *Ibid*.
[30] *Id.*, N 5.510. Hume would later adopt Fontenelle's description of the two parties of the *querelle* in 'Of the Independency of Parliament' in 1741. In a footnote, he noticed how any party defending the established opinion is 'always the most dogmatical and imperious in their stile' (regardless of the truth of the matter). In the 'controversy with regard to ancient and modern learning', the Ancients 'mixed their reasonings with satire and invective;' the Moderns, in contrast, 'never transgressed the bounds of moderation and good breeding', see Hume, *Essays* 608. As we will see, in the case of matters of taste (including poetry), Hume sided with the Ancient Dubos, not with the Modern de la Motte, despite the latter's moderation in the disputes.
[31] Fontenelle, 'Éloge de M. Léibnitz', N 6.381.
[32] *Id.*, N 6.385.

investigated 'what causes public actions and makes men move.'[33] From those underlying springs he knew how to extract general reflections 'beyond History itself', offering the reader a history of nations, their moeurs, language and opinions instead of a list of battles and treaties—a history of the human spirit, as he would propose later.

The geometric and philosophical spirits of the seventeenth century thus explained the *rupture* between antiquity and modernity, that is, they explained why the hundred or so years before the time Fontenelle penned his eulogy to Leibniz had witnessed such a rapid and unprecedented progress in the arts and sciences. A new way of reasoning had made this progress possible; the sharpest minds of the century spread this new way of reasoning beyond its origins in mathematics, favouring the development of all the sciences as well as of the arts.

But whence the philosophical spirit? If Fontenelle the (proto-)historian of science used the philosophical spirit to explain the difference between ancient and modern sciences and letters, his intervention in the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* sought to articulate a sense of historical continuity that eventually led to his proposal of a 'history of the human spirit'. The *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688) was published a year after Charles Perrault read his *Siècle de Louis le Grand* to the *Académie Française*. It appeared along with some of his eclogues and the *Discours sur la Nature de l'Églogue*. Together, the *Discours* and the *Digression* defended the Modern position by rejecting above all the value of *ancienneté*, that is, the attribution of value (to a work of art or to a philosophical system, for instance) solely based on antiquity. Although his argument would sound 'sacrilegious' to those who 'profess that religious adoration of Antiquity', he insisted he would not bend 'the natural light of reason [*les lumières naturelles de la raison*] in order to justify that adoration.'[34]

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[33] *Id.*, N 6.382-383.

[34] Fontenelle, 'Discours sur la Nature de l'Églogue', N 2.409. The affirmation appeared in the context of Fontenelle's attempt to apply equally his rules of criticism to ancient and modern poets. In his view, eclogues had to strike a balance between a realistic depiction of shepherds and an idealized view of rural life, portraying them neither as rude peasants with a brutish discourse nor as urban gentlemen in simple clothes. Excess on the one side would make the poem unpleasant to a refined audience; excess on the other would make it unpleasant by its complete lack of verisimilitude, see *id.* N 2.402. Either

Unlike Perrault, Fontenelle did not structure his critique of *ancienneté* in terms of a parallel that decided on the best examples to follow. His critique of *ancienneté* was based on an account of progress between ancients and moderns. The *Digression* opens with a discussion about the constancy of human nature. In our physical and mental nature, ancients and moderns were all of the same kind—Plato, Demosthenes, and Homer were not made of 'a finer clay' than modern philosophers, orators, and poets.[35] Although Fontenelle admitted that climate might have an effect on our brain fibres, it was impossible to account precisely for its effects and it was reasonable to expect that positive and negative effects would balance each other out when comparing equally civilized peoples.[36] 'Voilà, we are all perfectly equal: Ancients and Moderns, Greeks, Latins and French.[37]

The constancy of human nature does not mean there can be no differences between different societies. Differences in 'government' and the 'general state of affairs' are important foundations of knowledge.[38] However, the *Digression* did not go down that path (as we will see, it is here that later Enlightenment thinkers such as Hume weighed in). Rather, Fontenelle was more interested in the process of accumulation of knowledge. Amidst the disputes of the first phase of the *querelle* about whether the first or the latest achievements were more impressive, Fontenelle focused on distinguishing between cumulative and non-cumulative areas of human knowledge.[39] Arts such as eloquence and poetry require only a small number of cumulative attempts to be perfected, depending mostly on the vivacity of the imagination.[40] Hence, they could achieve perfection with only a few centuries of experience: those arts had already made

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way, modern and ancient poets must be judged by the same standards. As we will see below, the Ancients did not see themselves as professing a 'religious adoration' of classical antiquity, but rather as demanding a greater degree of historical awareness. Hume later said that 'notwithstanding his reasonings, [Fontenelle] had a false taste': there was not a 'finer piece of criticism' than the *Discours*, but the accompanying eclogues erred on the side of excessive refinement: 'The sentiments of his shepherds are better suited to the toilettes of Paris, than to the forests of Arcadia,' see Hume, *Essays* 194.

[35] Fontenelle, 'Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes', N 2.414.
[36] *Id.*, N 2.414-415.
[37] *Id.*, N 2.416.
[38] *Id.*, N 2.416-417.
[39] *Id.*, N 2.417.
[40] *Id.*, N 2.419.

impressive progress very early on in Greek history and had matured to perfection by the time of Augustus.[41] Fontenelle placed physics, mathematics and medicine on the other side: those depend on a 'an infinite number of attempts' and a 'sound reasoning' that are gradually perfected.[42] As we have already discussed, this is the place where Descartes and the new 'manner of reasoning' made the most difference.

In cases where accumulation was not possible, as in eloquence and poetry, Fontenelle argued that moderns have the right to at least aim at equality.[43] In the cases where accumulation of knowledge was possible, Fontenelle suggested that if we were to adopt a prejudice, at least it should be a prejudice in favour of the moderns, who could learn from past knowledge. Or, for that matter, from past errors: in the case of metaphysics, for instance, plenty of mistaken systems—Platonic ideas, Pythagorean numbers, Aristotelian qualities—had been tried before Cartesian metaphysics proved 'Nature consists of the shape and movement of extended bodies.'[44]

Like Bayle (and at around the same time), Fontenelle transposed Cartesian epistemology into a psychological account. However, he did not go along with Bayle's pessimism of opposing the real and the ideal.[45] Instead, Fontenelle compared the development of human knowledge as the unfolding of an individual mind:

> A cultivated mind [*esprit*] is, so to speak, composed of all the minds of preceding centuries; it is as if a single mind had cultivated itself throughout all that time. Therefore, that man who has lived since the beginning of the world until the present was first an infant, when he was occupied only with his most pressing needs; then he became young and succeeded most with things of the imagination such as Poetry and Eloquence. He even began to think, but his reasoning was less solid than fire. He has now reached the

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[41] *Id.*, N 2.421-422. Fontenelle included History in this category, noticing the perfection of history by the time of Augustus. However, he meant History as *belles-lettres*, not as historical knowledge, which, as we have seen with the eulogy of Leibniz and as we will see below, could be perfected by the philosophical spirit.
[42] *Id.*, N 2.419.
[43] *Id.*, N 2.424.
[44] *Id.*, N 2.418.
[45] Rioux-Beaulne, 'What is Cartesianism? Fontenelle and the Subsequent Construction of Cartesian Philosophy', p. 489, remarks that both Bayle and Fontenelle relied on transpositions of Cartesian epistemology into psychological accounts. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, p. 40, emphasized the difference between Bayle's static framework and Fontenelle's developmental account.

age of virility, where he reasons more forcefully and is more enlightened than ever.[46]

Thus, the minds of men are connected by the cumulativeness of knowledge. The stage of accumulation determines what kind of scientific or artistic production is possible: eloquence and poetry, requiring only a vivid mind and little experience of the world, flourish early; the sciences and philosophy, being more complex and requiring more maturity and more developed reason, flourish later. Indeed, as we have seen, the 'manner of reasoning' had only been perfected in the seventeenth century. The Middle Ages were compared to a loss of memory: after a period of development, the human spirit slowly forgot the knowledge it had acquired earlier. The Ancient party had argued that the recovery witnessed in the modern period was only possible because moderns were imitating the right models. Fontenelle claimed instead that a new start would have happened even without the classical examples, though it would indeed be more costly—moderns would have to fumble around like the ancients had done.[47] The recovery of classical texts avoided a costly new start, but this eternal mind is always capable of accumulating knowledge.

However, unlike the individual mind, the eternal mind does not decline in old age. Although Fontenelle acknowledged that an excessive passion for war could limit its development, 'the contributions of the each successive good mind [*bon esprit*] always add up.'[48] This argument was also used to moderate the Modern party's claim to superiority: Fontenelle expected posterity to look at his own time with contempt, imagining how limited their stock of knowledge was—perhaps the Americans will look down on Europeans like they were looking down on classical antiquity, he wondered.[49] An intelligent man like Archimedes would have invented a rustic chariot in the 'infancy of the world'; a few centuries later, he was burning roman ships with mirrors; what would he come up with if he had lived a couple thousand years later?[50]

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[46] Fontenelle, 'Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes', N 2.426.
[47] *Id*., N 2.425.
[48] *Id*., N 2.426.
[49] *Id*., N 2.428.
[50] *Id*., N 2.417.

Thus, although he positioned himself clearly in the Modern camp of the *querelle*, Fontenelle did so not by forsaking classical art and sciences, but rather by replacing the parallel with a continual evolution of the human spirit. As Mullet emphasizes, Fontenelle's defence of the modern combined a constant human nature with the capacity of reason to perfect itself. This constant but perfectible human nature was the foundation of the possibility of progress.[51] It allowed Fontenelle to connect classical antiquity to modern France without making them indistinguishable. Fontenelle's approach to historical knowledge was founded on the historical structure emerging from that idea of the progress of the human mind.

Even before his intervention in the *querelle*, Fontenelle had already used the notion of a primitive mind or spirit to explain the nature of pagan oracles in his *Histoire des Oracles* (1686).[52] The *Histoire* rejected a 'supernatural' understanding of oracles, favouring instead a combination of superstition and priestcraft, with the former creating space for the latter.[53] The book then described the endless ways priests employed to con believers: by controlling the environment of oracles, gathering information about pilgrims, limiting their cognitive abilities during initations, among other tricks. It was important, however, to emphasize that priestcraft did not come first: the general state of development of human reason had made priestcraft possible.[54] Indeed, the demise of oracles was caused not by the divine intervention of Christ but '*à force d'expérience*' and by the opposition of pagan philosophical sects and then Christianity. The

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[51] Isabelle Mullet, 'Fontenelle et l'Histoire : du Fixisme des Passions aux Progrès de l'Esprit Humain', *Dix-huitieme Siècle*, 44 (September 2012), pp. 335–347.

[52] The *Histoire* was a 'translation' of Anton van Dale's *De oraculis veterum ethnicorum dissertations* (1683), transforming an erudite Latin treatise into a French work more accessible to a wider audience. The stated aim of the *Histoire* was to show that 1) pagan oracles were not the works of demons; and 2) that pagan oracles did not cease with the first coming of Christ, see Fontenelle, *Histoire des Oracles*, N 2.145-147. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, pp. 41–52, inscribed the *Histoire* in the first wave of 'psychologization' of religious belief, led by Bayle and Fontenelle, which replaced demonological accounts of paganism.

[53] 'I do not believe that the first establishment of the oracles was a premeditated imposture; the people of the time would believe in any kind of superstition, which opened the opportunity for some more sophisticated minds to profit from them', Fontenelle, *Histoire des Oracles*, N 2.215.

[54] As Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, pp. 41–52, argued, it is important to distinguish between religious belief (which is founded on ignorance, as is shown below) and *organized* religion, which is based on priestcraft and deception.

learning process, associated with opposite forces, eventually exposed oracles for what they were.

That theme came up again in Fontenelle's *De l'Origine des Fables*, in which he formulated his theory of development of the human spirit more explicitly.[55] Here, the main object was the evolution of forms of causal explanation—what Fontenelle called a 'philosophy'— through time and how they lead to the formation of fabulous historical traditions. Forms of causal explanation are always limited by experience; we explain the unknown by means of what we have experienced.[56] In the early stages of the development of a people, causal explanation takes the form of anthropomorphising the unknown, so within their limited experience, physical phenomena such as lightning become the effect of the actions of exceptionally powerful humans; the dangerous currents of a river are governed by aquatic beings and so on. Even the particular attributes of those supernatural beings are limited by the scope of human experience: since bodily strength was more important in early stages of development, early fables featured physically strong and powerful Gods; as man developed a wider understanding and more abstract notions, Gods characterized by their wisdom and justice appeared. Thus, early societies created fabulous traditions without any awareness of their mistakes; it was simply their mode of making sense of the world around them.[57]

'Philosophy' is thus tightly connected to the creation of historical traditions. The stage of development of a people's understanding of natural causal relations was connected to the way they recorded their own history. Fables were not only a means of causal explanation for early peoples, but also a means of record. Before the invention of writing, tradition was transmitted orally, which only compounded the presence of supernatural phenomena already present due to the 'philosophical' side: the dynamics of storytelling favoured wonderful, surprising, and exaggerated accounts and oral traditions depended on the testimony of elders, so no correction could be implemented.

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[55] *De l'Origine de Fables* was first published in 1724, but written in the 1690s, see Jean Dagen, 'Pour une Histoire de la Pensée de Fontenelle', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 66 (1966), pp. 619–641.
[56] Fontenelle, *De l'Origine de Fables*, N 3.189.
[57] *Id.*, N 3.192.

Every new generation only added another layer of fable. In this context, Fontenelle concluded, 'what we have called the Philosophy of the first eras was perfectly suited to their accounts of facts.'[58] This idea that quality of the historical accounts of an age and its 'philosophy' were tied together, particularly in savage or barbarian societies would become central to Hume as well as to Nicolas Fréret—'philosophical' as well as 'erudite' approaches to the early history of humankind had the *Origine* constantly in view.

Fontenelle continued his account of the relation between philosophy and history in the posthumously published *Sur l'Histoire*.[59] The invention of writing stabilised fabulous traditions (which should not be confused with eliminating fabulous elements). Peoples discovered the utility of more accurate records, but fables remained until their 'philosophy' improved: 'there were less prodigies, less false systems, and histories became less fabulous because all those things are connected.'[60] However, even as history began to show 'some verisimilitude' to reality, it was still written in a confusing and dry manner, 'without showing the motives [of actions] nor reasoning about the character of men.'[61] By the time of Augustus—which produced the most brilliant historians, as we have seen—the fabulous forms of explanation were part of a past long gone, but they remained as a form of ornament to historical narrative. Those brilliant historians accommodated their factual accounts to the tastes of the time, so the fantastic elements that appear in their writings should not be taken at face value as if they believed them—again, both Hume and Fréret explored this notion when dealing with classical historians, as we will learn below. Further, historians now attempted some inroads into the realm of motives and characters. Fontenelle praised Tacitus for his more systematic approach to history. In that form of historical writing, history 'is

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[58] *Id.*, N 3.193.

[59] Dagen, 'Pour une Histoire de la Pensée de Fontenelle', argued convincingly that *Sur l'Histoire* was written after *L'Origine des Fables* and that it is a more elaborate version of the latter. The main difference between the two texts are 1) the absence of the many examples of *L'Origine* (which were omitted here) in *Sur l'Histoire* and 2) the further discussion of how historical writing evolves after the invention of writing, especially the 'call for action' for a new kind of historical writing.

[60] Fontenelle, *Sur l'Histoire*, N 3.174-175.

[61] *Id.*, N 3.176.

very similar to the construction of a philosophical system:' the historian works out the causes of the observed effects based on the experience of nature. Tacitus is compared to Descartes: they were 'two great inventors of systems.'[62] Despite the early example of Tacitus, historians had failed to write history in this systematic and philosophical fashion. They wandered around, amassing facts endlessly, failing to draw any general principles from them. Whatever they knew, they knew only '*historiquement*', that is, because they read another historian saying it. Their history of peoples and nations was actually a history of ruling families, which is hardly instructive to anyone but courtly lawyers.[63]

Against this mindless erudition, Fontenelle advocated a new approach to history. It is hard to apprehend general principles without the foundations supplied by the particulars, so 'it is positive that history accompany and support our knowledge of man.' History can show in detail what morality shows in general—it must be 'allied to morals.'[64] However, Fontenelle did not mean that history should only be the traditional *historia magistra vitae*, providing general moral lessons by means of historical examples. In a sense, historians must work together like the scientists and mathematicians of the *Académie des Sciences* he presided over, because the nature of historical facts is not dissimilar to the isolated experiments performed in the academy. Writing about the *Académie*'s method, he observed that 'many separate truths, if their number is sufficiently great, display their relations [*rapports*] and mutual dependences so vividly that it seems as if they are trying to reunite together after being detached from each other by some kind of violence.'[65] The historian's task can be regarded as similar: to go after this natural union of the facts they collected, undoing the violence that separated them. As we will see below, the academicians of the *Académie des Inscriptions* modelled their own agenda in the spirit of Fontenelle's agenda for the sciences, with

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[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Id.*, N 3.178-179.
[64] *Id.*, N 3.179.
[65] Fontenelle, 'Préface sur l'Utilité des Mathématiques et de la Physique et sur les Travaux de l'Académie des Sciences', N 6.18.

Claude Sallier citing that exact passage. Leibniz was, as we have seen, an early example of the kind of historical approach that went beyond that approach that merely 'filled their brains with facts and perfectly memorised dates' but who did not know 'the springs of the human heart which cause those events.'[66] A historian such as Leibniz 'is interested in the origins of Nations, their languages, moeurs, opinions. Above all, he is interested in the history of the human spirit [*histoire de l'esprit humain*] and the succession of ideas that arise in one people after another, or perhaps more precisely that are passed from one people to the other, creating a chain which, if well observed, could lead to some kind of prophecy.'[67]

In the conclusion to *Sur l'Histoire*, Fontenelle identified three different elements in historical accounts: first, there was 'fabulous history' (*l'histoire fabuleuse*). That part of history provided materials for the study of the 'errors of the human spirit'; it showed how far human imagination could fly. Second, there was true history ('*histoire veritable*'), which furnished the materials for the correct understanding of the passions of the human heart. The third element was the history of moeurs, which resulted from the opinions and passions of men. That part of history had been the most neglected, even though it had the potential to be the "most useful and agreeable part."[68] The kind of history Leibniz practiced had the potential to improve historical knowledge by bringing attention to that third element. Unlike Bayle, however, Fontenelle insisted on the usefulness of even fabulous history—and here he admitted that even though pagan fabulous history was much more far-fetched than its Christian counterpart, the latter still existed—they were still an element of history and had to be understood, rather than eliminated from the record. His confidence in the spread of the philosophical spirit assured him Bayle's pessimistic conclusions would not hold.

In that move, he historicized historical knowledge: it was itself a product of the history of the human spirit. In that 'histoire de l'histoire' modern historians surveyed

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[66] Fontenelle, *Sur l'Histoire*, N 3.178.
[67] Fontenelle, 'Éloge de M. Léibnitz', N 6.385.
[68] Fontenelle, *Sur l'Histoire*, N 3.182.

history from a vantage point.[69] That idea would be essential to eighteenth-century historians. However, they would be diffident of the Cartesianism that underlay Fontenelle's view of history.[70] Dubos, an Ancient and a pioneer in the introduction of Lockean philosophy in France, tempered and adapted Fontenelle's account of the philosophical spirit. The academicians, although inspired by the idea that they investigated history from the modern vantage point of the philosophical spirit, would also find the historical method for the history of the human spirit in Locke, not Descartes.

2. DUBOS' MODERN ANTI-MODERNISM

Fontenelle's narrative of the philosophical spirit concluded that being modern—living in the age when the Cartesian-inspired philosophical spirit enlightened the European Republic of Letters— gave a philosophical and historical vantage point to modern thinkers. Dubos reacted to the Modern narrative pushed by Fontenelle and the Modern party in the *Réflexions Critiques sur la Peinture et la Poésie*, first published in 1719. However, his reaction against the 'contempteurs des anciens' was not based

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[69] Grell, 'La Querelle Homérique et ses Incidences sur la Connaissance Historique', p. 23, emphasises that Fontenelle's account of progress is by no means relativist. On the 'histoire de l'esprit humain' as a value system and a form of recognition of historicity, see Dagen, *L'histoire de l'esprit humain dans la pensée française de Fontenelle à Condorcet*, pp. 16 and 699.

[70] The extent of Fontenelle's Cartesianism is a subject of debate among scholars. There is a tendency of regarding Fontenelle's Cartesianism as 'methodological' more than physical or metaphysical. See Hazard, *La Crise de la Conscience Européenne*, p. 172; Dagen, *L'histoire de l'esprit humain dans la pensée française de Fontenelle à Condorcet*, pp. 48–51; and Assaf, 'La Deuxième Querelle (1714-1716): Pour une genèse des Lumières?', p. 279. Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, pp. 42–43, identifies an 'eclecticism' in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, which allowed the kind of non-committal adherence to a 'Cartesian spirit' as a way of reasoning observed in this section. However, as Rioux-Beaulne, 'What is Cartesianism? Fontenelle and the Subsequent Construction of Cartesian Philosophy', p. 487, argues, this methodological Cartesianism could have serious consequences even in physics and metaphysics, not to mention historical method (as we have seen with Bayle and as the academicians knew well). Fontenelle remained attached to Cartesian physics as Newtonian physics gained ground in France, believing it relied on attributing 'occult causes' and inexplicable powers of attraction. It seemed a premodern explanation in the Fontenelle's history of science framed around Descartes. As late as 1752, Fontenelle published (or more precisely permitted the publication of) the *Théorie des Tourbillons Cartésiens avec des Réflexions sur l'Attraction* defending Cartesian physics against Newtonian attraction, see Mazauric, *Fontenelle et l'invention de l'histoire des sciences à l'aube des Lumières*, p. 226, footnote 2.

on a defence of the authority of classical antiquity for its own sake.[71] In other words, it was not merely an appeal to the *ancienneté* of the classical world; it was a thoroughly modern anti-Modern position. Although he sought to humble the hubris of the Modern party, the modern perspective was central to Dubos' project. Indeed, Dubos was influenced by the experimental philosophy of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*—he was a personal friend and pioneer defender of Locke's epistemology in France.[72] As we will see, a rejection of an aprioristic theory of art and of demonstrative reason as the only source of knowledge are at the heart of Dubos' answer to the Modern party. Dubos' experimental and gradualist approach to the progress of the arts and sciences would also be a pioneer in the eighteenth century.

In his reaction to the Modern narrative of the modern, Dubos reformulated Fontenelle's account of progress and the philosophical spirit. Dubos rejected an account of progress as the unfolding of Reason. In his view, progress was based on the accumulation of *experience*, which applied to the sciences as well as the arts. However, within the realm of the arts, Dubos emphasized the accumulation of experiences on the side of 'the public': the *comparative* taste of the public improved as its judgments incorporated new experiences of artistic expressions of genius. The emphasis on the public was a consequence of Dubos' sentiment-based theory of aesthetic judgment. The public judged works of art by sentiment, not according to a work's conformity to rational rules of composition. Within that perspective, the role of art critics was to explain why the public approved such and such works, not dictate what is rational to

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[71] Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions Critiques sur la Poésie et sur la Peinture*, fourth edition (3 vols, Paris, 1740), vol 2, p. 515-516. Hereafter '*Réflexions*'. References will give volume and page numbers.
[72] For a chronology of the reception of Locke in France, see Bonno, 'The Diffusion and Influence of Locke's "Essay concerning Human Understanding" in France before Voltaire's "Lettres Philosophiques"'. Dubos met Locke in England in 1698. He was probably the first Frenchman to have access to Pierre Coste's translation of the *Essay* that appeared in 1700, see Alfred Lombard, *L'abbé Du Bos, un initiateur de la pensée moderne (1670-1742): Un portrait, une planche hors texte et trois fac-similés d'autographes.* (Paris, 1913), p. 73, which remains the standard biography of Dubos. On Dubos' correspondence with Locke, see G. Bonno, 'Une amitié franco-anglaise du XVII e siècle: John Locke et l'Abbé du Bos', *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 24 (January 1950), pp. 481–520. Dubos kept Locke informed of French news, books, and debates. Perinetti, 'Philosophical Reflection on History', p. 1117, and Jones, *Hume's Sentiments*, pp. 93–94, also draw attention to Dubos' adherence to Lockean epistemology.

approve. On the side of artistic creation, Dubos proposed an account of the development of the arts based on a separation between technique and genius. He connected genius to climatic causes, independent of 'moral causes', which only affected mediocre artistic expressions.

According to Dubos, 'the first purpose of Poetry & Painting is to move us [*nous toucher*]; poems and paintings are good works to the extent that they move us and makes us attached to them [*qu'ils nous émeuvement & qu'ils nous attachent*].'[73] Works of art affect our 'sixth sense', which works in a way similar to taste or smell.[74] This means, above all, that every person is capable of perceiving and judging works of art. Anyone can watch an opera or regard a painting and decide whether it pleases or not. The 'public', insofar as it judges art by its purpose, cannot fail: if a work pleases the public, than it is a good work; if it does not, it is not a good work.[75] In making the 'public' the core of his theory of taste and art criticism, Dubos had to define, first, who was that public and how its judgment of works of art functioned, and, second, what was the relation between the public and art critics.

Dubos acknowledged that 'the public' is not everybody that is capable of reading or seeing. The public does not include the 'low people', only those who have 'acquired some enlightenment' (*lumières*) by reading or conversing with other enlightened people.[76] It varies according to the kind of work we have in mind: the public of the *Iliad* is more restricted than that of the *Aeneid*, which is in turn more restricted than that of *Le Cid*.[77] Dubos was clear that judging a work of art required some understanding about the purpose of the work and its context: the public must be able to understand

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[73] *Réflexions*, 2.323.
[74] *Réflexions*, 2.325-326.
[75] *Réflexions*, 2.324 and 2.358. Kate E. Tunstall, 'Enlightenment Aesthetic Thought', in Michael Moriarty and Jeremy Jennings, eds., *The Cambridge History of French Thought* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 257–258, stress the centrality of Dubos in making the sensuous experience of a work of art, not their rules of production, the central element of what would become the discipline of aesthetics.
[76] *Réflexions*, 2.334-335. Joseph Harris, *Inventing the Spectator: Subjectivity and the Theatrical Experience in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2014), p. 15, notices that, as aesthetics shifted from an emphasis on the rules of art to the perception of the public, theorists felt pressured to define who counted as part of the 'public'.
[77] *Réflexions*, 1.335-336.

it in the original language, who was its original audience and what kind of work it is and what historical events (real or fabulous) it referred to—as we will learn below.

Notwithstanding the requirement of knowledge that many of its members may not have (and that critics often do), the public had some characteristics that the critics lacked: first, the public was disinterested.[78] By its very collective nature, the public as a whole cannot develop a penchant for a particular artist, either naively (e.g. because this is the only genre they know) or maliciously (e.g. because the artist is their friend). In contrast, the 'gens de métier'—the critics and artists themselves[79]—develop biases because of their training, which dulls their sensibility and limits their interests, or because of their relations; their very work sometimes forces them to take the wrong side to save face.[80] Second, the public is willing to learn. Unlike insiders, the public does not need to form a definitive judgment quickly (even though it may). The public knows how to respect experience and give it time: a general is praised for his military skills only after he has proven himself a handful of times – three to be more precise.[81] The same goes for artists and even for individual works: the public knows that a particular work may generate a positive reaction merely because it relates to current affairs, for instance, but over time, it will eventually limit its praise to genuine genius alone. [82]

Finally, the public judges by sentiment alone. Dubos opened the *Réflexions Critiques* with an account of the restlessness and self-insufficiency of the human mind. That means human beings crave contact with objects that excite passions in them.[83]

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[78] *Réflexions*, 2.321.

[79] *Réflexions*, 2.365. Dubos was careful to notice that the *true* genius would not fall into this trap because he sees it, see *Réflexions*, 2.52-53. He recounted that Boileau and Racine would often converse and reach their expert judgements only to find the public disagreed, but they never failed to defer to the public's opinion, *Réflexions*, 2.370.

[80] *Réflexions*, 2.364-373.

[81] *Réflexions*, 2.354-355.

[82] As Dubos put it, the public may approve a work 'en qualité de gazette' (*Réflexions*, 2.375-376) but this gives in to a judgment on the quality of the work itself as the contemporary circumstances fade away, see *Réflexions*, 2.410-412.

[83] *Réflexions*, 1.5-11. That desire for activity would be central to Hume's account of the 'paradox of tragedy', which was developed with reference to Dubos and Fontenelle, see Paisley Livingston, 'Du Bos' Paradox', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 53 (October 2013), pp. 393–406. More importantly to our purposes, that crave for activity would be essential to Hume's account of the spread of industry, as we will learn in chapter four.

Although that desire can be filled with other forms of entertainment (gladiators, bear fights, gambling), works of art fulfil that desire with 'artificial passions' created by their imitations of nature that do not involve the trouble [*peine*] and risks involved in the more 'real' forms of activity.[84] Thus, people in general seek works of art for amusement and pleasure, not for instruction or abstract speculation. That also means the public reacts more to the *pathos* or, in other words, to what Dubos often calls (for both poetry and painting) the 'poésie du stile'.[85] They are not as concerned with the technique employed in the work; indeed, sometimes a work's technical faults are the very source of its beauty in the eyes of the public.[86] The judgment of the public will thus always be about whether the work pleases or not, which is, as we have already said, the very purpose of art. Those characteristics make it impossible for the collective judgment of the public to err. In contrast, the *gens de métier* (including most artists themselves) judge by reason: they speculate whether the particulars of a work are in accord with their principles—which are always man and always in conflict with one another—and forget the pathos of the whole.[87] When they conclude their speculations, they try to convince four hundred people that what they felt in the theatre is not real or wrong. Needless to say, Dubos added, the public tends not to be convinced by people arguing that what they feel is not real.[88] In science and in art alike, people are more convinced by those who say 'I saw it' than those who say 'I concluded it'.[89]

The interaction between the public and the critics is complicated because the judgement of the public is not an immediate matter. There are some circumstances that can delay the time it takes to decide. It takes time for people to access a work and converse about it and a 'cabal' of influential critics can disrupt the formation of the true (sentimental) judgment of the public.[90] More importantly, members of the public

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[84] *Réflexions*, 1.25.
[85] *Réflexions*, 1.271-283.
[86] *Réflexions*, 1.287 and 2.496.
[87] *Réflexions*, 2.380.
[88] *Réflexions*, 2.408.
[89] *Réflexions*, 2.474.
[90] *Réflexions*, 2.389-394.

often cannot explain *why* a work pleases them, even though they feel that it pleases.[91] That, Dubos argued, is the only situation in which the critic can contribute; he or she can discover by reason what characteristics of a work made the public react as it did. But the critic has to be a mirror and a good mirror always reflects the image that is in front of it, so a good critic always sides with the public, giving it its reasons.[92] Indeed, Dubos apologised in advance in the opening of the *Réflexions* in case anything in the book read like the dictates of a legislator: 'each of us possesses the internal rule or compass applicable to my reasonings, & each of us will *feel* the error, when they move away ever so little from truth.'[93]

Critics very rarely remained content with their role of being the mirror of the public. They arrogated themselves the role of determining whether a work is good or bad. They wanted to decide by means of reason and speculation what must be decided by sentiment.[94] When their speculations conflicted with the verdict of the public, they denied the reality of the sentiments of the public in favour of their abstract speculations. Partisans of the Moderns were the most egregious offenders, most notably the adepts of the 'geometric' approach to art criticism such as Houdar de la Motte. Beyond merely guiding the public, they were seeking to overturn more than two millennia of judgment of classic poetry (Homer in particular) issued from an infinite diversity of perspectives—different nationalities, temperaments, mores, professions, and ages—because they did not fit in their geometrically calculated rhymes, their carefully designed turns of phrase or their divinely ordained morals.[95] If allowed to progress as rapidly as they had in the previous seventy years, the modernisers and their philosophical spirit would end up doing to Europe 'the same the Goths and Vandals did in the

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[91] *Réflexions*, 2.333.
[92] *Réflexions*, 1.3
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] *Réflexions*, 2.324.
[95] On the Modern critique of Homer see Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 113-126 and pp.174-179 for morality, and pp. 159-166 for form.

past'.[96] Their hubristic approach to the arts and sciences would lead to the neglect of experience and destroy the prejudices this experience embodied.[97]

Again, the intention of the *Réflexions Critiques* is to humble the Moderns, the partisans, with a capital M; to force them to accept their place and only take credit where it was due. Dubos sought to correct their hubris, not to diminish the modern world itself. There was still a lot that modernity could legitimately claim in art as it could in science and Dubos did not spare praise where he thought it was due: the France of Louis XIV merited a place along with classic Greece, Augustan Rome and Renaissance Italy as one of the four great siècles of human history.[98] Corneille and La Bruyère were lavished with laurels, even if they did not win as many as Virgil.[99] Raphael and Michelangelo, Le Brun and Poussin stood unmatched (even if that was due in part to the losses caused by time, particularly in painting).[100]

Dubos' rejection of the geometric approach to art criticism was closely connected to his views about the production of works of art (or more precisely, the production of *great* works of art).[101] While the geometers philosophized about *a priori* rules of composition and discussed endlessly about artistic technique, Dubos connected great art to a theory of artistic genius based on climatic causes. More than half of the second volume of the *Réflexions Critiques* was devoted to that theory. In the longest section of the work, Dubos argued that moral causes are not the correct explanation of why the arts flourish in certain countries at certain periods. By moral causes he understood those which make the arts flourish (or prevent them from doing so) without 'actually increasing the spirit (*esprit*) of the artists'.[102] Chief among the moral causes are patronage by the sovereign or citizens, war and peace, the state of the arts

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[96] *Réflexions*, 2.455.
[97] *Ibid*.
[98] *Réflexions*, 2.134-135.
[99] *Réflexions*, 2.436.
[100] *Réflexions*, 1.346-347. Indeed, as Lombard shows, Dubos had positive views even about some more controversial aspects of modern society, such as luxury, see Lombard, *L'abbé Du Bos*, pp. 64–66.
[101] On the 'parti des géomètres' of critics and poets, see Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 153–159.
[102] *Réflexions*, 2.130.

itself and the education of artists.[103] Moral causes, Dubos admitted, do affect the quality of mediocre artists: whether there are good art masters in well-funded schools and whether people who have some talent to a particular trade actually have the means to pursue it are relevant causes when we speak of mediocrity in art.[104] In fact, excluding the fine arts, he was willing to admit that geniuses in other professions such as magistracy and the military are affected by moral causes, mostly because they need to achieve high offices before showing genius.[105]

However, none of those moral factors influences the genius that defines the greatest artists. The greatest artistic geniuses, Dubos argued, are the product of a very refined and rare brain composition: the structure of the fibres of the brain and their sensitivity to external objects create a unique perspective that makes the great genius see what other have not seen before.[106] The very best expression of this genius is to create works of art that will make mediocre people exclaim 'of course this is the best way to represent this scene, is it not obvious?'. That ability to see the 'belle nature'[107] praised so often by critics cannot be taught: a master can teach a young genius the rules and techniques of the profession, but the genius will proceed alone when he (and it is always 'he' in Dubos' theory) realizes that his master cannot see what he sees—a combination of shades, that odd positioning of an element, or the turn of a sentence that truly moves the public. Good education will make excellent engravers and mediocre painters, but there is no guarantee it will make great painters, poets, sculptors, and musicians. Indeed, those who have the true genius for a profession will always find their way to it, overcoming all sorts of adversities.[108] A poor farm boy born with a

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[103] *Réflexions*, 2.130-132.
[104] *Réflexions*, 2.67-77.
[105] *Réflexions*, 2.36. As we will see, Hume would counter Dubos' argument exactly by not allowing an exception in the case of artistic genius.
[106] *Réflexions*, 2.13 and 2.217-223.
[107] On the differences between Ancient and Modern understandings of the concept of 'belle nature', see Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 204–212.
[108] *Réflexions*, 2.35-43.

genius for poetry soon attracts the attention of the parish priest and is offered a scholarship in the church school and from there makes his way to greatness.[109] A coach driver that recites some rough but somewhat charming verses simply is not a true genius, not a forsaken Corneille.[110] Only the most abject struggle for subsistence can prevent a true genius from achieving what his brain fibres made him capable of.[111]

In a wider context, moral causes were lacking in society as a whole immediately before the great siècles began. Civil wars in Italy or Greece, the slow dissolution of the Roman republic and the wars of religion in France were ravaging their countries when their siècles begun.[112] The first steps of the arts towards those glorious moments were made on their own and in a sudden burst of genius; they achieved the zenith without any steady support from sovereign or citizens. The 'moral causes' only appear *after* the burst of genius. Indeed, they are caused by them: once some men of genius begin to show their potential, sovereigns fund schools, the rich buy more works of art and give patronage. No effort is spared to sustain the greatness of the siècle, but all efforts are not sufficient to prevent the inevitable decline that follows, and the arts rise and fall disregarding all the wishes of humankind.[113]

The bursts of genius that inaugurated the great *siècles* of artistic achievement were thus quite literally conjured out of thin air: the fibres of the brain that make a true genius are fed by the blood, which in turn is affected by the quality of the air.[114] The quality of the air is determined by latitude and, most important, by the exhalations from the earth. Latitude can explain why the arts never flourish in certain places (i.e. places distant from Europe's temperate climate); the exhalations from the earth explain why the arts come and go in the same places.[115] According to Dubos, the exhalations explained why the arts flourished in Italy around the time of Augustus and again in the

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[109] Although Dubos does allow for some differentiation among the arts: sculpture, for instance, seems to be closer to the mechanical arts and depends more on moral causes, see *Réflexions*, 2.198.
[110] *Réflexions*, 2.42.
[111] *Réflexions*, 2.102. Or being born in Lapland, apparently, see *Réflexions*, 2.43.
[112] *Réflexions*, 2.206.
[113] *Réflexions*, 2.185-6.
[114] *Réflexions*, 2.253.
[115] *Réflexions*, 2.294-304.

fifteenth century. The lower temperatures in the Italic peninsula and the smells of the sewers of ancient Rome are to blame for the decline of the Augustan age.[116] Dubos conceded that the work of physical causes was too complex for us to understand. However, he insisted that the fact that the workings of the air on our brains could not be explained should not dissuade us of their causal efficacy. After all, we did know that moral causes could *not* be the explanation, even if we remained ignorant of the true causes.[117] Thus, Dubos shut down any narrative of the expansion of the geometric spirit into the realm of the arts. By attributing the highest achievements of artistic genius to the hidden work of air in the brain fibres of a select few persons in some particular historical periods and places, Dubos shut down the very possibility of the kind of geometric approach and its desire to codify the rules of artistic composition.

The climate theory of genius was only a part of Dubos wider reformulation of the narrative of philosophical spirit. Although the *Réflexions* was not interested in a history of science, it was important to review the Modern narrative of the modern. Again, Dubos openly acknowledged that modern science was superior to ancient science. His point was not to diminish modern achievements, but to humble the hubris of the Modern view. Against the Moderns, he argued that the superiority of modern science was not derived from a superior philosophical method. In Dubos' view, modern science was superior simply because modern scientists had available to them a vastly expanded collection of facts totally unknown to the ancients. Modern natural philosophers and natural historians had more knowledge of the Asian and African continents, knew the Americas, completely unknown to the ancients. They also had a completely unprecedented experience of astronomical and anatomical details.[118] This enormous collection of new facts and experiences was made available not by a more penetrating

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[116] *Réflexions*, 2.278-284. As we will see, Hume would use the coldness of ancient Italy mentioned by Dubos to refute the idea the ancient Europe was more populous than modern Europe based on a theory directly opposite to Dubos' climate theory.

[117] *Réflexions*, 2.319.

[118] *Réflexions*, 2.464-474. Dubos himself was an avid reader of books and news about European affairs in other continents as well as of erudite research about the ancient world. He was a constant source of current and historical information about Europe and the world for his correspondents, including Bayle and Locke. On Bayle, see Lombard, *L'abbé Du Bos*, pp. 53–68. Dubos' correspondence with Locke is available in Bonno, 'Une amitié franco-anglaise du XVII e siècle'.

way of reasoning but by the discovery of myriad new technologies also unknown to the ancients: the compass, gunpowder, telescopes, microscopes. Again, none of those instruments were fruits of the new philosophy. They were often the serendipitous discovery of glassmakers, metalsmiths, mechanics, and other artisans who found new applications to objects they were familiar with. In other words, they were the product of experience and time. Time is particularly important: new technologies often have to be combined together before they begin to yield new '*lumières*'. Fortunately, the current *siècle* was a moment when the experiences made possible by the new technologies matured together, producing great change in the sciences.[119] Thus, the new way of thinking was made possible by the accumulation of experience, not the opposite. For that reason, Dubos praised the Royal Society and the *Académie des Sciences* for following Francis Bacon and rejecting system-building (including Cartesian system-building) in favour of piecemeal scientific advances based on experience.[120] Without losing art criticism from his sight, Dubos emphasised how far the 'systems of poetry' (the geometric method in art criticism) were from the leading scientific institutions of the age: they went beyond trying to substitute reason for experience; they sought to overturn it.[121]

That brings to the fore Dubos' rejection of Fontenelle's conception of the philosophical spirit. As we saw above, Fontenelle considered the philosophical spirit a more comprehensive version of the geometric spirit, making it a diffusion of that philosophical approach to other realms of enquiry and creative production. In some passages of the *Réflexions Critiques*, Dubos did accept Fontenelle's pairing of the geometric and philosophical spirit, but only to reject the idea that it had been the engine behind the *siècle* of Louis XIV. What role did the 'philosophical spirit of the last hundred years' have in the discoveries such as the circulation of blood that took place exactly before it?[122] If anything, the philosophical spirit, in the Fontenellian sense, was

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[119] *Réflexions*, 2.471.
[120] *Réflexions*, 2.343.
[121] *Réflexions*, 2.344.
[122] *Réflexions*, 2.475.

often an impediment to new discoveries: Guillaume Delisle (1675-1726) was only able to improve French cartography because he focused on collecting data and ignored the 'philosophical spirit' of 'speculative physicists' who eschewed facts in favour of their abstract reasonings.[123] In other passages, Dubos appropriated the concept and adapted it to his own narrative: 'the philosophical spirit, which is nothing but reason fortified by reflection and experience [*la raison fortiée par la réflexion & par l'expérience*], was known in all but name among the ancients.'[124] Did not the ancients know as well as us moderns that 'that superiority of reason, which we call the philosophical spirit, must preside over all the sciences and the arts?'[125] Elsewhere he noticed that 'the philosophical spirit, which is excellent to make truth evident provided it follow the guidance of experience' had made discoveries even in criticism (such as the discovery that verses 'full of images', though the most beautiful in poetry, very rarely fit well in an Opera).[126] In the end, the Moderns were claiming they were the first generation to think properly.[127] Because their science was better, they made the mistake of thinking their minds were better and thus that they saw things more clearly and distinctly.

The judgment of the public, particularly when it is paired to art criticism done in the spirit Dubos thought it ought to be done, can be read in parallel to Dubos' account of the philosophical spirit and the development of science—'the judgment of the public is always perfecting itself [*va toujours en se perfectionnant*].'[128] On the side of artistic production, Dubos tied the production of great art to climatic causes. In that sense, he made great artistic innovations almost an 'independent variable', since we do not know and cannot control their production. However, the public can perfect itself

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[123] *Réflexions*, 2.466.
[124] *Réflexions*, 2.504-505. Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 24–30, 37–43, places Dubos along with Fontenelle and Nicolas Fréret as the main exponents of the narrative of Enlightenment that had the philosophical spirit as its core. In Edelstein's view, the main difference in relation to Fontenelle's account is that Dubos regarded the philosophical spirit as a possibility for all ages, whereas Fontenelle regarded it as exclusively modern. In contrast, Dagen, *L'histoire de l'esprit humain dans la pensée française de Fontenelle à Condorcet*, p. 142, argued Dubos promoted a 'radical dissociation' between aesthetic judgment and philosophical spirit.
[125] *Réflexions*, 2.478.
[126] *Réflexions*, 1.472.
[127] *Réflexions*, 2.455 and 2.516-517.
[128] *Réflexions*, 2.422.

in its appreciation of those great artistic achievements. Although some people are naturally born with more delicate sentiments than others, everyone can perfect it by usage.[129] The source of perfection is 'comparative taste' (*goût de comparaison*), the ability to compare our perceptions of different works of art and the feelings they provoked.[130] Even multiple contacts with the same work of art can improve our comparative taste: the first time we watch a play, our attention is overwhelmed by the most striking details and our imagination flies higher; with the second viewing, we learn to put those most intense moments in the context of the play as a whole and we come to better appreciate them.[131] When we are young, Dubos explained, our first contacts with works of art of established merit *insensibly* create a kind of 'standard' in our young, malleable *brains* that serves as the basis of comparison for future interactions.[132] Indeed the size of the public mentioned above refers to this comparative taste: possessing 'lumières' and thus being included in 'the public' amounts to possessing the ability to exercise comparative taste. Everyone is capable of being affected by works of art, but only this enlightened public is capable of judging their *comparative* merit.[133] Here, moral causes are admitted to do some work: the Romans, for instance, developed a more delicate sixth sense in relation to painting and sculpture, given the abundance of masterpieces in the streets and churches; Parisians, in contrast, had a more developed sense for theatre because of the common habit of going to the theatre.[134]

The process of perfection of comparative taste that occurs at the individual level has a parallel on the collective, historical level. The contemporary public is always capable of judging the 'real merit'—that is, its capacity to affect spectators—of a particular work, because it experiences the work within the same context in which

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[129] *Réflexions*, 2.352. That was an increased 'justesse & delicatesse *du sentiment*', he insisted elsewhere (*Réflexions*, 2.328-329, emphasis mine), *not* reason.

[130] *Réflexions*, 2.396.

[131] *Réflexions*, 1.425-526. As Harris, *Inventing the Spectator*, pp. 155–160, highlights, this process creates a 'divided spectator' composed of the more instinctive spectator that experiences pleasure as she watches and the more serene and reflected 'aggregate spectator' that combines her multiple experiences into a settled judgment.

[132] *Réflexions*, 2.402.

[133] *Réflexions*, 2.335.

[134] *Réflexions*, 2.395 on the Romans, 2.407 on the Parisians.

the artist created it. But posterity retains the final judgment of the 'relative merit' of works of art, that is, whether they please more or less *than* such or such other work.[135] It takes two or three years for the public to decide whether a poem is good or bad, but it may take a full century to know its full merit and learn to place it.[136] That collective and historical second assessment of a work of art overcomes the excitement caused by art related to current affairs or defended by cabals of critics and artists.[137]

Crucially though, Dubos insisted that posterity never *overturns* the experience of the contemporary public.[138] There are two elements here that point straight to the *querelle homérique*, which was still going on when Dubos published the *Réflexions Critique* in 1719. First, Dubos insisted on the universally acknowledged merit of Homer, in particular, and other ancient poets such as Virgil. In a somewhat circular manner, Dubos argued that where disagreement about the quality of a work persisted, it was a sure signal that people were judging a work based on 'principle', instead of 'speaking simply and directly about their *apprehension*' of the work and what they felt.[139] However, time inevitably causes sentiment to win over reason—as critics feud with each other based on principle, the public gains space to express their sentiment-based judgments.[140] Unlike the case of philosophy, where people can be disabused of one dogmatic system only to fall into another, comparative experience of works of art eventually dispels any fanaticism—our sentiments simply revolt against repression.[141] That explains why works like Virgil's *Aeneid* received almost unanimous approval from people of all kinds in all ages and countries.[142] This universal veneration is to a poem what a demonstration is in geometry.[143] In that context, Dubos also dismissed the idea that praise for the great epics of antiquity were merely the product of centuries

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[135] *Réflexions*, 2.424.
[136] *Réflexions*, 2.423.
[137] *Réflexions*, 2.422-428.
[138] *Réflexions*, 2.375-376. Dubos makes an exception to works that are praised 'en qualité de gazette', that is, works that please due to its connections to current affairs, not as works of art in themselves.
[139] *Réflexions*, 2.353.
[140] *Réflexions*, 2.378.
[141] *Réflexions*, 2.495-498.
[142] *Réflexions*, 2.502.
[143] *Réflexions*, 2.506.

of indoctrination by teachers and tutors: it is silly to believe in such a '*bizarre complot*' of sçavants across two millennia of history.[144] Those works were (and are) taught because they pleased. And for that matter they were probably the object of critics in their own time, it is just that the critiques were lost to time—perhaps because they were not as important as the poems themselves.[145] Indeed, if we suppose that 'men of all times and from all places are equal in their hearts,' those works will continue to be approved in the future.[146]

The second element of Dubos' argument against the Moderns attempting to overthrow Homer (or perhaps revamp him, as in the case of de la Motte) is their lack of historical awareness. As Norman reports, Modern partisans often attacked the Ancients for remaining in a state of prejudiced childhood, attached to the art created in the infancy of human society, notably Homer.[147] Or as Dubos put it, Moderns expected that a future generation—perhaps the first generation to be educated under the full sway of the philosophical spirit—would eventually outgrow Homer and his faulty poetry like children outgrow the fabulous stories of childhood once they begin to reason.[148] That would never happen, in Dubos' view. For one, as we have seen, he had no reason to expect so great a change in taste. Moreover, being part of the 'public' meant possessing a high degree of historical awareness—the very characteristic that made the public aware of the greatness of those works. 'We must transform ourselves into those to whom the poem was written if we want to judge its images, figures and sentiments correctly [*sainement*]', Dubos wrote.[149] That meant, first and foremost, being able to read the poem in the original language. A translated work, even a careful trans-

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[144] *Réflexions*, 2.504.
[145] *Réflexions*, 2.506.
[146] 'Sont semblables par le cœur,' *Réflexions*, 2.493. Here, Dubos meant similarity in terms of bodily constitution. Elsewhere, Dubos said that the public judging the ancient epics unpleasant would require a revolution 'in the organs of that machine' [*les organes de cette machine*] about as great as what would be necessary to make sugar taste bitter, *Réflexions*, 2.505-506.
[147] Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 63–67 and 171–174.
[148] *Réflexions*, 2.453.
[149] *Réflexions*, 2.545.

lation by an accomplished *érudite* (such as Anne Dacier), is not the same as the origi-
nal.[150] Formally, both Greek and Latin allowed a conciseness and force in expression
that was difficult to achieve in French,[151] so a translation from those languages to
French always implied some loss of the 'poësie du stile', which Dubos deemed crucial
to the reader's pleasure. The linguistic obstacle goes beyond understanding the corre-
spondence of words in each language. The reader must be able to understand life in
that language: 'we cannot learn a language without learning at the same time the
moeurs and customs of the people who speak it'; only this will give us a sense of the
'poësie du stile' of a poem written in that language.[152] Those who cannot read a poem
in its original language are simply incapable of judging the merit of the poem; they are
similar to an ageusiac (a person with no sense of taste) judging a ragout.[153] Those who
cannot enjoy a poem in its original language (in the double sense of knowing the lan-
guage and life in that language) do better by asking those who can what they *felt* than
by asking a critic what they *ought* to feel.[154]

The Modern 'geometric' critics made two major mistakes in relation to that
necessary degree of historical awareness—that is, beyond the foundational mistake of
believing taste was decided by reason, not sentiment. Focusing on the *Iliad*, Dubos
first argued they ignored the context of the work. Although he admitted that to a mod-
ern careless reader the *Iliad* could be just another pleasant reading, that did not give a
modern poet like Houdar de la Motte the right to 'improve' it according to his system
of poetry.[155] Licences of the kind taken by de la Motte established a fundamentally
mistaken relationship to a work of art from the past. First, they made the mistake of

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[150] *Réflexions*, 2.517.
[151] Dubos devoted a lengthy section to the differences between Greek, Latin and French, see *Réflexions*, 1.291-333.
[152] *Réflexions*, 2.528. Thomas E. Kaiser, 'Rhetoric in the Service of the King: The Abbe Dubos and the Concept of Public Judgment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 23 (1989), pp. 193–194, argues that Dubos took his own theory very seriously in his work as a propagandist of the French absolute monarchy. He acknowledged openly in letters that he wrote different kinds of works to suit the different national char-acters of Europe: a political economy pamphlet for the English, a critical history for the French, a jurid-ical tract in Latin for the Germans and an outraged pamphlet for the Italians.
[153] *Réflexions*, 2.512-513.
[154] *Réflexions*, 2.514-515.
[155] *Réflexions*, 2.536-538.

assuming that Homer's depiction of his heroes' rustic ways of life and impolitic actions was itself an error of composition. Greece, like every other society, was a 'societé naisant' before reaching a degree of 'polite' stage. Homer composed the *Iliad* in, for and about that early period. Indeed, following Fontenelle, he argued that at that stage of society, 'the first historians were poets.'[156] In striking off the unseemly passages and openly disregarding the erudition of Anne Dacier's earlier erudite translation, de la Motte disregarded the fact that Homer was depicting a historical event from a not so distant past and that imposed many limitations on the kind of poetical flourishes he could add. Homer changing significant actions in the *Iliad* would be similar to Chapelain changing the actions of Joan of Arc in *La Pucelle* at his will: his modern French audience would not find it convincing.[157] Whatever de la Motte was doing, he was not making the readers of his adaptation part of the public capable of understanding the comparative merit of the *Iliad*.

When the Moderns did take historical context into account, they failed to comprehend it. At the centre of the *querelle homérique* was a question about the appropriate reaction to the 'shock' provoked by the otherness of ancient morals, politics, and religion, particularly as depicted by Homer.[158] Modern critics made the mistake of universalizing their own customs and manners, the most common source of mistaken judgments about art.[159] Modern critics' shock at the passivity of Homeric heroes, who did not react to the lowest insults hurled at them, only exposed the corruption of modern morals: the Greeks waited for the public authority to avenge crimes by means of justice or war; they did not pretend the smartest duellist was somehow the better man—that was a custom only among those peoples whom 'misery once raised from beneath the snows of the North.'[160] Perhaps more surprisingly, Dubos singled out the Moderns' shock at Homer's depiction of the epic heroes' affectionate relationship with their

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[156] *Réflexions*, 2.539.
[157] *Réflexions*, 2.541.
[158] Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, chaps 6–8. On the Ancient's characterization of the Modern's shock as a narcissistic self-infatuation, see Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 131–139.
[159] *Réflexions*, 2.544-545.
[160] *Réflexions*, 2.542-544, quote from 2.544.

horses.[161] Although seemingly unimportant, that shock revealed the parochialism of the supposedly universal Cartesian philosophy: it made sense only for those who considered horses as automata, mere machines, as Cartesian philosophy proposed. If the Moderns had any awareness of historical experience, they would recognize that the Greeks were followed by many other peoples such as Arabs and Turks. More than merely a matter of taste, the Moderns' speculative principles prevented them from realising that the more affectionate, experience-based treatment actually produced better results in horse-breeding according to various accounts of European travellers.[162] In the end, the hubris of many Modern critics was exposed by their lack of understanding of ancient manners and customs (when they knew Greek at all).[163]

Hence, historical awareness is a fundamental part of Dubos' account of the development of the public. Further, as the seemingly unimportant matter of horses showed, the perfection of the public and the progress of knowledge went hand in hand: both were part of the progress of our capacity to incorporate the experience of past ages and use reason to profit the most from them. Within the realm of the arts, critics and *érudits* had a fundamental role in the development of the public. Critics were responsible for making sense of public taste, finding the causes in the work of art that produced that judgment, not instructing the public about how to judge. Erudition was fundamental in making it possible for the public to access the world in which art of the past was created, thus making proper judgment of comparative merit possible. The academicians at the *Académie des Inscriptions* would constantly remind the public of their role in that regard—not just in the arts, but also in making scientific knowledge of the past available to contemporary scientists. However, Dubos' account did not entail an inevitable progress. 'Experience' from the past had to be organized and understood. In the end, the worst impediment to progress in comparative taste as in science was belief in the power of speculative philosophical principles, even more so if that belief was founded on the idea that the current age was the first to leave the 'infancy

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[161] Dubos' comment on the treatment of horses can be found in *Réflexions*, 2.548-552.
[162] *Réflexions*, 2.552.
[163] *Réflexions*, 2.526.

of the world' and to reason properly.[164] Still, Dubos' position was not an unmediated return to the ancients. It fully incorporated the idea that classical antiquity was a distant and different past, that moderns had to relate to it as moderns.

3. LOCKE, HISTORY AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL SPIRIT AT THE *ACADÉMIE DES INSCRIPTIONS ET BELLES-LETTRES*

The *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* was founded in 1663 by French finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert as the *Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Médailles* to supervise the creation of medals in praise of Louis XIV. After its reform in 1701, the *petite académie* quickly became the centre of erudition and scholarship in France and perhaps Europe.[165] From 1717, the *Académie* regularly published volumes with a selection of dissertations read in its sessions either in full (the *Memoires de Litterature*) or as summaries (the *Histoire de l'Académie*).[166] The dissertations read between the 1710s and the 1730s reveal an attempt to reposition the work of the *Académie* in the institutional arrangement of the French academies and of the broader Republic of Letters centered around them. From its foundation to its reform in 1701, the *Académie*'s had a fairly limited role of giving historical consultancy to the French crown on medals and inscriptions. After its reform, The *Académie* broadened the scope of its activities to include all of ancient history (including the history of all aspects of life of the ancient world, not limited to the Greco-Roman societies), French medieval history, and the study of material evidence.[167]

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[164] *Réflexions*, 2.516-517.

[165] For an institutional history of the *Académie*, see Blandine Barret-Kriegel, *Les académies de l'histoire* (Paris, 1988). Henri Duranton, 'Le Métier d'Historien au XVIIIe Siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 23 (1976), pp. 481–500, discusses its social composition.

[166] For a detailed account of the publication and reprint of the dissertation of the *Académie*, see Barret-Kriegel, *Les académies de l'histoire*, p. 205, n. 80.

[167] On the "information system" developed by the French minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert, of which the *Académie* was part in its early years, see Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor, 2009). The preface to the first volume of the memoirs

After the reform, the academicians constantly debated the principles and methods that would guide the activity of their company. They sought to redefine themselves according to what they understood as the historian's version of the philosophical spirit. As we will see, they shared a sense of their own modernity, which was most cogently expressed by Fontenelle, as we learned above. Pursuing erudite historical scholarship according to the philosophical spirit meant, above all, doing it differently from their humanist predecessors—Scaliger, Vossius, Pétau, Grotius, etc.—even if the academicians openly acknowledged their debt to them. As the Abbé Gédoyn put it in 1736, it meant adding to the 'universal man, prodigy of erudition' of the humanist era, the habit of the contemporary astronomer or chemist of 'believing nothing but their eyes, their own experience' because they "had learned to doubt, and to be certain about the truth by means of a kind of incredulity.'[168] A dozen years before, Fréret—speaking from across all the many political, religious and philosophical lines that divided the *Académie* as much as wider French intellectual life—had also said that it was principally in matters of method that eighteenth-century historians differed from their humanist predecessors.[169]

Fréret's claim that eighteenth-century scholarship was different appeared in his contribution to a debate raised by Louis-Jean Levesque de Pouilly in 1722, when he launched an attack on the certainty of the history of the early Roman Republic. De Pouilly's sceptical invective against the early history of Rome provoked reactions by the Abbé Claude Sallier, Professor of Hebrew at the *Collège Royal* and later keeper of the royal library, and Fréret, in an exchange that lasted until 1725.[170] At the centre of the debate was the question of what sources were available to later Roman thinkers like Livy or Cicero and what use they made of them. The potential weakness of the

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(HAI 1, préface) presents the new regulations under which the *Académie* operated after its reform and the themes and disciplines it would cover.

[168] Nicolas Gédoyn, 'Si les Anciens ont esté plus sçavants que les Modernes, & comment on peut apprécier le mérite des uns & des autres', HAI 12.105 (1736).

[169] Nicolas Fréret, 'Reflexions sur l'étude des anciennes histoires, & sur le dégré de certitude de leurs preuves', MAI 6.147-8 (1724).

[170] The debate was published in MAI 6.14-189 (1722-1725). Unfortunately, much of the attention given to the *Académie* in Anglophone intellectual history is limited to this debate.

sources of classical authors exposed more than historical knowledge to scepticism: as Pouilly mentioned in a note, 'philosophers *like Machiavelli, in his Discourse on the first decade of Livy,* who ground their physical, moral, or political observations on such facts, do so on a weak foundation [*foibles fondemens*].'[171]

The debate involved plenty of traditional techniques of historical criticism, such as cross-referencing of classical sources and debates about the authorship of manuscripts. De Pouilly argued that sources such as the annals of the *pontifices*, upon which later Roman historians relied, were ridden with fables and that they did not have access to much information from before the sack of Rome by Gallic tribes in *c.* 390BC anyway.[172] Sallier answered that losses were partial and that public documents like those mentioned by de Pouilly could not contain blatantly false accounts.[173] However, the debate went beyond the specific questions about the early history of the Roman Republic and delved into the foundations of historical knowledge. It was clear to both sides that for modern historians to understand and write histories of early Rome—or any history, for that matter—they had to develop arguments about how to judge sparse evidence and how to connect pieces of evidence into a coherent historical account. Although standing in opposite sides of the *Académie* like Fréret and Gédoyn, de Pouilly and Sallier also reached a similar conclusion: that evidence had to be judged according to 'experience'.

Bayle tried to make historical knowledge stand on a Cartesian foundation, as we have learned. The academicians, very much like Dubos (himself a member of the *Académie*), had their eyes set on Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*.[174]

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[171] Louis-Jean Levesque de Pouilly, 'Dissertation sur l'incertitude de l'Histoire des quatre premiers Siècles de Rome', MAI 6.14 note A (1722).

[172] Louis-Jean Levesque de Pouilly, 'Dissertation sur l'incertitude…', MAI 6.18-20 (1722), and 'Nouveaux essais de critique sur la fidélité de l'histoire', MAI 6.108-10 (1724).

[173] Claude Sallier, 'Discours sur les premiers monumens historiques des romains', MAI 6.30-2 (1723) and 6.52 (1724); 'Troisième Discours sur la certitude de l'Histoire des quatre premiers Siècles de Rome', MAI 6.121-8 (1725). Hendrik Johannes Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome in Historiography from Petrarch to Perizonius* (Assen, 1962), 67-85, discussed seventeenth-century sceptical arguments against the history of the early Roman Republic.

[174] Besides Dubos, Bonno, 'The Diffusion and Influence of Locke's "Essay concerning Human Understanding" in France before Voltaire's "Lettres Philosophiques"', p. 422, also listed *érudits* like Fréret,

In Book IV of the *Essay*, Locke redeveloped Antoine Arnauld's analysis of the degrees of assent we give to testimony of others. As in the Port Royal *Logique*, Locke identified internal and external aspects of testimony: the probability of a reported event and therefore the degree of assent we ought to give to it is determined by the combination of 'conformity of any thing with our own Knowledge, Observation, and Experience' on the internal side and the quality and number of witnesses on the external side.[175] Unlike Arnauld, Locke emphasized the *internal* side of testimony, at least insofar as testimony of common events was concerned. The emphasis is clearest in Locke's example of the Prince of Siam, which would be repeated by both de Pouilly and Hume: upon hearing from a Dutch ambassador that during the winter in his country water became so hard that a man or even an elephant could walk on it, the prince of Siam quickly dismissed the ambassador as a liar. In his tropical experience of causality, there was nothing to suggest such a thing could happen to water.[176] That story or a statement such as 'that fire warmed a man' fit within the highest degree of probability, that of regular causal relations related to the 'Constitutions and Properties of Bodies' at the highest degree of probability, almost as certain as demonstrative knowledge.[177] The second highest degree of probability contained testimony of actions consistent with our experience of the behaviour of man and about which there is agreement among witnesses: that such or such person preferred her private advantage to that of the public, for instance.[178] In the third degree of probability came facts to which experience was indifferent such as 'that about 1700 years ago, there lived in it [Rome] a Man, called Julius Cæsar.'[179] In those cases, one's experience says nothing about the event

Levesque de Bourigny (de Pouilly's brother) and Henri de Boulainvilliers as the pioneer adepts of Locke's 'empirical conception of knowledge' in France. De Pouilly wrote the *Théorie des Sentiments Agréables* (1736), which was aligned with Dubos' empirical/sentimental approach.

[175] John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), p. 656.
[176] Locke, *Essay*, pp. 656–657. The importance of the story of the prince of Siam and its transmission is discussed by Carlo Borghero, 'Le Roi du Siam et l'Historien', *Dix-huitième siècle*, no 39 (2007), pp. 23–38, and Wootton, 'Hume's "Of Miracles": probability and irreligion', pp. 195–198.
[177] Locke, *Essay*, pp. 661–662.
[178] Locke, *Essay*, p. 662.
[179] *Ibid*.

(unless that person happened to meet Caesar) and the matter has to be decided solely in terms of the quality of testimony.

As Carlo Borghero notices, Locke opened the possibility of placing natural and historical knowledge closer together: compatibility with common experience was the litmus test for testimony of both kinds.[180] However, Locke himself considered most historical facts to belong to the third category. And although he reassured the reader he was not attacking the certainty of historical knowledge, he admitted—like Bayle if without the same pessimistic tone—that the passing of time inevitably diminished the degree of probability assigned to any historical fact indifferent to experience. 'No *Probability* can arise higher than its first Original' and time only adds more opportunities for 'Passion, Interest, Inadvertency, Mistake' to corrupt the transmission of the original. That also meant the certainty of historical knowledge was bound to decline with time.[181] In that sense the *Académie*'s interest in Locke's approach to testimony went against Locke's own view on the matter: they would focus, so to speak, on turning 'a man name Caesar existed' into 'fire warmed a man,' thus making historical knowledge amenable to verification in terms of conformity to nature and experience.[182] Succeeding in the 'extensive application of the criteria of verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*)' would take historical criticism where seventeenth-century criticism deemed impossible to reach.[183] Indeed, Fréret explicitly connected his and his colleagues' approach to historical evidence to a rejection of Bayle's 'extreme historical pyrrhonism.'[184]

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[180] Borghero, 'Les philosophes face à l'histoire : quelques discussions sur la connaissance historique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles', pp. 80–81.

[181] Locke, *Essay*, pp. 664–665. Borghero, 'Les philosophes face à l'histoire : quelques discussions sur la connaissance historique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles', pp. 80–81, notices the proximity between Locke and Bayle in that regard.

[182] As argued by Grell, *L'Histoire entre Érudition et Philosophie*, p. 75. Similarly, Carlo Borghero, 'Méthode Historique et Philosophie chez Fréret', *Corpus: Revue de Philosophie*, 29 (1995), p. 19, emphasises Fréret's contribution to the introduction of Lockean empiricism at the *Academie* by means of the use of the 'internal' aspect of testimony.

[183] Borghero, 'Le Roi du Siam et l'Historien', p. 35.

[184] Fréret, 'Reflexions sur l'étude des ancienne histoires…', MAI 6.154 (1724). It is important to notice that Fréret did agree with Bayle elsewhere. He repeated Bayle's argument in the *Projet et Fragmens* that the objects of geometry only existed in the mind (although in Fréret's view they thus had higher

Translating Locke's approach to testimony into a historical method revolved around three central elements. First, the academicians highlighted relations of cause and effect in historical accounts that could be judged according to our experience, rather than the aspects of an account that were indifferent to it. The emphasis on experience was present in the *Académie* as a whole: for instance, in an curious exchange in 1730 between Louis Jouard de La Nauze and Nicolas Mahudel about an admittedly insignificant matter, the authors disputed whether the history of Hero and Leander was a myth based on whether it was possible to swim across the Hellespont every night as the story claimed Leander did.[185] Both sides agreed that verisimilitude to common experience (or lack thereof) was the criterion that decided the matter and used this trifling discussion to accuse each other of historical Pyrrhonism or naïve belief in myths. Within the 1722-1726 debate on historical pyrrhonism, de Pouilly argued that we can assess the verisimilitude of a reported event judging by its causes: if we have experience of similar causes producing events similar to what was reported, we should believe it. In other words, Locke's King of Siam was wrong in his distrust of the Dutch ambassador: his tropical experience range would surely have informed him of liquids becoming solid in colder temperatures.[186] Sallier also argued that in the 'theatre of world history […] the principle of movement of all men is the same; and the springs are so similar, that one would be surprised if their movements were always different'— a claim Fontenelle had made in *Sur l'Histoire* and Hume would make in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, as will be shown below.[187] He also argued that the burden of proof lies on the sceptic: 'we know the causes that are capable of producing the particular effects that make this history [of Early Rome]', it is the sceptic who has

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degree of certainty), see MAI 6.188. However, he attributed to Leibniz the argument that each science has its own kind of certainty, which was also stated by Bayle in the *Projet et Fragmens*, as we have seen. Borghero, 'Méthode Historique et Philosophie chez Fréret', p. 35, notices Fréret's proximity to Bayle in metaphysical matters, for instance.

[185] Nicolas Mahudel, 'Reflexions critiques sur l'histoire de Héro et de Léandre', HAI 7.74-78 (1730) and Louis Jouard de la Nauze, 'Remarques sur l'histoire d'Hero et de Léandre', MAI 7.240-249 (1730).
[186] De Pouilly, 'Nouveaux essais…', MAI 6.73 (1724).
[187] Claude Sallier, 'Second Discours sur la certitude de l'Histoire des quatre premiers Siècle de Rome, ou Réflexions générales sur un Traité qui se trouve parmi les Oeuvres Morales de Plutarque, sous ce titre PARALLELES DES FAITS GRECS ET ROMAINS', MAI 6.54-55 (1724).

to prove those causes are improbable and 'contrary to our own observations,' he concluded, immediately referring to Fréret's 1717 dissertation.[188]

Second, the academicians presented historical certainty as the product of the connections between facts. Here, Fréret's contribution to the debate seems to capture well the prevailing direction of the *Académie*: what truly distinguished the method of eighteenth-century erudite historians from their humanist predecessors was the latter's inability to 'put [*mettre*] in between the events of ancient history that chain and connection [*cette suite & cette liaison*] that is the mark of true history.'[189] They failed to see that 'it is not enough to determine the general degree of authority of writers whose fragments we employ; it is often necessary to interpret them and complement them with conjectures and hypotheses that draw their strength from their probability and *their connection to the rest of history*.'[190] Sallier seconded Fréret in his 1725 contribution to the debate on early Rome: 'History is the collection of many facts *linked together by the thread of narrative*' and it is the thread that confers certainty to the individual facts, not the opposite. Indeed, adapting Fontenelle's comments on physics to his historical purposes, Sallier insisted that 'many separate truths, if they are in a sufficiently large number, vividly reveal their relations and mutual dependences to our mind' as if they naturally sought to reunite themselves after some kind of violence had separated them.[191] Similarly, Étienne de Foncemagne urged the medievalist branch of

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[188] Sallier, 'Troisieme discours…', MAI 6.130 (1725). He added four pages later that the sceptic must prove 'that history [of Rome] contains facts that our knowledge and experience disprove', see MAI 6.134. Sallier would later make some concessions to pyrrhonism, again following Fréret in claiming its utility only lasted insofar as it was kept within just boundaries, see his 'Remarques critiques sur le Traité de Plutarque, ΠΕΡΙ ΤΥΧΗΣ', MAI 10.342 (1732). In the 1717 memoir mentioned by Sallier, Fréret argued that 'under the pretext of yielding to evidence alone, they [modern philosophers] believed they could deny the existence of anything they had difficulty conceiving,' see 'Reflexions sur les Prodiges rapportez par les Anciens,' MAI 4.435 (1717). Those modern philosophers could not see that historical evidence has its own genre of certainty, he argued.

[189] Fréret, 'Reflexions sur l'étude des ancienne histoires…', MAI 6.147 (1724).

[190] Fréret, 'Reflexions sur l'étude des ancienne histoires…', MAI 6.147-148, emphasis mine. In a phostumous summary of Fréret's method, Louis de Bouganville wrote that 'One must know how to connect separate passages and form a whole in which all parties support and agree with each other. One must unite them under a point of view that presents itself naturally to the spirit,' see Louis de Bouganville, 'Vues générales sur l'origine & le mélange des anciennes Nations & sur la manière d'en étudier l'histoire', HAI 18.51.

[191] Claude Sallier, 'Troisieme Discours…', MAI 6.133-4 (1725), emphasis mine, and 6.129 (1725).

the *Académie* to also focus on the totality of evidence: each piece of evidence, like the stones of a building, though possessing individual strengths, 'concur in preparing the general consequence that results from their chain.'[192] Even de Pouilly, the sceptic, was willing to concede that reliable historical propositions could be derived from fabulous sources if they were general, not particular: for instance, the widespread accounts of Amazons or female warriors proved that women likely fought alongside men in ancient Asia Minor, even if it remained impossible to give precise details.[193] In the perspective of Bayle, 'Caesar did X because of Y' must be a less certain statement than 'Caesar did X' because we now need to check two pieces of information (especially if they come from different sources). For the academicians, if we have experience that people in circumstances like Caesar's tend to do X because of Y, then connecting Caesar's action to the circumstance Y may be a more probable statement even if we cannot be fully certain of the perfect transmission of reports about both X and Y.

Thus, on the one side, the academicians' work was focused on putting together particular historical facts, so that their union generated accounts of the causal links between actions and states of affairs, which could be judged in terms of our experience of causal connections. That meant, on the other side, sometimes it was necessary to disaggregate a source, using parts of the information provided by it while rejecting others. This procedure is clear in Fréret's treatment of Xenophon: in 1715, he had argued that Xenophon's geography is generally trustworthy if the historian takes the pain to sort out the details; in 1726, however, he discredited the same author's *Cyropaedia* as a historical source: it was a '*roman de vertu*' presenting Socrates's moral philosophy in an historical setting.[194] Carving up a celebrated author or work was a way of avoiding the kind of criticism wielded by Bayle, which, as we have seen, ex-

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[192] Étienne de Foncemagne, 'Mémoire pour établir que le Royaume de France a esté successif-héréditaire dans la premiére Race', MAI 6.682 (1724).
[193] De Pouilly, 'Nouveaux Essais…', MAI 6.87 and 6.95 (1724).
[194] Nicolas Fréret, 'Observations sur la *Cyropédie* de Xénophon, principalement par rapport à la Géographie', MAI 4.588-612 (1715), and 'Observations sur la *Cyropédie* de Xénophon. Seconde Partie' MAI 7.448-9 and 7.456-7 (1726).

trapolated some moral fault, interest or mistake into a suspicion hanging over all information derived from that source.[195] Indeed, in the summary of Fréret's methods published after his death, Louis de Bougainville argued that '*ancienneté*' should not get into the way of treating ancient texts with the same rigor as modern works—if it were not allowed, than 'investigations about literature and erudition would not be worth the time of a reasonable man.'[196]

That process of breaking down authors and sources, cleaning out what was considered marvellous or fabulous, and reconstructing the connections between facts generated what the academicians called the '*fond de l'histoire*', a background of solid historical knowledge that could not be put into question by the errors or problems of this or that author.[197] Fréret considered that kind of critique focused on reconstructing the *fond de l'histoire* as the 'application of that philosophical spirit to the discussion of facts.'[198] It established a fundamental relationship between philosophy and historical critique: critique provides the facts, which adds the knowledge of the ancients to our own, thus broadening the foundation upon which philosophers can work to 'enlarge our spirit.' As with Dubos, Fréret identified the 'esprit de systême' as the worst enemy of the philosophical spirit and cautioned readers against mixing them.[199] True, there was nothing more beautiful than systems of necessary and self-evident truths, but 'experience has sufficiently convinced us of the falsehood of the ingenious systems which criticism, politics, and philosophy have imagined in the past century.'[200] In that regard, the fashionable Cartesian systems of the last century had only replaced the

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[195] Burke, 'Historical Facts and Historical Fictions', p. 176, notices that *not* treating the source as an indivisible whole was associated to the Lockean perspective.

[196] Louis de Bouganville, 'Vues Générales…', HAI 18.51. Patey, 'Ancients and Moderns', p. 61. defined the *Académie des Inscriptions* as that 'haven of *ancienneté*'. Although it is correct to say that the academicians were mostly Ancients in the *querelle* and valued classical art, knowledge and societies, that should not be confused with *ancienneté* as a relationship to the past as authoritative and unquestionable, which is clearly rejected by Bougainville here.

[197] Claude Sallier, 'Discours…', MAI 6.47 (1723), and Fréret, 'Reflexions sur l'étude des ancienne histoires…', MAI 6.169 (1724).

[198] *Id.*, pp. 151-152.

[199] *Id.*, pp. 149-150.

[200] *Id.*, p. 150.

Aristotelian systems that had come before: adherents of both were more interested in 'studying the art of reasoning, but never actually reasoning.'[201]

If until recently the error was to adhere too easily to systems, Fréret believed his contemporaries were perhaps erring on the side of an excessive rejection of attempts to put particular facts and truths together.[202] As we have seen, the academicians were indeed constantly emphasizing the need to put things together and form generalizations. Indeed, the main debates at the *Académie* were focused on how to interpret the *fond de l'histoire*, that is, how to organize, generalize, and make sense of that evidence they were putting together. This was the third element of the new approach at the *Académie* and it was here that battles were fought—not so much about the basic epistemological notions, but about what kind of interpretations were afforded by their epistemological agreement.

A prime example of this dispute is the debate over the history of pagan religions. Although the debate was by no means confined to the *Académie*, the latter was the centre of one of the most influential positions in the early eighteenth century, namely, Abbé Antoine Banier's Euhemerism. As Banier explained, the method underlying his studies of ancient mythology sought to find the historical content buried under the layers of fable and myth.[203] Fabulous gods and heroes thus revealed kings or princes and mythical creatures revealed established customs and practices. This method had become so important to the *Académie* that Banier submitted his plans for the *Mythologie et les Fables Expliquées par l'Histoire*, whose first volume appeared in 1738, to the official approval by the *Académie* before its publication. The *Académie*

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[201] *Ibid.*

[202] *Id.*, p. 152. Borghero, 'Le Roi du Siam et l'Historien', p. 38, remarks that building from that Lockean foundation was the beginning of history '*en philosophe*'. In the text quoted, Borghero does jump straight from Locke to Voltaire and Hume. However, as he noticed somewhere else, Fréret must also be considered an exponent of 'philosophical history', see Borghero, 'Méthode Historique et Philosophie chez Fréret', p. 34.

[203] Antoine Banier, 'Histoire de Bellerophon', MAI 7.69 (1729). 'Euhemerism' is a form of interpretation of myths that considers mythological characters to be apotheosized rulers and heroes (contrasting with allegorical interpretations). See Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, pp. 85–125, for a discussion of eighteenth-century Euhemerism. On the wider debate, see Robertson and Mortimer, 'Nature, revelation, History: Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy c. 1600-1750', and Grell, *Le Dix-Huitième Siècle*, pp. 882–900.

approved his method and insisted that it was the only one capable of revealing the *fond de l'histoire* of myths and fables.[204] It was more '*vraysemblable*' than any of the competing methodologies—those that considered pagan myths to be corrupted sacred history, sponsored by 'the *sçavants* of the previous and current century,' or creations of Egyptian or Phoenician superstition.[205] Although Banier and others had earlier adopted elements of a 'diffusionist' theory (the theory that paganism was a corruption of the revealed religion of the Old Testament), his Euhemerism was in 1738 a fully distinct approach.[206]

In a dynamic similar to that of the seventeenth century, the not-at-all orthodox Fréret found in the orthodoxy's adherence to Euhemerism an opportunity to push for further historicization and naturalisation of religion, including Christianity. He systematically called for a historical treatment of Scripture: on the one side, Fréret argued that the Old Testament, as a 'monument of ancient history' had a strength that many other monuments lacked, namely, the fact that some of its 'historical books' were written close to the events they report and, more importantly, the care that had been taken by religious institutions to preserve its content.[207] As such, they could and should be used as evidence of ancient history. On the other side, Fréret argued that sacred history, insofar as it is history, ought to be subject to the full scrutiny of historical critique.[208] Again in his reaction to Banier's defence of Xenophon as a historical source, he rejected the attempts of Renaissance scholars to square profane history with the prophecies in the Book of Daniel: 'One must explain the writings of the prophets by history,

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[204] [Claude Gros de Boze], 'Réflexions sur la mythologie', HAI 12.10.
[205] *Id.,* pp. 15-18.
[206] For Banier, see 'Dissertation sur l'origine du culte que les Egyptiens rendoient aux animaux', MAI 3.84-97 (1716). The Abbé Anselme argued that the 'unknown God' of the Athenians was actually the Old Testament God ('Dissertation sur le dieu inconnu des Atheniens', MAI 4.560-573 (1715)) and regarded pagan miracles as priestcraft ('Dissertation sur ce que le Paganisme a publié de merveilleux', MAI 4.399-410 (1717)); Henri Morin also argued that the Pagan custom of praying for the dead came from the Hebrews rather than the other way round ('De l'usage de la prière pour les morts parmi les payens', HAI 3.84-89 (1711)). Pierre Bonamy ('Du rapport de la magie avec la théologie payenne', HAI 7.23-32 (1728)) adopted the Phoenician/Egyptian ur-religion theory.
[207] Nicolas Fréret, 'Essay sur l'Histoire et la Chronologie des Assyriens de Ninive', MAI 5.344 and 5.334 (1722-1724), respectively. This same argument had been made by the Abbé Anselme in 'Des monumens…', MAI 4.387 (1715).
[208] Nicolas Fréret, 'Observations sur la *Cyropédie* de Xénophon, seconde partie', MAI 7.459 (1726).

not the historians by the interpretations of the prophets we make; that seems to me one of the first rules of sacred [historical] critique.'[209] Claiming that the prophecies turned out true because they agreed with what is reported by Xenophon undermines them, given that even pagan authors themselves considered Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* a novel.[210] He concluded the dissertation by connecting those attempts to the 'esprit de système' that reigned before the philosophical spirit appeared: earlier *érudits* were too enthralled by their beautiful systems of chronology and ended up forcing their pre-ferred systems onto ancient sources rather than actually parsing through the evi-dence—theological systems were no less dangerous to historical criticism than philo-sophical systems.[211]

Fréret also tried to push for a new approach in place of Banier's Euhemerist understanding of paganism. To some extent, Fréret did accept Banier's method, em-ploying it and acknowledging that his colleague had 'a kind of exclusive right' in mythological studies due to his efforts.[212] However, Fréret imposed some limits to the usefulness of Banier's method: Euhemerism could plausibly lead to the conclusion that some fabulous stories had an original historical kernel, but it could not point precisely what the kernel and the fable were. Instead, Fréret advocated and practiced a compar-ative method.[213] Already in the debate with Pouilly and Sallier, he observed that his

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[209] *Id.*, p. 469. The prophecies of the Book of Daniel were used by Renaissance scholars – notably Protestants – to frame a universal history whereby the Holy Roman Empire would be the last empire before the Kingdom of God. Thus, this is a point where compatibility between sacred and profane his-tory had even more importance. Jean Bodin devoted a whole chapter of his *Methodus ad facilem histo-riarium cognitionem* (1566) to the refutation of this theory. See Grafton, *What was History?*, pp. 167–175. In rehearsing Bodin, Fréret is making a case for de-sacralization of history, that is, trying to disen-tangle it from a philosophy of history grounded on Revelation.

[210] Fréret, 'Observations sur la *Cyropédie* de Xénophon, seconde partie', MAI 7.460 (1726).

[211] *Id.*, p. 478.

[212] Nicolas Fréret, 'Observations sur le temps auquel a vécu Bellérophon', MAI 7.84 (1729).

[213] Nicolas Fréret, 'Recherches sur l'ancienneté & sur l'origine de l'art de l'Equitation dans la Grece', MAI 7.320-321 (1730). Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, p. 108, argues that Fréret's method was still a form of Euhemerism, but one that mapped myths onto a broad "cultural history", instead of considering them an account of the actual *actions* of actual rulers and heroes of the past. Although Fréret did consider some mythological characters as real persons, his attempts to collate from *multiple* sources a historical kernel that contained more generic statements about past societies perhaps deserves a different name, given that Fréret himself tried to impose some distance between him and Banier, especially in his later dissertations.

sixteenth- and seventeenth-century predecessors lacked a comparative approach.[214] In a 1747 dissertation on the religions of ancient Gaul and Germany, Fréret concluded—as Fontenelle had suggested before and as Hume's *Natural History of Religion* would conclude a decade later—from his comparative studies that polytheism was always the first religion of human societies: 'Since we found that same system [polytheism] in other barbarous nations that had no commerce among them, it must be a consequence of the first ideas that present themselves to men; and it is absolutely unnecessary to suppose that it has passed from one country to another.'[215] To which he added 'it is very natural that the same needs and the same primitive ideas produce similar customs and that those produce similar opinions.'[216]

Fréret's conclusion points to a second example of the history according to the philosophical spirit practiced in the *Académie* that contributed to the interpretation of the *fond de l'histoire*: its interest in manners and opinions, another element that would become a staple of Enlightenment historiography.[217] Fréret had long been pushing for more focus on manners and opinions: in a dissertation on the structure of Chinese writing, he argued that the 'knowledge of the opinions of all peoples in the universe, is a domain of this academy as much as that of facts or languages.'[218] But again, it would be wrong to see Fréret as an outlier at the *Académie*. In the very first volume of dissertations, the *Académie* designated the study of science, customs, laws, religion,

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[214] Nicolas Fréret, 'Reflexions sur l'étude des ancienne histoires…', MAI 6.147 (1724).

[215] Nicolas Fréret, 'Observations sur la Religion des Gaulois, & sur celle des Germains', MAI 24.395 (1747).

[216] *Id*., p. 419. On the importance of the question about the priority of polytheism and monotheism to Enlightenment social thought, see Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 217–225.

[217] Phillips, *Society and sentiment*, chaps 6–7.

[218] Nicolas Fréret, 'Réflexions sur les Principes généraux de l'art d'écrire, & en particulier sur les fondements de l'écriture Chinoise', MAI 6.630 (1718). This dissertation deserves some special attention. As Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon*, pp. 161–167, shows, Fréret's comparative study of non-European languages was one of the areas in which his comparative approach proved most fruitful. Also, following foonote 66, Fréret rehearses Bayle's argument that atheists could be moral agents "*par des motifs de société*" (MAI 6.633). That his comparative study of Chinese writing (and the attendant knowledge of Chinese society) led him to this conclusion is certainly not without importance.

games and even physical exercises of the many ancient peoples as one of its four objects of study.[219] Examples abound throughout the thirty years analysed here, ranging from the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Couture's remarkably detailed 'De la Vie Privée des Romains' to Henri Morin's broad historical surveys of poverty and celibacy, covering a period from antiquity to modern Europe.[220] The academicians could and did move from the minute details produced by their erudite enquiries to sweeping conclusions about the development of manners and customs: as the Abbé Augustin Nadal remarked in another minutely detailed account of the luxury of Roman women, dissertations on the 'customs and usages' of nations can end up being a pile of distant and disconnected things, but that was not the problem with his present subject because 'the source and progress of luxury are the same everywhere;' To which he immediately added a general theory of the development of luxury and of its corrupting effects, supplemented with the necessary erudite details. [221]

The emphasis on manners, opinions, and the state of development of society was also clearly displayed in the medievalist branch of the *Académie* and in the wider erudite debates surrounding it. Although Montesquieu's chapters on the French monarchy in the *Spirit of the Laws* get the credit for bringing the historiography of the French monarchy into the philosophical age, the interest in moving beyond a chronicle of royal succession and towards a '*histoire raisonnée*' of France was present in the early eighteenth century and was connected to the calls for a new kind of history in *querelle*.[222] The academicians contributed to the historiography of the period, even if

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[219] HAI 1, préface. The other three were critical and grammatical dissertations, the description and explanation of monuments and the history of French Middle Ages.

[220] Jean-Baptiste Couture, 'De la vie privée des Romains, c'est-à-dire: ce qu'un particulier, menant une vie commune, fasoit dans le cours d'une journée ; les heures ajustées à notre manière de compter', MAI 1.303-352, and Henri Morin, 'Histoire critique de la Pauvreté' MAI 4.296-307 (1717) and 'Histoire critique du Célibat', MAI 4.308-325 (1713).

[221] Augustin Nadal, 'Du luxe des dames Romaines', MAI 4.227-263 (1712, 1714).

[222] Montesquieu discusses the French monarchy in *The Spirit of the Laws*, eds. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge, 1989), part VI. On the use of 'philosophical' methods by historians of the French monarchy before Montesquieu, see Phyllis K. Leffler, 'French Historians and the Challenge to Louis XIV's Absolutism', *French Historical Studies*, 14 (1985), pp. 1–22. On the connection of early eighteenth-century positions about the French monarchy to the *querelle* see Ellis, 'Montesquieu's Modern Politics'.

in a secondary role in that moment.[223] However, the confrontation between the *thèse royale* and the *thèse nobiliaire*, which culminated with the opposition between Henri de Boulainvilliers' *Histoire de l'Ancien gouvernement de la France* (1727) and Dubos' *Histoire Critique de l'Établissement de la Monarchie Française dans les Gaules* (1734), shaped the openness of the *Académie* to a new historical approach.[224] In contrast to his pioneer position in aesthetics, Dubos' erudition was fairly traditional: the introduction to the *Histoire Critique* clearly identified the problem as a matter of correcting mistakes by past historians that had been perpetuated.[225] The more philosophical approach to the history of France was found in the circle around Boulainvilliers, which included Fréret and Montesquieu. Their influence within the *Académie* was responsible for 'opening' the Académie to the Enlightenment.[226] Indeed, Foncemagne acknowledged

> how important it is to have a history of our monarchy in which we present the spirit and principles of government, the relationship with neighbouring

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[223] See, for instance the Abbé Vertot's 'Dissertations dans laquelle on tâche de démêler la véritable origine des François par un paralele de leurs mœurs avec celle des Germains' (MAI 2.611-650) and 'Dissertation dans laquelle on examine si le Royaume de France, depuis l'establissement de la Monarchie, a esté un Estat héréditaire, ou un Estat électif' (MAI 4.672-704); Étienne Foncemagne's 'Examen critique d'une opinion de M. le Comte de Boulainvilliers, sur l'ancien gouvernement de la France' (MAI 10.525-541) and the abovementioned 'Mémoire pour établir que le Royaume de France a esté successif-héréditaire dans la premirére Race' (MAI 6.680-727 (1724)); and Fréret's 'Observations sur la religion des gaulois et sur celle des germains' MAI 24. (1747). Fréret was sent to the Bastille in 1719 after reading a 'Germanist' memoir to the *Académie*, see Barret-Kriegel, *Les académies de l'histoire*, pp. 265–267.

[224] On the political import of the debate, see Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, 2007), pp. 131–153; Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', pp. 68–79; and Michael Sonenscher, 'Introduction', in Sieyès, *Political writings* (Indianapolis, 2003), pp. l–lii.

[225] Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Histoire critique de l'établissement de la monarchie française dans les Gaules* (3 vols, Amsterdam, 1735), vol 1, pp. 19-21. Dubos argued it was necessary to distinguish between what was the most probable and what was proven because history is full of occasions in which the least expected actually happened, see vol. 2, p. 332. However, as Kaiser, 'Rhetoric in the Service of the King', p. 190 esp. note 50, notices, Dubos did not always hold true to his maxim to never present a fact without attributing it to a contemporary source (see *Histoire Critique*, vol. 1, pp. 61-62). In one instance, he acknowledged that a historian's statement can be 'verisimilar both *by the nature of the facts themselves* and because they are in accord with the information [*lumières*] other monuments […] provide about those facts', see *Histoire Critique*, vol. 2 p. 472 (italics are mine).

[226] Barret-Kriegel, *Jean Mabillon*, p. 168. The group tried unsuccessfully to make Montesquieu a member of the *Académie,* see Barret-Kriegel, *Les académies de l'histoire*, p. 123. On the group's influence within the *Académie* see p. 295.

nations, the moeurs, usages, and customs of the nation, its agriculture, commerce, rights [*droits*], privileges, the changes that had occurred in each of those areas, and their causes.[227]

All of which was to be achieved exactly with erudite investigation of sources done at the *Académie.* Later in the eighteenth century, the medieval branch would fully embrace the combination of erudition and a philosophical approach with Jean Baptiste de la Curne de Sainte-Palaye (1697-1781).[228]

Furthermore, the academicians deemed their enquiries into the life of societies of the past, especially their technologies and their science, as fundamental to the success of *current* scientific endeavours. On the one side, science was an important aspect of the life of past societies, Nicolas Mahudel claimed in a dissertation about the 'lin incombustible' (asbestos). On the other side, current science depended on the work of erudite historians to recover the scientific discoveries of the past and thus allow for new discoveries, as the role of erudite humanists in the Renaissance had shown, claimed De la Nauze.[229] This exchange between science and belles-lettres, de la Nauze added, was part of a wider exchange, embodied in the synergy among the French academies, in which the Belles-Lettres contributed with both style and sources—without which 'the history of the human spirit would remain buried in deep obscurity and the veil that hides the sciences would become impenetrable'—and the Sciences contributed with 'that philosophical spirit, without which erudition is chaos and discourse becomes a vain display of frivolous words.'[230] Echoes of Fontenelle's eulogy of Leibniz can be clearly heard.

In conclusion, by the 1730s the academicians had been developing for some twenty years a form of historical practice that was as much concerned with manners and opinions as philosophical historians would be later in the eighteenth century; it

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[227] Quoted in Gossman, *Medievalism and the ideologies of the Enlightenment*, p. 354 note 11.
[228] On Sainte-Palaye's work, see Gossman, *Medievalism and the ideologies of the Enlightenment*. As already mentioned, Gossman was perhaps the main exception in not opposing *érudits* and *philosophes* and acknowledging the 'enlightened' turn of he *Académie des Inscriptions* in the first half of the eighteenth-century.
[229] Nicolas Mahudel, 'Du lin incombustible' MAI 4.634 (1715), and Louis Jouard de la Nauze, 'Des rapports que les Belles-Lettres & les Sciences ont entr'elles', MAI 13.377-8 (1735), respectively.
[230] *Ibid.*

pushed— even among the more orthodox types, if to a lesser degree—towards the naturalization and historicization of religious belief; it used comparative approaches; and, above all, it did so based on an epistemology that, first, recognized a *fond de l'histoire* that made the causes of events a key element of historical explanation and, second, judged interpretations of this *fond* according to experience. Even such approaches as Antoine Banier's Euhemerism, which sought to 'clear' the *fond de l'histoire* more than reconstruct it, still presented themselves as new approaches defining the new moment of erudition. They were clearly aware that their approach was distinct from that of the great scholars of the previous centuries. They acknowledged the limitations of classical sources and modern critics alike but refused to entertain the possibility of historical pyrrhonism. The gloomy picture of the Republic of Letters painted by Bayle and the threat of historical pyrrhonism had found an answer. That answer was grounded on the 'philosophical spirit' of their age, even if they (like Dubos) rejected the association Fontenelle made of that spirit with the 'spirit of system'. That answer was also the beginning of history '*en philosophe*', to some extent at least. As de la Nauze summarized in 1736:

> There where the historian seems to be only listing facts, the reader must make a thousand discoveries: there he must learn the order of times and places, without any chronological or geographical discussion; there he must uncover the principles of affairs, the motives, the intrigues, the most concealed springs; there he must distinguish good and evil, seemingly without any instruction; there he must discover the human heart and spirit, when we talk only of operations of the senses; there he must know, in short, men in depth, beneath the surface of their actions.[231]

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[231] Louis Jouard de la Nauze, 'De l'abus qu'on fait quelquefois d'une prétendue claret de stile, en traitant les matiéres de Littérature ou de Science', MAI 13.398 (1736).

Chapter 3

A PHILOSOPHER'S HISTORY: HUME'S HISTORICAL METHOD

'Of the Balance of Power', published in 1752 as part of the *Political Discourses*, contained a curious footnote that has passed almost completely unnoticed by the scholarly literature.[1] The footnote was inserted in a passage discussing the lack of a unified international opposition against the Roman Republic's attempt at universal empire during the Punic Wars. It discussed the certainty of the early history of Rome. It is worth quoting it in full:

> There have strong suspicions, of late, arisen among critics, and, in my opinion, not without reason, concerning the first ages of the ROMAN history; as if they were almost entirely fabulous, 'till after the sacking of the city by the GAULS; and were even doubtful for some time afterwards, 'till the GREEKS began to give attention to ROMAN affairs, and commit them to writing. This scepticism, however, seems to me scarcely defensible in its full extent, with regard to the domestic history of Rome, which has some air of truth and probability, and cou'd scarce be the invention of an historian, who had so little morals or judgment as to indulge himself in fiction and romance. The revolutions seem so well proportion'd to their causes: The progress of factions is so conformable to political experience: The manners and maxims of the age are so uniform and natural, that scarce any real history affords more just reflection and improvement. Is not MACHIAVEL'S comment on LIVY (a work surely of great judgment and genius) founded entirely on this period, which is represented as fabulous. I wou'd willingly, therefore, in my private sentiments, divide the matter with these critics; and allow, that the battles and victories and triumphs of those ages had been extremely falsify'd by family memoirs, as CICERO says they were: But as in the accounts of domestic factions, there were two opposite relations transmitted to posterity, this both serv'd as a check upon fiction, and enabled latter historians to gather some truth from comparison and reasoning. Half of the slaughter which Livy commits on the ÆQUI and the VOLSCI, would depopulate FRANCE and GERMANY; and that historian, tho' perhaps he may be justly charged as superficial, is at last shock'd himself with the incredibility of his narration. The same love of exaggeration seems to have magnify'd the numbers of the ROMANS in their armies, and *census*.[2]

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[1] The exception is Baumstark, 'David Hume', p. 88.

[2] *Essays*, 633-634. The footnote was present in the first two editions, see Hume, *Political Discourses*, pp. 105–106. It was withdrawn when the *Political Discourses* were incorporated as volume two of the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1753-1754).

This footnote contains the central elements of Hume's historical method, as we will learn in this chapter. The footnote acknowledged scepticism concerning some historical evidence, noticing the theme of the debate that had interested the *Académie des Inscriptions* in the 1720s.[3] It accepted scepticism to some extent (concerning wars and numbers) and conceded that ancient historians had a love for exaggeration. However, the footnote insisted that Roman records have an 'air of truth and probability' concerning domestic affairs, at least. It accepted the defence of ancient historians proposed by Sallier and Fréret, insisting that domestic political disputes implied extreme falsifications were unlikely. As we will learn, 'domestic affairs' were a particularly well-suited object of Hume's historical method. More importantly, Hume argued that it is reasonable to accept the account of ancient historians, their obvious problems notwithstanding, *because* Machiavelli was able to derive sound political theory from the supposedly false accounts. Instead of the weakness of the sources limiting the power of the theory based on them, as de Pouilly had argued in 1722, Hume was arguing that sound theory bestowed certainty on the sources on which it was grounded.[4]

This chapter unpacks how Hume arrived at the historical method encapsulated in that footnote, explaining how he turned to the assessment of the internal side of testimony—the 'air of truth and probability'—and then arrived at the idea that theory confirmed facts, rather than facts confirming theory. Hume never wrote a work on historical method. His *History of Great Britain*, later the *History of England*, did not

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[3] Baumstark connects this footnote (and other comments on historical criticism in the *Political Discourses*) to the work of William Wotton. While the general connection to Wotton is valid (see the reference to Wotton in 'Populousness' in section 3.3 below, esp. footnote 157), the explicit references to Livy and the sack of Rome by the Gauls, makes the precise context here more likely to be the debate at the *Académie des Inscriptions* covered in chapter two. That this footnote refers to the debate at the *Académie* is a conjecture based on the similarity of arguments here and elsewhere, as will be noticed extensively in this chapter.

[4] As mentioned in the introduction, it is possible that Hume was hosted by de Pouilly in Rheims before he headed to La Flèche. On the possible contact with Pouilly, see Fernand Baldensperger, 'La Première Relation intellectuelle de David Hume en France: Une conjecture', *Modern Language Notes*, 57 (1942), pp. 268–271. Mossner, *The life of David Hume*, pp. 97–98, also notices Hume's possible contact with Pouilly but denies he was Hume's host on the basis of letters which Felix Waldmann, 'David Hume in Chicago: A Twentieth-Century Hoax', *Journal of British Studies*, 59 (October 2020), pp. 793–820, discards as twentieth-century forgeries. As Mossner notices (p. 102), Pouilly's *Théorie des Sentiments Agréables* (1736) was among the acquisitions Hume made as a Keeper of the Advocates's Library in 1752.

come with a preface explaining the author's approach to the subject and contrasting it with previous histories, as was usual in his own time.[5] However, by the time Hume started working on the *History of Great Britain* in 1752, he already had his own approach to historical evidence and a conception of what history was about. Hume developed his historical method as he answered social, political, and economic, and religious questions in the *Treatise of Human Nature*, the *Essays*, the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and the *Political Discourses*. History was not an 'auxiliary science' in Hume's early intellectual career.[6] Nor was Hume's historical project a post-1752 affair, as M. A. Stewart suggested.[7] From the first volume of the *Essays* onwards, Hume answered questions that were simultaneously historical and political, economic, social, moral or religious. He was clearly aware of it and, for that reason, often prefaced (or annotated, as above) his discussions with reflections on historical causality, evidence, and method. If we recall that the *Essays* were considered a kind of 'philosophy' in the eighteenth-century conception of philosophy—the 'easy' kind of philosophy, contrasted with 'abstruse' metaphysics'—we can therefore say that Hume's history was a philosopher's history.[8]

This chapter aims at more than saying that Hume's developed his historical method while addressing philosophical questions, be they of the 'easy' or 'abstruse' kind. The relation between history and philosophy in Hume's work has often been framed in terms of a distinction between the science of human nature and history: the former proposes causal generalisations, which are then used to understand 'particular' historical events.[9] As we saw in the previous chapter, the academicians' historical

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[5] Harris, *Hume*, p. 326, notices the 'unusual' and 'almost complete silence with respect to the general histories that had gone before his own. It was standard practice for a history of England to begin with a preface in which earlier histories were abused and denounced as instances of gross party prejudice.'

[6] This is the definition of Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 25–26. Baumstark, as mentioned in the introduction, defines 1748 as the beginning of the making of Hume the historian. Hume's early essays and his philosophical works treated history as an 'auxiliary science.' In those works, Hume would be better characterized as a 'reader' than a 'writer' (or potential writer) of history.

[7] Stewart, 'Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711-1752', p. 45.

[8] *EHU* 1.1-2. On the *Essays* as philosophy see Harris, *Hume*, pp. 18–20.

[9] See Schmidt, *David Hume*, pp. 381–382; Norton, 'History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought', p. xxxvi; and Rotwein, 'Introduction', pp. xxiv–xxv, xxxii.

method involved transforming statements of historical facts into the kind of statement that could be assessed in the same way as 'fire warmed a man'. This chapter presents Hume's philosophical approach to history as the further development of the method that had been brewing in the *Académie des Inscriptions* since the 1720s.[10] The *Essays* and the *Political Discourses* began to construct a history *of* general causes, not just use causal knowledge generated by the science of human nature to assess individual testimonies or sources. As we will see, a history of general causes provides an account of the moral, political, economic, and religious institutions, practices, and customs.

Indeed, the chapter is structured to highlight how Hume's historical method must be read as a further development of the method of the *Académie des Inscriptions*. It starts with Hume's general framework to assess historical evidence and testimony in the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*. Hume's approach to historical evidence used the science of human nature to judge the internal and external probability of evidence. Hume gave pride of place to internal evidence, but I show how internal and external probabilities were tied together in the same way they were to Fontenelle and Fréret: the production of testimony is itself a historical process. The chapter then reconstructs how Hume transformed the causal generalisations of the science of human nature into general historical causes that structured his answers to the political, economic, social, and religious questions of his day. Finally, the chapter observes how Hume's framework of general causes—his '*fond de l'histoire*', if we wish—was employed as a tool of historical criticism in 'Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations' (1752) and in the Ossian poems affair. As we will see in the next chapter, the same essays in which Hume defined and discussed historical general causes were also the places he discussed their structure, that is, how they articulated a narrative of the modern.

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[10] Although the thesis interrupts its account of the *Académie* in the 1730s and moves to Hume, it is important to stress that the academicians did not stop their own development at that point. The post-1730 works cited in the last chapter should be enough to suggest that. Gossman, *Medievalism and the ideologies of the Enlightenment*, also points to that direction. Later academicians such as Charles de Brosses and Nicholas Antoine Boulanger, whose works were found in the Hume library (though we cannot be sure whether Hume acquired them or they were acquired by someone else in a later period) could also provide a continuation to the narrative of the last chapter.

1. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE IN THE *TREATISE* AND 'OF MIRACLES'

Hume discussed historical evidence and testimony in both the *Treatise* and in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. In the *Treatise*, belief in historical accounts appeared as a paradigmatic case for the problem at hand (probability and belief and then the discussion of liberty and necessity). Similarly, in the first *Enquiry,* historical knowledge and historical evidence appeared again in the discussion of liberty and necessity and the essay/chapter on miracles. 'Of Miracles' was most likely one of the 'nobler parts' *Treatise* Hume 'castrated' from the *Treatise* because of the reaction he expected.[11] Indeed, 'Of Miracles' matches the subject of Part three of the *Treatise*, 'Of Knowledge and Probability, the place where belief in historical accounts was discussed.[12] 'Of Miracles' original place in a wider discussion of probability is reflected in its emphasis: instead of engaging with the polemical literature on miracles, Hume's arguments seem to belong to the debate we have surveyed in chapters one and two concerning belief in the testimony of others that reached back to the *Logique*.[13] That broader discussion about probability and belief is the foundation for regarding 'Of Miracles', along with the earlier discussions in the *Treatise*, as providing a general framework to deal with historical evidence.[14]

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[11] In a letter to Henry Home (later Lord Kames) dated 02 December 1737, Hume enclosed the draft of some 'Reasonings concerning Miracles', a piece he believed would 'give too much Offence' if put out to the world. In the same letter, he admitted he was 'castrating my Work, that is, cutting off its noble Parts', before he could send it to Bishop Butler, see Hume to Henry Home, 2 December 1737, in David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T Greig (2 vols, Oxford, 1932), vol. 1, pp. 23-25.

[12] As Harris, *Hume*, p. 229. suggests. In 1762, he recounted to George Campbell how he had developed his arguments about miracles after a conversation with a Jesuit during his time at La Flèche, where he drafted the *Treatise*, see Hume to George Campbell, 1 July 1762, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 361. On Hume's contact with the French debates between Jesuits and Jansenists about miracles, see Perinetti, 'Hume at La Flèche: Skepticism and the French Connection', pp. 51–53.

[13] Wootton, 'Hume's "Of Miracles": Probability and Irreligion', pp. 195–196, discusses this point at length, noticing how the changes Hume made for the 1750 edition seemed to redirect the attention of the reader away from the French context in which it was probably conceived and more towards an English context.

[14] What follows therefore agrees with Wootton, 'Hume's "Of Miracles": Probability and Irreligion', in placing 'Of Miracles' within the broader tradition initiated by the Port-Royal Logic. That view is also present in Norton, 'History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought', and M. A. Stewart, 'Hume's Historical View of Miracles', in M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright, eds., *Hume and Hume's connexions* (University Park, Pa, 1995), pp. 193–194.

Both the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* show Bayle's extensive influence on the early development of Hume's brand of scepticism. Hume was influenced by Bayle from very early on in his intention of exposing the limits of what reason could achieve in metaphysics and theology.[15] That influence went well beyond metaphysics, reaching Hume's moral philosophy and social theory.[16] However, this section aims to show that Hume went *beyond* Bayle in his discussion of historical evidence. Although Hume never complained about Bayle's supposed historical pyrrhonism, this section shows that he was engaged in very much the same task as Fréret: asking how to assess historical evidence and testimony based on 'internal' probability. More importantly, 'Of Miracles' suggested how to build a positive historical account *from* sources, going beyond their mere assessment. Again, very much in the way the academicians had been doing—or probably *because* of Fréret and the academicians. As I argued in chapter one, Bayle was an 'ethical teacher' of the Enlightenment—his example was constantly in the minds of Hume and Fréret, and both absorbed Bayle's arguments in other

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[15] On Bayle's influence on Hume, see Harris, *Hume*, pp. 61–64 for his influence on Hume's early life and pp. 225-229 for the first *Enquiry*. Hume went so far as reading other authors through Bayle. His critique of Spinoza in book I part IV of the *Treatise* is based on the *Dictionnaire*, see Harris, *Hume*, p. 53. Hume mentions Bayle in two letters to Michael Ramsay in March 1732 and August 1737, see Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 11-12, and Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, pp. 626–627, respectively. The latter shows how Hume framed the *Treatise* as situated to a considerable extent in a French context, as Harris, *Hume*, p. 84, notices. Hume met Pierre Desmaizeaux, Bayle's posthumous publisher, while he was in London getting the *Treatise* printed and asked his opinions about the book, see Hume to Desmaizeaux, 6 April 1739, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 29-30. Bayle was one of the main sources of Hume's 'early memoranda'. J.-P. Pittion, 'Hume's Reading of Bayle: An Inquiry into the Source and Role of the Memoranda', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 15 (1977), pp. 373–386, details which of Bayle's works Hume was reading and how. See also Harris, *Hume*, pp. 146–147. Mazza and Mori, '"Loose Bits of Paper" and "Uncorrect Thoughts"', p. 20, agree with Pittion's main claim that the context of the memoranda is primarily considerably Baylean and French, but introduce some corrections regarding Hume's sources, see p. 15 fn. 40.

[16] Hume was the first (and only) thinker in the Scottish Enlightenment to answer positively 'Bayle's question' of whether a society of atheists was possible, see James A. Harris, 'Answering Bayle's Question: Religious Belief in the Moral Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment', in Daniel Garber and Donald Rutherford, eds., *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* (Oxford, 2003). Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, esp pp. 145, 261, established a connection between Hume's moral philosophy and Bayle's version of Augustianian-Epicurean social theory and moral philosophy through Bernard Mandeville. Harris, *Hume*, pp. 121–139, also reads Book III of the *Treatise* as divided between Francis Hutcheson and Mandeville, with Bayle in the background, a conflict that can be traced to Hume's early interest in Mandeville, see pp. 26-27 and 62.

spheres—but eighteenth-century thinkers were doing much more than Bayle thought was possible.

The *Treatise* discussed historical evidence at two distinct moments, each emphasising a different aspect of our belief in testimony of past events. In part three of Book I, 'Of Knowledge and Probability', historical evidence and testimony appeared as a paradigmatic case of belief. Hume's primary concern about belief in historical evidence in Book I of the *Treatise* was related to the effects of that long chain of transmission between the eyewitnesses of a past event and the present readers of historical accounts. Our belief that 'Caesar was killed in the senate-house on the *ides* of *March*' rests on establishing a causal connection between the characters in the book we read to the eyewitnesses of Caesar's assassination, moving through the whole chain of transmission of testimony.[17] As we saw, the decline in the chain of transmission was a central source of historical uncertainty for both Bayle and Locke. Hume acknowledged that that argument presented a challenge to his own system. Against it, he relied on the fidelity of printers and copyists: since most of the links in the chain of transmission 'are perfectly resembling, the mind runs easily along them, jumps from one part to another with facility, and forms but a confus'd and general notion of each link.'[18] At least in terms of producing belief, transmission should not be a problem. Indeed, the mere attribution of a historical character to a narrative tends to produce a stronger feeling of belief in the reader: simply being told a book is a history rather than a novel is sufficient to make us 'enter deeper' into the event and form livelier conceptions of the persons and relations it describes.[19] So much so that writers of fiction deliberately employ historical names and settings in their fictions to 'procure an easier reception into the imagination' for the events they represented.[20]

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[17] *Treatise* 1.3.4.2.
[18] *Treatise* 1.3.13.6.
[19] *Treatise* 1.3.7.8.
[20] *Treatise* 1.3.10.6. Hume insists that readers do not believe the narration is true because of that, but only that they imagine it livelier because of the connection with history.

Hume's general trust in the similarity of the links in the chain of transmission of historical testimony was grounded on the 'moral certainty' concerning that transmission. This issue was explored in the second moment of the *Treatise* in which historical evidence came to the fore, namely the discussion of liberty and necessity.[21] Hume grounded belief in historical evidence on the moral certainty we have about the motives of historians and witnesses. When we read about 'the death of *Caesar*, the success of *Augustus*, the cruelty of *Nero*' in a book, we believe those actions actually happened in the past because 'so many men, without any interest, wou'd never conspire to deceive us.'[22] As Fréret and Sallier had argued, Hume also insisted on the reproach and derision people contemporary to the events would face if they tried to falsify recent events. This kind of inference is not different from all our reasonings about politics, commerce, war, or any other aspect of human life. Indeed, the moral evidence that sustains belief in historical testimony has the same nature as the evidence that supports our expectations concerning natural events.[23] A prisoner without money or power does not expect his guards to free him in the same way he does not expect the walls of his cell to crumble around his ears.

In moral matters, we can find the causes based on our knowledge of the 'uniform principles of human nature': thus, for instance, 'we not only observe, that men *always* seek society, but can also explain the principles, on which this universal propensity is founded.'[24] On the external side, the constant conjunction of motives and actions assured us that it would rarely be in the interest of historians to conspire to falsify their accounts. That uniformity of human nature also worked in relation to the internal side of testimony: a traveller who 'shou'd inform us of people of exactly the same character with those in *Plato*'s *Republic* on the one hand, or those in *Hobbes*'s

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[21] For a comprehensive treatment of Hume's contribution to the early modern debate about free will, see James Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 2005), pp. 64–87. As Harris notices, 'looking outwards'— that is, asking *whether we act as if* human actions are necessitated by motives or are the product of a free will, instead of finding the metaphysical solution—was central to Hume's 'reconciling project' in this area, see p. 75.

[22] *Treatise* 2.3.1.15.

[23] *Treatise* 2.3.1.17.

[24] *Treatise* 2.3.1.8.

Leviathan on the other' would find as few people willing to believe her as another who claimed to find a country 'in the fiftieth degree of northern latitude, where all the fruits ripen and come to perfection in the winter, and decay in the summer.'[25] Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes' *Leviathan* go against our knowledge of human nature in the same way the supposed country subverts our knowledge of the climate and seasons.

Hume stressed the same point when he recast book I of the *Treatise* as the *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748). However, this time he was more emphatic on the connection between knowledge of human nature and history. He insisted that in all ages and nations 'human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations.' An enquirer would not be mistaken in transferring *most* of the observations concerning 'the sentiments, inclinations, and course of life' made in one time and place to another because 'the same motives always produce the same actions: The same events follow from the same causes.'[26] Indeed, he concluded

> Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature, by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations, and furnishing us with materials, from which we may form our observations, and become acquainted with the regular springs of human action and behaviour.[27]

Hume's statements about the uniformity of human nature have been a constant object of debate in the last hundred years of scholarship. Earlier twentieth-century readings of Hume emphasized the fixedness of human nature, often deriving from there an inability to genuinely appreciate historical change.[28] On the other side, scholars since at

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[25] *Treatise* 2.3.1.10.
[26] *EHU* 8.7.
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] See, for instance, J. B. Black, *The Art of History: A Study of Four Great Historians of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2016), pp. 94–99, and R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History with Lectures 1926-1928*, ed. W. J. van der Dussen (Oxford, 1994), pp. 81–85. Christopher Berry is a more recent view emphasising the fixed side of human nature, see Christopher J. Berry, *Hume, Hegel and Human Nature* (The Hague, 1982), 103, pp. 57–68, esp. 63. Berry regards that fixedness as essential to Hume's (and the Scottish Enlightenment's) innovative historical method but, unlike earlier interpretations, casts that method in a positive light. He also distances himself from more 'essentialist' views, placing the fixedness of human nature in the more general aspects of the workings of the human mind (associations of ideas, the influence of habits, the conjunction of motives and actions) rather than more specific characteristics (say preferring X or Y).

least Duncan Forbes have defended a more nuanced interpretation of Hume's claims about the uniformity of human nature.[29] Indeed, he added a couple of paragraphs later that

> We must not, however, expect, that this uniformity of human actions should be carried to such a length, as that all men, in the same circumstances, will always act precisely in the same manner, without making any allowance for the diversity of characters, prejudices, and opinions. Such a uniformity in every particular, is found in no part of nature. On the contrary, from observing the variety of conduct in different men, we are enabled to form a greater variety of maxims, which still suppose a degree of uniformity and regularity.[30]

In any case, Hume made the connection between the uniformity of human nature and historical criticism more explicit in this section, thus giving slightly more emphasis to the internal aspect of testimony: 'If we would explode any forgery in history', we would only need to show that the actions attributed to a historical character are 'directly contrary to the course of nature, and that no human motives, in such circumstances, could ever induce him to such a conduct.'[31] The argument that we must trust the testimony of historians in general was still there, but now the emphasis was on the internal aspect.[32]

In the *Philosophical Essays*, Hume put the doctrine developed in his discussion of free will to practice in section ten, 'Of Miracles'. The essay/chapter started from the requirement to balance probabilities given both the internal and external aspects of testimony. A 'wise man […] proportions his belief to the evidence.'[33] As we account

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[29] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 101–121; Simon Evnine, 'Hume, Conjectural History, and the Uniformity of Human Nature', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 31 (1993), pp. 589–606; and Spencer K. Wertz, *Between Hume's Philosophy and History: Historical Theory and Practice* (Lanham, 2000), pp. 19–34. As Evnine admits (p. 591), both sides have copious textual evidence to support their claims. The distance between the two camps of the debate—or at least the distance between Berry and Forbes and his followers—seems mostly a matter where exactly to draw the line between constancy and variability. Unlike the early twentieth-century interpretations, both sides here acknowledge the value of Hume's approach.

[30] EHU 8.10.

[31] *EHU* 8.8.

[32] In EHU 8.18 Hume asked 'What would become of history, had we not a dependence on the veracity of the historian, according to the experience, which we have had of mankind?'. In 'Of Miracles', he argued that 'inclination to truth and a principle of probity' are 'discovered by *experience* to be qualities, inherent in human nature' (EHU 10.5)

[33] *EHU* 10.4.

for both the circumstances of testimony and the content it reports, we must add or subtract weight to the evidence depending on its compatibility with our experience. On the external front, Hume started from the assumption discussed above that testimony in general, and a historian's testimony in particular, deserve our confidence. This conclusion is 'not derived from any *connexions*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them.'[34] The lack of conformity between testimony and reality could be used to reject the report as well: Hume commended the 'Indian prince' in Locke's story for reasoning justly and rejecting an event that seemed extraordinary given his experience of nature. Not even reasoning by analogy could have suggested to him the possibility of water freezing all of a sudden at a precise temperature.[35]

However, in the case of miracles, our natural confidence in human testimony faces the most robust counterweight on the internal side. A miracle is by definition a violation of the laws of nature, which are established by 'firm and unalterable experience'. If a miracle were not a violation of the laws of nature, it would not be called a miracle. Since 'uniform experience amounts to a proof', the proof against miracles 'from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.'[36] Hume added in a footnote that, even though an event may not in itself be contrary to the laws of nature, if the cause associated to the event is contrary to our experience of the usual causes of such events, it may still be regarded as miraculous.[37] Thus, although there is nothing unusual in, say, a healthy man dropping dead or clouds pouring rain, attributing those events to a person's command still goes against our uniform experience of physical and human nature.

If a miracle is a full proof against itself on the internal side, the calculus of probability would require a full proof on the external side to zero out the balance. In

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[34] *EHU* 10.8.
[35] *EHU* 10.10. Hume is referring to Locke's 'Prince of Siam', discussed in section 2.3 above. This paragraph was added to the second edition (1750), the footnote where Hume explains why the Indian prince was justified in his scepticism was a last-minute insertion, appearing at the end of the volume, see David Hume, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1750), p. 260.
[36] *EHU* 10.12.
[37] *EHU* 10.12, fn. 23.

order to establish a miracle, therefore, the falsehood of the testimony would have to be 'more miraculous than the fact, which it endeavours to establish.'[38] As we have seen, that was, in different ways, Arnauld's last resort: the testimony of God Himself, or of such saintly witnesses as St Augustine, was deemed by them to be sufficient proof.[39] In Hume's view, however, even if we were to accept those claims, the balance of probabilities would still lead us at best to indifference. The second part of 'Of Miracles' showed that this was not the case, that the usual external circumstances of testimony of miracles were far from perfect proof in favour of miracles.

Hume presented four main arguments against testimonies of miracles. First, there are no miracles attested by a sufficient number of men with 'unquestioned good sense, education, and learning', 'undoubted integrity', and 'credit and reputation' in a 'celebrated' part of the world.[40] Hume did not extend the confidence he gave to historians to those reporting miracles. Second, we are prone to accept—against the correct balancing of probability—testimony of events that excite the agreeable passions of 'surprize' and 'wonder'.[41] We also enjoy partaking of the delight and admiration inspired in others when they hear such accounts. Those sentiments are compounded by the 'spirit of religion', which inclines believers to believe in and spread false narratives that further their holy cause. Moreover, once a person is invested in that spirit, advancement of the cause becomes associated with her self-interest, compounding even further the propensity to believe in and spread miraculous accounts.[42] Third, accounts of supernatural and miraculous events 'are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations.'[43] The 'first histories of all nations' are always so full of miraculous and supernatural events that 'we are apt to imagine ourselves transported into

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[38] *EHU* 10.13.
[39] It was also Locke's last resort: 'For where such supernatural Events are suitable to ends aim'd at by him [God], who has the Power to change the course of Nature, there, under such Circumstances, they may be the fitter to procure Belief, by how much the more they are beyond, or contrary to ordinary Observation. This is the proper Case of *Miracles*, which well attested, do not only find Credit themselves; but give it also to other Truths, which need such Confirmation,' see Locke, *Essay*, pp. 667-668.
[40] *EHU* 10.15.
[41] *EHU* 10.16.
[42] *EHU* 10.17.
[43] *EHU* 10.20.

some new world' where our experience of nature no longer holds.[44] Indeed, that would be the case of the Pentateuch if we treated it merely as the product of a 'human writer and historian': a book written in a barbarous age, long after the facts it describes, uncorroborated by other testimony, very similar to the fables every other nation produced about its own origins, and presenting a version of human nature totally different from that with which we are familiar.[45] As the histories of nations advance towards the 'enlightened ages' of each society, the inclination to believe in miraculous and supernatural events diminishes, even if it can never be 'extirpated from human nature'. The dynamics of propagation in such circumstances favour the spread of false accounts: the wise deem the issue too insignificant in its early stages and ignore it; the fools propagate and entrench the narrative. Once the wise and learned become concerned, the records and witnesses 'have [already] perished beyond recovery', and there remain few means of detecting falsehood.[46] Finally, Hume added a fourth argument: since miracles and prodigies are supposed to either be founded on or to be the foundation of particular religious systems, and since the validity of one system is supposed to deny the validity of other systems, testimonies of miracles belonging to one religion stand as counter-proof to the testimonies of miracles of other religions.[47]

The first three arguments against testimony of miracles, with particular emphasis on the third, point to the fact that testimony itself has a history that must be incorporated into the balance of probabilities. Like Fontenelle (in theory more than in practice) and Fréret, Hume inscribes the process of production of testimony within history, connecting internal and external aspects of testimony together. Barbarian or uncivilized societies are expected to produce historical evidence (their own historical accounts as well as the material evidence they leave behind) that deals extensively in

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[44] *Ibid.*

[45] *EHU* 10.40. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, p. 306, notices how the reference to the Pentateuch at the end of 'Of Miracles' was one of the most outrageous elements of the whole text. Within the polemical context we are not exploring here, Hume's inclusion of the miracles of the Pentateuch went further than Protestant attacks on miracles of the post-Biblical era.

[46] *EHU* 10.31-35. We see here an echo of Bayle's concern with the fact that false traditions are not a corruption of truth, but originate directly from the event.

[47] *EHU* 10.24.

extraordinary or miraculous events. That generalisation worked both ways: it could be used to reject testimony of miracles derived from those periods, as is the case here, but it could also be used to reject historical accounts supposedly originating in barbarian societies that *did not* include miracles, as we will see below.

After presenting the four reasons why testimony of miracles generally failed to clear the bar, Hume presented to the reader three instances in which the *external* requirements seem to have been met. The first is 'one of the best attested miracles in all profane history', emperor Vespasian's curing a blind and disabled man in Alexandria. In Hume's view, Vespasian was not an emperor inclined to regard himself as a kind of divinity. The miracle was reported by Tacitus on the authority (Hume assumed) of persons of established character and confirmed even after the Flavian dynasty was no longer in power (thus ruling out self-interest as a motive).[48] In the second edition, Hume added that Suetonius also reported the miracle in a similar way. The second case is a miracle related by French Cardinal de Retz. Central to Hume's argument is that the cardinal himself—known for 'an incredulous and libertine character, as well as of great genius'—seemed not to give much credit to the story but still chose to report it with all the circumstances attending to the miracle. The third case was the series of miracles attributed to the tomb of the Jansenist Abbé Paris. The list includes miracles 'proved upon the spot, before judges of unquestioned authority.'[49] Neither the Jesuits nor the civil magistrates, both determined to attack the Jansenists, could refute the miracles. In the second edition of the *Philosophical Essays*, Hume added an extensive footnote detailing the evidence and controversies, noticing, among other things, the reputation of the various witnesses.

Hume's treatment of those three cases shows his absolute unwillingness even to entertain the possibility of miracles. According to his own requirements concerning

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[48] *EHU* 10.25.
[49] *EHU* 10.27. As Perinetti, 'Hume at La Flèche: Skepticism and the French Connection', pp. 52–53, notices, the controversy took place a couple of years before Hume's stay in France in the late 1730s. The conversation with the Jesuit priest that gave origin to 'Of Miracles' could well have been related to the miracles of the Abbé Pâris.

external circumstances of the testimonies mentioned above, the three examples warranted at least suspending belief, given that the strength of testimony was as perfect as one could wish, without any of the usual negative characteristics of testimony of miracles. 'And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses,' he asked, 'but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events, which they relate?'[50] Hume would rather follow de Retz, who 'concluded, like a just reasoner, that such an evidence carried falsehood upon the very face of it' and that testimony of miracles 'was more properly a subject of derision than of argument.'[51] He hammered in the point a couple of paragraphs later, insisting that 'no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle.'[52] Thus, Hume turned the Port-Royal *Logic* on its head: the extreme internal improbability of even the most well-attested miracles made assessment of the external probability unnecessary.[53]

However, Hume's insistence that no testimony could establish the existence of a miracle had consequences to historical testimony in general. Even if we rule out strictly miraculous events—those who go against a perfectly uniform experience—history still abounded in marvellous and improbable events of all kinds, which many would have found hard to believe even if they had witnessed them. Worse still, much of it was accepted on the authority of sources and witnesses of less quality and quantity than the three miracles he rejected based on their internal probability alone. Thus, although the case of miracles was by definition extreme, Hume's approach could be employed for sceptical purposes in History. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, published an anonymous satire of 'Of Miracles' that proved Napoleon was a legend created by the French and adopted by cunning British politicians.[54]

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[50] *EHU* 10.27.
[51] *EHU* 10.26.
[52] *EHU* 10.35.
[53] As noticed by Hacking, *The emergence of probability*, p. 79.
[54] Richard Whately, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (New York, 1819). On the external side of testimony, Whately explored the inconsistencies and contradictions of reports, and the

Hume was aware of the risk and the relevance of his argument to historical testimony. His concern with protecting true history from his attack on miracles seems, if anything, to have grown in the period immediately after the publication of the first edition—a period in which he was constantly involved with historical criticism. In a footnote that was later incorporated into the body of the text, Hume set out two hypothetical scenarios that dealt with the boundaries between the miraculous and the extraordinary.[55] First, Hume asked the reader to imagine that all authors in all languages and all the accounts of travellers agreed that 'from the first of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days.' In the face of such testimony, Hume argued that philosophers ought to accept it and 'search for the Causes, whence it might be deriv'd'.[56]

In his second hypothetical situation, Hume asked the reader to imagine that all historians of England agreed that Queen Elizabeth died on the first of January 1600, had her death confirmed and was buried according to the usual traditions, but then reappeared a month later and resumed her reign for another three years. Although he could not understand the reasons why the queen would have staged her own death and resurrection and, worse, why people were convinced by it, Hume argued we must reject the miracle (i.e. the resurrection) but accept the reality of the situation (the queen and courtiers feigned her death and resurrection). 'The knavery and folly of men, are such common phaenomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence' than from a transgression of the laws of nature, he explained.[57] If the resurrection were attributed to 'any new system of religion', then 'this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat.'[58]

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interest of reporters. On the internal side, he explored the most improbable aspects of Napoleon's history: for instance, the French giving themselves over and again to a general that sacrificed his people by the thousands on extravagant projects; or the fact that only the English seemed capable of defeating the French, even when heavily outnumbered.

[55] The footnote consists of paragraphs 10.36-38 in the critical edition quoted here, see David Hume, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1748), pp. 199–201. Paragraph 10.39 and the last sentence of 10.36 were added in the 1756 edition.

[56] *EHU* 10.36.

[57] *EHU* 10.37.

[58] *Ibid*.

Hume's scenarios suggest that, in face of an extraordinary event confirmed by strong testimony (which is *ex hypothesi* perfect here), we must 'naturalise' the event. That is, we must find plausible causal relations compatible with our experience that explain either how the event happened or how witnesses came to believe it had happened. Although he believed it would 'be impossible to find any such [miracles] in all the records of history,' the two purposefully extreme scenarios show how that process could be done.[59] In the first case, Hume answers that we must develop our scientific knowledge until it includes causes that explain the eight-day darkness. Given the nature of the phenomenon, there is no social explanation and thus no other answer than an admission of lack of experience. In the second case, there is the possibility of the phenomenon having social causes. Here, naturalisation takes the form of a 'deflation' of the event, involving both explanations of how it could have been contrived, feigned or perhaps even misunderstood, and why witnesses would be inclined to believe it was a genuinely miraculous or extraordinary event.[60] If anything, attribution to a religious system, given the typical characteristics of testimony of religious miracles, only makes the deflation of testimony easier: it provides a set of motivations and beliefs that promptly explain both why some people would be inclined to deceive and why others would be inclined to believe in a miraculous event (or accept a supernatural explanation to an extraordinary event).

This process allowed Hume to save the gist of historical testimony without necessarily taking its content at face value. The constancy of human nature, the fact that 'history informs us nothing new or strange in this particular', allowed Hume to rework the meaning of testimony into a coherent historical account that employed only probable causes. Hume was operating a system similar to the academicians' '*fond de l'histoire*': pieces of evidence must be connected together and articulated in a narrative or picture compatible with common causal experience. The very process of putting

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[59] *EHU* 10.36.
[60] Schmidt, *David Hume*, p. 389, acknowledges that Hume's approach had the potential risk of erasing all improbable but not supernatural or marvellous events from the historical record, which is the gist of Whately's satire of 'Of Miracles' mentioned above. As we saw in chapter two, Dubos warned that history is not made of the most probable events.

evidence together may lead to a reappraisal of individual pieces of evidence. The fact that people genuinely believed in (or at least were willing to share) accounts of miraculous or extraordinary events is itself an essential element of the constitution of the 'fond' that provides the certainty of evidence. An abundance of references to supernatural, marvellous, or otherwise improbable events tells the historian she needs to rework the account given by sources, naturalising and deflating it.

Hume was not interested in reconstructing a historical picture or narrative from the evidence in the case of miracles, in any case. 'I never knew any one, that examined and deliberated about nonsense who did not believe it before the end of his enquiries', he wrote to Hugh Blair in 1761.[61] The argument against miracles could be made in general terms, and that was enough for Hume.[62] However, the arguments presented in 'Of Miracles' had consequences for historical evidence in general. As mentioned above, I am not the first to point out that the essay must be considered as part of a broader tradition of analysing belief in testimony and historical evidence that starts with the Port-Royal Logic, moves on to Locke and Bayle and from there to the *Académie des Inscriptions* and Hume. However, such interpretations still consider the historian's task to be that to which Bayle limited himself: accepting or rejecting individual pieces of testimony—the task that could only produce an enormous 'heap of ruins', to use Cassirer's description of the product of the *Dictionnaire*.[63] Implicit in this view is an equivalence between 'history' and the 'cautious observation of human life' in the 'common course of the world' that Hume presented as the laboratory of the science of

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[61] Hume to Hugh Blair, 1761, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 350. The comment is part of some considerations on a manuscript of George Campbell's *Dissertation on Miracles* (1762).

[62] Harris, *Hume*, p. 229, emphasises this point.

[63] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 203. I have already mentioned Stewart, 'Hume's Historical View of Miracles', and Wootton, 'Hume's "Of Miracles": Probability and Irreligion'. The prevailing idea is still that expressed by Popkin, 'Skepticism and the Study of History', p. xxx, that Hume was turning Baylean scepticism to constructive purposes. Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, pp. 156–157, claimed that Hume was uniquely aware of the dangers of Bayle's scepticism and turned to human nature for answers where Bayle had turned to the grace of God. Pittion, 'Hume's Reading of Bayle', p. 384, argued that Hume was scrutinising the errors of scholars like Bayle, but with the mediation of his science of human nature.

human nature in the introduction of the *Treatise*.[64] Hume and the academicians were doing more than simply shifting the emphasis away from the external side of testimony towards the internal and using 'experience'—or in Hume's case, an entire science of human nature—to judge it. The hypothetical Elizabethan scenarios did what de Pouilly's essay on the early history of Rome forced the academicians to do: state how historians could work with sources whose reports they could not accept in full. In both cases, the direction was to develop methods with which evidence could be preserved and reinterpreted in order to *create* a positive account of the past. The question is not so much about believing the sources but how to extract the truth from what they say.

In situations where Hume was actually interested in producing a historical account out of evidence, the way out of the Elizabethan hypothetical scenarios pointed the direction. As we will see, that is what Hume did in 'Of Populousness of the Ancient Nations'. On a much smaller scale, this was also what Hume did to the story of Joan of Arc in the *History of England*, though here he could invoke religious superstition, which made the task much more straightforward. Finally, the 'reverse engineering' of that kind of re-elaboration was the reason why Hume ultimately rejected James Macpherson's Ossian Poems: the poems could not be squared with what was expected from the kind of society in which Ossian must have lived. However, the process of naturalising or deflating a particular statement required theories about the types of causal relations at play in the circumstances described by the supernatural/marvellous/improbable source. As the academicians had been doing, Hume developed his own views of 'general causes': what they were, how and when they were at play, how they relate to individual facts and sources. In sum, Hume had to set out what the stuff of history was in that new perspective.

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[64] *Treatise* Introduction.10. This equivalence is explicitly made by Norton, 'History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought', p. xxxviii.

2. STABLE MORAL CAUSES

Even though Hume at first intended his essays to be read each as a self-contained 'work apart', they collectively established a background of 'general causes' against which individual bits of historical evidence could be understood and interpretation of particular historical phenomena could be articulated.[65] As he analysed subjects as diverse as the state of British party politics since the previous century, the lack of eloquent men in modern Europe, or the determination of interest rates, Hume sought to define what kind of causal generalisations were relevant to his present concerns and the extent to which generalisations were possible in those cases. In some cases, the central theme of the essay was itself a matter of correcting misidentified causal relations—'Of Interest' corrected the common misattribution of causal connection between the money supply and interest rates.[66] In other essays, such as 'That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science', Hume showed that there were wider causal regularities at play where previous writers had only identified the immediate consequences of individuals' actions. In other essays, such as 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', Hume was concerned with the extent to which causal generalisations were possible in the first place. Frequently, questions about what kind of causal relations could be established and the extent to which they were valid were addressed directly as introductory methodological remarks. Despite the difference of both ends and means, Hume's essays, volume two of Dubos' *Réflexions Critiques*, and the memoirs of the academicians were all concerned with establishing a set of general causal relations that articulated a historical background against which the questions at hand were analysed. As Phillips writes, in the *Essays*, 'the problem of history is reformulated as

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[65] Hume expressed such desires in the Advertisement to the first edition David Hume, *Essays, moral and political* (Edinburgh, 1741), pp. ii–v. Hereafter, *Essays* (1741).
[66] See *Essays* 303, where Hume explicitly identifies the issue as mistaking a simultaneous effect for the cause.

a matter of possibilities for philosophical understanding.'[67] If 'Of Commerce' and 'Of Refinement of the Arts' offered a 'potted expression' of the later *History of England*, as Christopher Berry suggests, it is so because the former were concerned with establishing a set of causal relations (and a historical structure, but that is a matter for the next chapter) that would define the scope of historical inquiry in the latter.[68] In this section, I consider the kinds of general causal connections Hume was most interested in in the *Essays* and the extent to which they could be used to interpret individual historical phenomena.

The possibility of finding general and stable causes in politics was the theme of the opening paragraphs of the 1741 essay 'That Politics May be Reduced to a Science'—the very title of the essay indicating what would become a theme in Hume's political writings. The essay began with a rejection of Alexander Pope's claim that forms of government do not matter, only the character and conduct of governors.[69] Hume acknowledged some truth in Pope's claim in the case of absolute governments, which depended on the quality of the ruler's administration. A republican and free government, in contrast, by its very nature, is subject to controls and rules established by the constitution, which makes it less open to variations.[70] In both cases—and we will discuss in the next chapter the process by which even absolute monarchies were becoming governments by law in modern Europe—Hume argued that 'so great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have

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[67] Phillips, *Society and sentiment*, p. 48. I am here purposefully stretching Phillips' words, which refer exclusively to 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences'. Establishing the boundaries of historical phenomena that are amenable to philosophical understanding is a task at play well beyond that essay, even if it is at its most explicit there, as this section seeks to show.

[68] Christopher J. Berry, 'Hume and the Customary Causes of Industry, Knowledge, and Humanity', *History of Political Economy*, 38 (June 2006), p. 313. Differences between the two should not be neglected, in any case. See, for instance, Stockton, 'Economics and the Mechanism of Historical Progress in Hume's History', pp. 313–315. on how the History is more 'materialist' than the essays when Hume addresses the move from a feudal agricultural economy to a commercial society with extensive manufacturing and foreign commerce.

[69] *Essays* 14. For the passage Hume cited, see Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man: Epistle III* (London, 1733), p. 19, lines 304-305.

[70] *Essays* 15-16.

they on the tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them, as any which the mathematical sciences afford us.'[71]

Hume was keen to insert the study of political constitutions within a much broader compass, which included its connections to commerce, manners, religion, and natural circumstances. 'Of Liberty and Despotism', retitled 'Of Civil Liberty' in 1758, noticed how trade had only become part of political analysis in the previous century—even 'the Italians' had 'kept a profound silence with regard to it' in their political works.[72] Historical phenomena had to be explained by more than solely political causes. Like Dubos, Hume noticed that the arts and sciences flourished in Europe, chiefly in Italy and then in France, in both cases under absolute governments. Moreover, although the Roman republic retained the title of highest artistic and scientific excellence in the ancient world, Hume reminded his readers that Egypt, Persian, and Greece after Alexander were wealthy empires, home to the arts of luxury and, in the Greek case, also the fine arts, even if to a lesser extent than in the previous century of free governments.[73]

The connection between politics and the other elements of that broader compass was explored extensively in all volumes of the *Essays*. The first volume, in particular, refined the Harringtonian thesis that the balance of political power within a constitution depends on the balance of property.[74] Property did not influence the political constitution merely by affecting the power of different social and economic groups. Every kind of government, Hume argued, was founded on opinion because force is always on the side of the governed, who are always in larger numbers. The opinion of the public concerning the 'right to property', representing the Harringtonian thesis within Hume's scheme, was only one of the three kinds of opinion relevant to

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[71] *Essays* 16.
[72] *Essays* 89.
[73] *Essays* 89-91.
[74] See Harris, *Hume*, pp. 175–183, and Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 207–211.

keeping a government in place.[75] 'Even interest itself, and all human affairs, are entirely governed by *opinion*,' he added in another essay.[76] Divisions based on economic or political interest could be refracted in different directions, united or disunited by other principles, including philosophical and religious principles. Indeed, in 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' Hume remarked how 'superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it.'[77] Superstition favoured priestly power, which tended to side with royal authority, whereas religious enthusiasm tended to limit or destroy ecclesiastical power and give those under its spell confidence and ambition to change established political arrangements.

In the second volume of essays, Hume added more complexity to the set of general causes relevant to the study of politics and society. As suggested above, 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' provided the lengthiest and most explicit treatment of the methodological side of the matter. Hume opened the essay with the distinction between 'what is owing to *chance*, and what proceeds from *causes.*' Affirming an event is derived from chance 'cuts short all farther enquiry concerning it;' where an event 'is supposed to proceed from certain and stable causes,' the path is open for a thorough analysis of what kind of causes were behind the event.[78] We must bear in mind Hume's comments about chance in the *Treatise*: 'chance is nothing real in itself, and, properly speaking is merely the negation of a cause.'[79] That is, 'chance' in 'Of the Rise and Progress' refers not to some kind of randomness but to the inquirer's inability to determine precisely what causal relation is at play.

Unlike Bayle, who was keen to limit the possibility of causal analysis in history and insisted that historical events are primarily products of human caprice, Hume did think there was a rather wide area to explore. Indeed, in 1752 he defined a thinker of

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[75] *Essays* 32-34. The other two being the opinion of interest, that is, the general interest in maintaining the established government for the sake of stability and the opinion of right to rule of the particular dynasty in power.
[76] *Essays* 51.
[77] *Essays* 78.
[78] *Essays* 111.
[79] *Treatise* 1.3.11.4.

'solid understanding' as one capable of reasoning upon 'general subjects' and distinguishing 'in a great number of particulars, that common circumstance in which they all agree,' thus enlarging their views in order to 'comprehend under them an infinite number of individuals, and include a whole science in a single theorem.'[80] 'Of the Rise and Progress' claimed that, as a general rule, '*What depends upon a few persons is*, *in a great measure*, *to be ascribed to chance*, *or secret and unknown causes: What arises from a great number*, *may often be accounted for by determinate and known causes.*'[81] Hume rested his claim on two 'natural reasons': first, when 'any *causes* beget a particular inclination or passion' among a people, even though some individuals may escape such influence, we can expect the 'multitude' to be governed by such general causes. Second, the causes or principles that operate in the multitude 'are always of a grosser and more stubborn nature', and thus less influenced by the idiosyncrasies of individual temperaments and fancies that may affect a few individuals. In his example, 'you will never want booksellers, while there are buyers of books: But there may frequently be readers where there are no authors.'[82] That is, since the passions that move commerce—avarice, the desire of gain—are more universal and stubborn, we can expect them to be expressed as general patterns among a people, whereas the ability to produce fine works of literature or science is a more delicate and contingent passion affecting only a small number of persons.

For those reasons, the subject of the essay, the rise and progress of the arts and sciences, demanded extra caution in making causal generalisations. Similarly, the 'domestic and the gradual revolutions of a state must be a more proper subject of reasoning and observation, than the foreign and the violent' because the former are the consequences of the actions of the multitude, whereas the latter depend on the passions of a few people.[83] Even within the domestic affairs of a state, more causal regularity (and thus a more precise causal explanation) can be found in places where they depend upon

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[80] *Essays* 254.
[81] *Essays* 112.
[82] *Essays* 113.
[83] *Essays* 112-113.

more persons than where they are the consequences of the actions of a few people. For instance, the growth of commerce in England is 'more easily accounted for by general principles' than its decline in Spain, given the number of persons involved and their ability to impose their passions upon the determination of economic policy.[84]

Hume acknowledged the role of chance in the history of the arts and sciences in another essay published in the 1742, 'Of Eloquence'. After restating the argument of 'Of the Rise and Progress' that the history of learning and science display much less uniformity than the history of 'wars, negociations, and politics,' Hume suggested that 'a few successful attempts' of eloquent men could 'rouze the genius of the nation, excite the emulation of the youth, and accustom our ears to a more sublime and more pathetic elocution.'[85] That is, the idiosyncratic passions of a few individuals could, in some circumstances, put a general principle into action—'There is certainly something accidental in the first rise and progress of the arts in any nation,' he concluded.[86] Modern Europe, Britain in particular, seemed to be lacking the spark, for many other elements necessary for the flourishing of great oratorial skills were present: there was a 'popular government' in England; modern 'good sense' or legal complexity were not real obstacles, and even political turmoil was there to serve as the material and setting for great orators.[87] In a passage that was removed in the 1770 edition, Hume suggested that British national character, characterised by its good-sense and modesty, limited the success of a flashier oratorical style.[88] In any case, the spark that was missing, Hume argued, would initiate the workings of more general causes based on the development of taste, for once the public is presented with a better taste in eloquence, it will remain attached to it. The modern taste for 'argumentative and rational' rhetoric was

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[84] *Essays* 113. Although here as in Hume's answer to Pope, absolute government did not mean a pure arbitrariness impervious to analysis.

[85] *Essays* 97-98.

[86] *Essays* 106.

[87] *Essays* 102-109.

[88] *Essays* 622. As Harris, *Hume*, p. 187, suggests, this change may be related to Hume's distaste for the strident rhetoric of John Wilkes and his followers. On this and other changes implemented by Hume in the context of the Wilkes affair, see pp. 426-431.

clearly inferior to the ancient 'sublime and passionate'. Modern preferences could only be the result of a lack of comparative taste.[89]

If 'Of Eloquence' opened a possibility of a Dubosian view where individual genius put a general cause in motion, 'Of the Rise and Progress' placed Hume firmly in opposition to Dubos. In that essay, Hume downplayed the role of chance in the origin of the arts and sciences and highlighted the general causes at play. Even though the highest achievements of genius are always the product of only a few minds, the 'materials' that make great minds must be anterior to their flourishing—'The mass cannot be altogether insipid, from which such refined spirits are extracted.' The 'fire' of poets and other artists is not derived from heaven, it 'runs along the earth; is caught from one breast to another; and burns brightest, where the materials are best prepared, and most happily disposed.'[90] It may be impossible to determine the source of an individual poet's genius, but it is reasonable to ask why a nation is more 'polite and learned, at a particular time, than any of its neighbours.'[91] The essay then advanced four propositions concerning the conditions under which the arts and sciences flourish: 1) that the arts and sciences require a free government to arise; 2) that neighbouring and independent states with extensive commerce among them are more favourable to politeness and learning; 3) that after their original birth in a free government, the arts and sciences can be transplanted into any other government; and 4) that once perfection of arts and sciences is achieved in a state, they naturally decline.[92]

The four propositions showcase the complex interactions between political, economic, religious, and social circumstances that make up the background against which the history of the arts and sciences must be narrated. The first proposition resumed the argument from the first volume of the *Essays* concerning the relation between laws, free governments, and the arts and sciences. Since republics are the first

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[89] *Essays* 108. We can recognise here a proximity to Dubos' views on aesthetic judgment: the public, once given the adequate comparative foundation, does not make mistakes. The connections between Hume and Dubos on judgement will be further developed in chapter five below.
[90] *Essays* 114.
[91] *Essays* 115.
[92] *Essays* 115, 119, 124, and 135, respectively.

kind of government to be defined by general laws, they are the first place to offer the kind of security necessary for the flourishing of the arts and sciences.[93] However, Hume again stressed that the kind of general causes that mattered went beyond the political. Geographic and geopolitical factors were crucial as well, as the second proposition suggested. The rugged geography of Europe—and Greece in particular—favoured the proliferation of smaller political units that limited the authority particular tastes or philosophical systems could acquire, thus inclining the continent to artistic and scientific competition and emulation.[94] Catholicism had a negative effect because it contributed to undo that positive fragmentation, making Europe more similar to China: a single large state, with one language, one religion. Unsurprisingly, a similar stagnation of learning ensued from the consolidation of the Catholic church.[95] Internally, the form of government worked its influence through the social distinctions it established, as the third proposition established. Republics favoured useful qualities because those seeking office had to make themselves useful to their electors; monarchies favoured the agreeable because power came from above, not below, which forced those seeking power to be agreeable to those above them. That made republics more propitious to the sciences and monarchies to the fine arts and politeness.[96] As Harris puts it, 'the study of the condition of the arts and sciences, in other words, was part of the science of politics.'[97]

As Jones notices, Hume's account was similar to Dubos' account of the 'moral causes' of the great *siècles* in volume two of *Réflexions Critiques*. As discussed in chapter two above, Dubos identified as chief moral causes the states of war and peace, the encouragement of artists with funding and social distinction, and the availability of education and of objects of emulation. Hume emphasised similar themes: the importance of peace and security, of emulation and social distinction. However, we must notice that Hume was much more intent on establishing a solid connection between

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[93] *Essays* 115-118.
[94] *Essays* 119-123.
[95] *Essays* 121-122.
[96] *Essays* 125.126.
[97] Harris, *Hume*, p. 187.

the cultural-aesthetic and the politico-economic aspects of society than Dubos. The latter, in contrast, extended his argument in a different direction: towards the 'physical causes'. Indeed, as we have seen, the *Réflexions* proceeded to *deny* that the source of distinction of the major *siècles* was related to moral causes.[98] Those causes made their effects felt in mediocre artists. Moral causes did not determine the number of great artists. A concentration of artistic achievements was caused directly by 'genius', which was, in turn, the product of physical conditions. If anything, causality ran the other way round: the flourishing of true geniuses (due to physical causes) set the moral causes in motion, expanding the arts at the mediocre level.[99] Despite both authors expanding the domain of historical causality beyond what Bayle had thought was possible, Hume and Dubos took different paths.

Hume addressed this divergence in 'Of National Characters', published in 1748. The essay has been read as a response to Montesquieu' *Spirit of the Laws*.[100] However, the latter was published in Geneva in October 1748, only a month before the former appeared in London while Hume was in Turin attached to a diplomatic mission, making it unlikely that the essay was written in response to Montesquieu.[101] The problem of national characters and the division between moral and physical causes had appeared in the *Treatise* almost a decade before. That suggests Hume had at least begun to think about the subject based on texts he had read or known much earlier.[102]

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[98] Jones, *Hume's sentiments*, pp. 101–102.

[99] Jones does acknowledge that Dubos put physical causes at the top, see *Hume's Sentiments*, pp. 96-97. However, Jones' insistence on an agreement between Hume and Dubos is incorrect. Dubos' argumentative strategy, as we have discussed, was to first present moral causes, then deny their validity and present an alternative explanation. Jones reads his strategy as an addition, not an opposition.

[100] See, for instance, Paul E. Chamley, 'The Conflict between Montesquieu and Hume: A Study of the Origins of Adam Smith's Universalism', in Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson, eds., *Essays on Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 274–305; Emilio Mazza and Edoardo Piccoli, '"Disguised in scarlet". Hume and Turin in 1748', *I Castelli di Yale*, 11 (2011), pp. 102–107. Montesquieu discusses climate in *Spirit of the Laws*, Part 3, esp. book 14.

[101] See Harris, *Hume*, pp. 243–244, and Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 41–44 esp footnote 88. Hume did read the book almost immediately after publication while in Turin, as he stated in Hume to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 133. On Hume's period in Turin, see Mazza and Piccoli, '"Disguised in scarlet". Hume and Turin in 1748'.

[102] *Treatise* 2.1.11.2. A similar remark is made by Harris, *Hume*, p. 244.

Equally longstanding was Hume's interest in Dubos. Hume's "early memoranda" allows us to establish a very early engagement with Dubos' *Réflexions Critiques*. While there is some controversy about the precise dating of the manuscripts, the current consensus dates them to the late 1730s and early 1740s.[103] Dubos appeared as the source of the second and third notes of the 'Philosophy' section of the memoranda. The first note, which is attributed to Juvenal, was also likely taken from Dubos. Judging by Hume's spelling of Dubos' name, Emilio Mazza and Gianluca Mori suggest Hume's engagement with the *Réflexions Critiques* could be dated as far back as the late 1720s or early 1730s.[104] In any case, the presence of Dubos in Hume's works can be detected from Book I of the *Treatise* to 'Of Tragedy' (1757).[105] Hume's engagement with Dubos' works went beyond the latter's most famous work: there were copies of the *Histoire de la Ligue Faite à Cambray* (a 1728 edition), the *Histoire Critique de L'Establissement de la Monarchie Françoise dans les Gaules*, and a 1732 edition of the *Réflexions* in the Hume Library. He also referred to Dubos' *Les Interêts de l'Angleterre Mal Entendus dans la Guerre Presente* (1703).[106] Thus, although Hume did not name Dubos or any other thinker in 'Of National Characters', it is very plausible to conjecture that Dubos' theory of climatic causes was one if not *the* main target of the essay.

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[103] The text is available in Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-1740: The Complete Text', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 9 (1948), pp. 492–518. Mazza and Mori, '"Loose Bits of Paper" and "Uncorrect Thoughts"', pp. 10–12, provide a brief history of attempts to date the manuscript since John Hill Burton first drew attention to them in 1846. Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-1740', pp. 493–497, proposed a dating of the parts of the manuscript starting from 1729 until 1740. The prevailing opinion, based on M. A. Stewart, 'The Dating of Hume's Manuscripts', in Paul Wood, ed., *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation* (Rochester-NY, 2000), defers the date to circa 1740. Tatsuya Sakamoto, 'Hume's" Early Memoranda" and the making of his political economy', *Hume studies*, 37 (2011), pp. 131–164, proposes a much later dating, making the manuscripts contemporary to the preparation of the *Political Discourse* in the late 1740s and early 1750s. However, Jon Charles Miller, 'Hume's Citation of Strabo and the Dating of the Memoranda', *Hume Studies*, 39 (2013), pp. 197–202, plausibly contests Sakamoto's main argument. Harris, *Hume*, p. 146, suggests the memoranda are notes taken from previous, non-extant notes, which Mazza and Mori, '"Loose Bits of Paper" and "Uncorrect Thoughts"', pp. 13–20, conjecture can be dated back to 1727-1734.
[104] Mazza and Mori, '"Loose Bits of Paper" and "Uncorrect Thoughts"', pp. 21, 27.
[105] On the presence of Dubos in the *Treatise*, see James O. Young and Margaret Cameron, 'Jean-Baptiste Du Bos' Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting and Hume's Treatise', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 58 (May 2018), pp. 119–130.
[106] *Essays* 314.

In any case, 'Of National Characters' significantly expanded Hume's treatment of the question about national characters, given that the discussion in the *Treatise* was used primarily to introduce his account of sympathy. The essay began by defining moral and physical causes. The former are 'circumstances which are fitted to work on the mind as motives or reasons, and which render a peculiar set of manners habitual to us.' The latter are 'those qualities of the air and climate, which are supposed to work insensibly on the temper, by altering the tone and habit of the body.'[107] Hume stated outright that the character of a nation depends chiefly on moral causes. A couple of pages later, he doubted whether physical causes had any effect at all on our tempers.[108] Indeed, he argued that 'if we run over the globe, or revolve the annals of history, we shall discover every where signs of a sympathy or contagion of manners, none of the influence of air or climate.'[109] The essay then presented nine circumstances that showed conclusively that moral causes determine national characters and manners. Even the inclination to strong liquors in northern countries and love and women in southern ones—the only situation Hume conceded physical causes could have a role— could be explained strictly moral terms.[110] The crux of the matter here is that differences in climate *could* be relevant in some situations, but where they were actually relevant, their effects did not work in *physical* (or, more precisely, physiological) terms as Dubos or Montesquieu held. Climate affects human behaviour by means of its moral effects: in 'Of Commerce', published in 1752, for instance, Hume connected the differences in wealth between southern and northern Europe to climatic differences. However, climate worked its influence by changing the incentives to work, creating a habit of industrious work in northern countries that was unnecessary in the south; climate did not affect people by changing their body fibres.[111]

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[107] *Essays* 198.
[108] *Essays* 200.
[109] *Essays* 204.
[110] If it were true in the first place. Hume did not think that generalisation held, *Essays* 214.
[111] *Essays* 267.

As Berry observes, among the nine circumstances Hume enumerated in the essay, government was the most prominent moral factor.[112] We must notice, however, *how* government affects the formation of national characters. Government shapes and delimits what kind of 'commerce' (here understood in the eighteenth-century broad meaning of the term) people have with each other. The territorial and temporal extension of a particular government, the way different socio-economic groups are set up in contact (conflictual or not) with each other, the social distinctions that come with power, the emulation that ensues: the political is again tightly connected to the social, economic, and cultural spheres.

Hume's awareness of this complexity was also on display in a travelogue he composed while travelling with the diplomatic mission of General St Clair.[113] Addressed to his brother John Home, the travelogue contains Hume's observations about the places he visited in the continental journey. There are comments on the abundance of natural resources, the state of commerce, architecture and religion, and the beauty and health of the inhabitants. Observing the differences between the inhabitants of the Austrian regions of Styria and Tyrol, Hume noticed how the former were 'deform'd and monstruous in their appearance', 'their Dress is scarce European as their figure is scarce human; in contrast, the latter were 'as remarkably beautiful as the Stirians are ugly.' Yet, the natural landscape favoured Styria—the hills of Tyrol were higher, their valleys narrower and more barren—and both regions were German and governed by the Habsburg monarchy, 'so that it wou'd puzzle a Naturalist or Politician to find the Reason of so great and remarkable a Difference.'[114] It is expected that the Naturalist would not be able to explain the difference, for physical causes did not cause such differences. However, it is important to notice that Hume was again concerned with

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[112] Berry, 'Hume and the Customary Causes of Industry, Knowledge, and Humanity', p. 299.
[113] Hume to John Home of Ninewells, March-June 1748, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 114-133. On the travelogue, see Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 35–41.
[114] Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 130–131.

the limits of a monocausal explanation, to use Baumstark's terms, that looked exclusively to politics.[115]

Hume's view of the interaction between the different kinds of general causes became yet more elaborated in the *Political Discourses*. 'Of Luxury', retitled 'Of Refinement in the Arts' in 1760, presented Hume's famous statement that '*industry, knowledge,* and *humanity*, are linked together by an indissoluble chain.'[116] The essay put together the mildness of social and political interactions, the spread of knowledge (in the liberal and mechanical arts), and the expansion of commerce. All were intertwined consequences of the introduction of luxury in Europe. At the heart of Hume's defence of modern European commercial societies against attempts to adopt classical Greco-Roman models—the topic of the next chapter—there was a very concise yet highly complex articulation of social, economic, political, and even aesthetic general causes. And when Hume had to deal with historical sources and evidence, that amalgam of general causes overshadowed the evidence it was supposed to explain.

3. FACTS INTERMINGLED WITH CAUSES

'Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations' demonstrated the crucial role of general causes in the investigation of historical evidence. It proposed a distinction between 'facts' and 'causes' and showed how causal analysis defines our understanding of historical facts. This section analyses 'Populousness' and Hume's reaction to the Ossian Poems of James Macpherson to show the centrality of general causes in Hume's historical method.

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[115] Baumstark, 'David Hume', p. 39. Baumstark interprets Hume's travel to the continent and the discoveries he registered in the travelogue as the first moment of the 'making' of Hume the historian. As we have seen, the arguments about the many kinds of general causes and their role in shaping historical development had been in development since the first volume of the essays. Tatsuya Sakamoto, 'Hume's Political Economy as a System of Manners', in Tatsuya Sakamoto and Hideo Tanaka, eds., *The rise of political economy in the Scottish enlightenment* (London, 2003), p. 90, also emphasizes the travelogue as a crucial moment in Hume's development as a social theorist.
[116] *Essays* 271.

'Populousness' was written during Hume's stay at his family home in Ninewells between April 1749 and July or August 1751.[117] This period was one of the most prolific moments of his intellectual career. It saw the preparation of the *Political Discourses*, the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, drafts of the *Natural History of Religion* and the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion,* and some essays that appeared later as part of the *Four Dissertations*.[118] In April 1750, Hume wrote to John Clephane saying that he had been working on a 'very learned, elaborate discourse concerning the populousness of antiquity.'[119] The essay had 'led [him] into many Disquisitions concerning the public & domestic Life of the Antients' and reading 'all the Classics both Greek and Latin.'[120] The extensiveness of Hume's reading of the classics cannot be emphasised enough. Hume went well beyond the established canons of classical history, scraping information from sources as diverse as ancient treatises on agriculture or satirical plays.[121] As Baumstark observes, the list of sources used in 'Populousness' displays Hume's distinct scholarly approach to the texts. Texts were not chosen merely by their literary merit or canonical status. To be sure, the classical canon was present, but Hume's approach sought any text that could reveal information relevant to the essay.[122] Hume read sources against the grain, obtaining information oblique to the message of the text, and cross-checking the information he was able to extract.[123]

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[117] Moritz Baumstark, 'Hume's Reading of the Classics at Ninewells', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 8 (March 2010), pp. 63–77, details the preparation of 'Populousness'.

[118] Harris, *Hume*, pp. 248–250.

[119] Hume to John Clephane, 18 April 1750, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 140.

[120] Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 18 February 1751, Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 152.

[121] For comprehensive surveys of Hume's use of sources, see the Appendix in Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 253–256, and M.A. Box and Michael Silverthorne, 'The "Most Curious & Important of All Questions of Erudition": Hume's assessment of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', in Mark G. Spencer, ed., *David Hume: Historical Thinker, Historical Writer* (November 2013), pp. 234–244. Baumstark, 'Hume's Reading of the Classics at Ninewells', p. 65, emphasises that much of the readings were new material, not re-readings, as Mossner, *The life of David Hume*, p. 266, suggested.

[122] Baumstark, 'Hume's Reading of the Classics at Ninewells', p. 67.

[123] As noticed by Phillips, *Society and sentiment*, p. 50.

Further, the classical sources were employed in almost all works Hume wrote or revised after that period. From footnotes added to the previous volumes of the *Essays* to illustrations of the arguments of the *Natural History of Religion*, Hume's reading of the classics became a major moment in the consolidation of his stock of historical knowledge.[124] That stock of knowledge not only enriched his references and illustrations, but it was also the very foundation of the arguments about the merits of ancient and modern societies in the *Political Discourses* and the second *Enquiry* we will discuss in the next chapter. The importance of the topic justified Hume's dedication to the essay: as he put it in a footnote to the first edition, the question concerning the population of the ancient world was 'the most curious and important of all questions of erudition.'[125] He echoed the widespread eighteenth-century belief that the comparative populations of ages or kingdoms were decisive in matters of policy: it 'commonly determines concerning the preference of their whole police, their manners, and the constitution of their government.'[126] Given that 'almost every man who thinks he can maintain a family will have one,' it is expected that 'if every thing else be equal […] wherever there are most happiness and virtue, and the wisest institutions, there will also be most people.'[127] Thus, as Sylvana Tomaselli puts it, population was an 'Ariadne's thread' to critical aspects of the Enlightenment's evaluation of modern societies.[128]

However, the economy of the essay is more relevant to the purposes of this chapter than its ancient-modern comparative elements. In the 1752 edition, the essay opened by identifying its targets and defining its stance. The first edition attached a footnote to the title identifying 'an eminent clergyman in *Edinburgh*' who wrote a discourse on the population of ancient nations 'some years ago'.[129] The clergyman was

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[124] Baumstark, 'Hume's Reading of the Classics at Ninewells', pp. 71–72. Elsewhere Baumstark notices that Diodorus Siculus' *Library of History* is the most quoted source in both 'Populousness' and the *Natural History of Religion* (Baumstark, 'David Hume', p. 95, footnote 220).
[125] *Essays* 639.
[126] *Essays* 381.
[127] *Essays* 381-382.
[128] Sylvana Tomaselli, 'Moral Philosophy and Population Questions in Eighteenth Century Europe', *Population and Development Review*, 14 (1988), p. 7.
[129] *Essays*, 638.

Robert Wallace, who had presented the discourse for debate at the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh in 1745.[130] Wallace published the work as *A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind in Antient and Modern Times* in 1753, not least because of the attention Hume's essay had directed to the subject.[131] In the letter to John Clephane, Hume also identified Vossius and Montesquieu as his targets.[132] Vossius had argued in 1685 that the population and area of Rome were vastly superior to that of modern Paris and London.[133] Montesquieu had also argued in favour of the superiority of the ancients in the *Lettres Persanes* (1721) and the *Spirit of the Laws*.[134] Hume thought both had 'exaggerate[d] that affair infinitely.' Although some elements of the argument seem to refer directly to Montesquieu—Hume's rejection of physical causes as the source of a supposed decline of the planet looks like a reference to the *Persian Letters*—the main target seems to have been Wallace's early draft.[135] The target became apparent in the 1753-1754 edition of the *Essays*, when Hume identified Wallace's now published *Dissertation* in a footnote to the title. The same footnote also insisted Hume positioned himself 'on the sceptical side.'[136] In the face of the corrections and counterarguments offered by Wallace (which included a 168-page appendix dedicated exclusively to 'Populousness'), Hume reaffirmed his original stance stated

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[130] David Hume, *New Letters of David Hume*, eds. R. Klibansky and Ernest Campbell Mossner (Oxford, 1954), p. 29, footnote 2.

[131] Robert Wallace, *A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind in antient and modern Times: in which The superior Populousness of Antiquity is maintained. With An Appendix, Containing Additional Observations the same Subject, And Some Remarks on Mr. Hume's Political Discourse, Of the Populousness of Antient Nations* (Edinburgh, 1753), Advertisement. On Hume's relationship to Wallace, see Mossner, *The life of David Hume*, pp. 260–268. Despite their intellectual disagreements, Hume and Wallace maintained an amicable relationship. In 1751, Hume remarked to Wallace 'Why cannot all the World entertain different Opinions about any Subject, as amicably as we do?', see Hume to Robert Wallace, 22 September 1751, in Hume, *New Letters of David Hume*, p. 30.

[132] Hume to John Clephane, 18 April 1750, in Hume, *Letters* vol. 1, p. 140.

[133] Isaac Vossius, 'De Antiquae Romae Magnitudine' in *Variarum Observatorium Liber* (London, 1685).

[134] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, pp. 437–440; Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *Persian letters*, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford, 2008), p. 150.

[135] On physical causes in this essay, see *Essays*, 377-380. On the role of Montesquieu in the Hume-Wallace debate, see Sher, 'From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue and Commerce', pp. 383–388. Box and Silverthorne, 'The "Most Curious & Important of All Questions of Erudition"', p. 227, suggest Wallace's early draft, not Montesquieu, was the main foil to 'Populousness'.

[136] *Essays* 639.

in the letter to John Clephane: he was merely 'starting some doubts, and scruples, and difficulties, sufficient to make us suspend our judgment on that head.'[137] Hume justified his sceptical position with the uncertainty of population numbers. If it was not possible to know with certainty the population of modern European countries, sometimes even cities, 'how can we pretend to calculate those of ancient cities and states, where historians have left us such imperfect traces?'[138]

Hume's sceptical stance was crucial to the structure of the essay. As he proceeded to explain, the essay would 'intermingle the enquiry concerning *causes* with that concerning *facts*.' The essay would open with the enquiry concerning causes, which would 'consider whether it be probable, from what we know of the situation of society in both periods, that antiquity must have been more populous.' Then it would move on to the facts and ask 'whether in reality it was so.'[139] The enquiry concerning causes can be read as a continuation of the main thread of the *Political Discourses*. It attempted to establish how the relevant practices and institutions of ancient societies worked to limit population growth in classical antiquity, with occasional discussion of some modern practices and institutions. As mentioned above, the next chapter will cover the topic at length. For now, it is sufficient to mention that Hume divided his enquiry concerning causes into two parts, the first covering the 'domestic œconomy' of the ancients and the second focusing on the 'political situation' of the period. The first part described at length the extension and inhumanity of ancient slavery. Against the notion that ancient slavery was less violent than modern Atlantic slavery (and thus more favourable to the growth of the enslaved population), Hume paraded the inhumanity of the former as described by ancient sources, comparing it to the management of cattle.[140] The second part focused on the politics of ancient commonwealths. It described the frequent bloodbaths involved in ancient faction politics, its never-ending

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[137] Hume to John Clephane, 18 April 1750, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 140.
[138] *Essays* 381.
[139] *Ibid.*
[140] *Essays* 383-398.

and unruly wars, and the lack of commerce and manufacturing necessary to sustain a large population.[141]

Hume concluded the enquiry concerning causes favouring the moderns: the disadvantages of ancient societies 'rather favour the opposite opinion to that which commonly prevails with regard to this subject.'[142] However, reasoning concerning causes had no effect against 'matters of fact'. 'All our preceding reasonings, I acknowledge to be mere trifling, or at least, small skirmishes and frivolous rencounters, which decide nothing,' Hume claimed.[143] Unfortunately, however, the main battle was plagued by uncertainty, and the result would be indecisive if the 'facts' alone were considered. What followed was a systematic reappraisal of numbers given by ancient sources, particularly about the population of the cities of Athens and Rome.[144] Hume's approach included some traditional elements of source criticism, such as rejecting the manuscript of Pliny's *Natural History* Vossius had employed in his estimation of the physical size of Rome in favour of a different manuscript.[145] It also included extensive cross-referencing between sources, checking the compatibility between the numbers or facts given by each.

However, the enquiry concerning causes continued into the enquiry concerning facts. In some cases, such as the contestation of Athenaeus' claim that the population of Athens was greater than 400,000, the very fact that Hume chose to contest the claim was derived from his prior notion that such a number was internally improbable, not that the source was untrustworthy in some external aspect. Wallace, in contrast, simply

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[141] *Essays* 400-421.
[142] *Essays* 421.
[143] *Essays* 421. Box and Silverthorne, 'The "Most Curious & Important of All Questions of Erudition"', pp. 231–232, rightly draw attention to the fact that Hume's usage here is at odds with his epistemological works. The probable, causal reasoning, opposed to 'matters of facts' here, bears no correspondence to Hume's opposition between demonstrative and probable reasoning in his philosophical works.
[144] *Essays*, 422-464.
[145] *Essays*, 438 n. 204.

accepts the claim at face value. It did not sound improbable to him.[146] In other circumstances, Hume used textual evidence to infer causal connections that would make the inflation of population numbers evident. Still in the discussion about Athens, Hume invoked the absence of slave rebellions as an argument against the supposed population of slaves in that city. He argued that a proportion of twenty slaves to one freeman would have made it easy for slaves to rebel, noticing that a much smaller proportion in modern European colonies was sufficient to 'oblige' Europeans 'to exercise a rigorous military government over the negroes.'[147] Drawing on a passage from Juvenal quoted by Dubos in the *Reflexions*—in the very chapter where Dubos argued that climatic changes were responsible for the rise and decline of genius—Hume argued that the climate of ancient Europe was colder than in the modern period.[148] Unlike Dubos, Hume connected the climatic effect to a moral cause: the relative warmth of modern Europe was caused by the extensive cultivation of the soil, which reduced the extension of woods and exposed the soil to more sunlight.[149]

In the extension of 'causes' into the domain of facts we can see how Hume's approach to historical evidence depended on the general causes established by the science of human nature, in particular the science of politics and the complex array of general causes that he had been developing in the *Essays*. We can also observe Hume's proximity to Fréret in the actual practice of historical criticism.[150]

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[146] For Hume, see *Essays*, 428. For Wallace, see Wallace, *Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind*, pp. 57–58. Box and Silverthorne, 'The "Most Curious & Important of All Questions of Erudition"', p. 239, draw attention to this difference.

[147] *Essays* 429.

[148] *Essays* 448-449. Mazza and Mori, '"Loose Bits of Paper" and "Uncorrect Thoughts"', p. 27, notice that Hume's version of the Juvenal quote did not include an extension of the same passage by Dubos included in the 1733 edition, which suggest, along with the spelling of Dubos name in the memoranda noted above, that Hume became acquainted with the *Réflexions Critiques* before that date.

[149] *Essays* 451. Hume could not have known that he was living at the end of the Little Ice Age. Hume added a few pages later that the colder climate registered by ancient Roman sources could also be the consequence of cold winds coming from the sparsely populated areas of central Europe, rather than the lack of cultivation of land (and thus smaller population) in Italy itself, see *Essays*, 457. Hume also refers to Dubos here.

[150] Even those who have noted the proximity between Fréret and Hume, such as David Wootton, 'David Hume: "The Historian"', in David Fate Norton and Jacqueline Anne Taylor, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Hume* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 456, have not made this particular connection.

The *kind* of uncertainty associated with ancient sources gave Hume the liberty to extend causes into the domain of facts. He remarked that numbers are more easily corrupted in ancient manuscripts. Words are more resilient because they are embedded in a grammatical context, so an alteration of one word is more easily perceived in the process of transmission.[151] However, he also identified 'more candour and sincerity in ancient historians, but less exactness and care, than in the moderns.'[152] He limited this distinction to the sources that came after 'the first page of THUCYDIDES,' which was in his opinion 'the commencement of real history. All the preceding narrations are so intermixed with fable, that philosophers ought to abandon them, in a great measure, to the embellishment of poets and orators.'[153] Although Hume did not explain where the candour of post-Thucydidean ancient historians came from, he contrasted them with modern historians, whose affiliation to 'speculative factions' made them regard the impartial treatment of opponents as a vice.[154] However, since books had become more common in the modern era, those factional historians had to be careful with their manipulation of evidence. Ancient historians, in contrast, often seemed to be unaware of each other's productions. That combination of the absence of factions of principle and the lack of access to other historical works in the ancient world created a large space

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[151] *Essays* 421.

[152] *Essays* 422 n. 123.

[153] *Essays* 422. We must notice the similarity between Hume's division of historical and fabulous ages and that of Fontenelle and the academicians. On the issue of periodization and the 'fabulous' period, see Grell, *Le Dix-Huitième Siècle*, vol. 1, p. 425, and Grell, 'La Querelle Homérique et ses Incidences sur la Connaissance Historique', p. 28. The question about the historical certainty of fabulous accounts would come up again in the Ossian controversy and in Hume's treatment of pre-Roman British history, as we will see below.

[154] We must bear in mind that Hume regarded political divisions due to 'speculative' matters as a particularly pernicious and *modern* phenomenon (*Essays*, 61). Opposition of interests, as the opposition between families in the Roman Republic, could actually be conducive to historical truth, since one tended to check the other, as we have seen in the footnote to 'Of the Balance of Power' that opens this chapter. Baumstark, 'David Hume', p. 91, notices the importance of the opposition of interests but does not distinguish between it and the characteristically modern form of opposition that might not be so conducive to historical truth. Indeed, a couple of months before his death, Hume wrote to Edward Gibbon expressing surprise that the latter's *Decline and Fall* was written by an Englishman: 'as it seems to me that your Countrymen, for almost a whole Generation, have given themselves up to barbarous and absurd Faction, and have totally neglected all polite Letters, I no longer expected any valuable Production ever to come from them,' see Hume to Edward Gibbon, 18 March 1776, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 310.

for *modern* critical historians to operate. Hume's sources retain some authority *despite* their faults and limitations. That Livy was 'superficial', that Plutarch at times could be as superstitious as Livy or Herodotus, or yet that Xenophon and Demosthenes constantly contradicted Diodorus Siculus, none of those facts robbed the classical sources of authority.[155] Like Fréret, Hume was not interested in rejecting ancient sources because of their faults. Their faults, superstitions, and exaggerations begged for interpretation, not a guilty/not-guilty judgment. In a move similar to Fréret's, Hume applied himself to the task of making sense of sources that he deemed incorrect but trustworthy. Fréret had shown that ancient historians could be employed to advantage despite their superstition and inaccuracy: even Xenophon's '*roman de vertu*' could become a source for geographical information if the historian knew how to use it. In a similar move, Hume retained the sources because he, as a historian, could extract meaning from them if they were put together and read against the grain.

It is not surprising then that 'Populousness' started with the enquiry concerning causes, not facts. It was not, as has been suggested, a 'backward' choice.[156] In the face of the general human inclination to truthfulness (in the absence of 'speculative' opinions), a thorough knowledge of the general causes at work is necessary to question the numbers in the first place. How would Hume question Athenaeus' numbers without first having shown by means of causal analysis that that many slaves could not possibly be maintained in Athens? And what is Hume's decision about the candidness of ancient historians, if not a conclusion derived from his own understanding of the operations of metaphysical beliefs (political or religious, for that matter) in the formation of factions? As Hume writes in a paragraph removed in the 1760 edition,

> The critical art may very justly be suspected of temerity, when it pretends to correct or dispute the plain testimony of ancient historians by any probable or analogical reasonings: Yet the licence of authors upon all subjects, particularly with regard to numbers, is so great, that we ought still to retain

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[155] On Livy, see *Essays* 634. On Plutarch and superstition, see *Essays* 463 n. 278. On Diodorus Siculus, see *Essays* 421 n. 123.
[156] Box and Silverthorne, 'The "Most Curious & Important of All Questions of Erudition"', p. 246.

a kind of doubt or reserve, whenever the facts advanced depart in the least from the common bounds of nature and experience.[157]

The critical art ought to retain its autonomy from the plain testimony of sources when their statements depart from what experience suggests. Hume is here echoing the method advanced by eighteenth-century erudite historians, as we learned in chapter two.[158] Critique is not an assessment of the authority or moral worth of the source; it is primarily an assessment of what the source states in terms of 'the common bounds of nature and experience'. The former remained an element of historical critique—the task is much simpler when the candour of the source can be accepted—but it is the latter the forms the core business of the critical historian.

Hume's order of investigation thus does not make 'more sense as rhetoric than logic.'[159] There was, to be sure, a lot of 'rhetoric' going on in 'Populousness'—despite Hume's claim that 'our present business is only to consider the influence of slavery on the populousness of a state', it was clear that the extensive exposition of the inhumanity of ancient slavery served a more than strictly critical historical purpose. Nevertheless, the economy of the essay was not a rhetorical move. It was a first-rate display of the new, eighteenth-century form of historical criticism developed at the *Académie des Inscriptions* thirty years earlier. The philosophical approach to history could take the form of historical criticism as well as the narrative form it would take in Hume's *History of England*. The method, not the genre, is philosophical.

The method we observe in 'Populousness' is an extended version of the method encapsulated in the footnote to 'Of the Balance of Power' that opens this chapter. In the footnote, Hume acknowledged the necessity of some scepticism concerning the early history of Rome, particularly where numbers might be exaggerated. But the fact that Machiavelli could produce solid political theory solely based on Livy's account

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[157] *Essays* 641.
[158] Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 86–88, notices the similarity of this passage to the arguments of William Wotton against William Temple in the 'Battle of the Books'. Wotton, a Modern, favoured modern critique against Temple's neoclassic respect for the authority of classical historians. The Battle of the Books inverted the poles of the French *querelle*, where erudite historians tended to lean Ancient against the rationalist disdain for history present in parts of the Modern camp.
[159] Box and Silverthorne, 'The "Most Curious & Important of All Questions of Erudition"', p. 246.

showed there was 'some air of truth and probability' in the latter's account. The events were 'well proportion'd to their causes,' and nothing proves that better than the fact that the generalizations produced from them are consistent with our general knowledge of politics. It is the knowledge of general causes, in that case produced by Machiavelli, that bestows certainty upon the source. Corrections to the ancient sources were in order, of course, but the modern critic had to be careful not to throw the baby out with the water. Pouilly, in contrast, argued for precisely the opposite during the debates at the *Académie des Inscriptions*: modern thinkers had to reject Machiavelli's theories *because* they were based on the dubious evidence provided by Livy.[160]

As in 'Of Miracles', the primacy of the causal background grows as evidence becomes weaker (and it cannot be emphasised enough that weaker means more improbable, but not necessarily scarcer). Although Hume's response to the publication of James Macpherson's Ossian poems falls outside of the temporal scope of this thesis, it is worth considering it because it does more than bring home some of the arguments made here about the primacy of the causal background over the evidence and the primacy of internal over external aspects of historical evidence. It also displayed Hume's treatment of evidence outside of the realm of 'real history'.[161]

James Macpherson published anonymously the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Galic or Erse Language* in 1760 with an anonymous preface by Hume's friend Hugh Blair. The collection was supposedly based on poems that survived in Scottish songs and oral tradition. Macpherson published two additional epic poems in 1762 and 1763, *Fingal* and *Temora*, supposedly written by the Gaelic poet Ossian and translated by himself. A compilation of *The Works of Ossian* appeared in 1765 with a *Critical Dissertation* and an appendix in which Blair defended the aesthetic merit and provided testimony of the

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[160] De Pouilly, 'Discours sur l'Incertitude…', MAI 6.14 note A (1722).
[161] Although Hume defined 'real history' as the historiography (and source material) that came after Thucydides, 'fabulous history' was not a strictly temporal division (again, as was the case with Fontenelle and Fréret): within the Mediterranean context, Thucydides defined the real/fabulous history division, but in other geographical contexts the transition from fable to history came much later.

authenticity of the poems.[162] Hume's opinion about Macpherson, the works, and their authenticity shifted dramatically over the period between the publication of the *Fragments* and the final years of his life.[163] He initially embraced the *Fragments*, commenting on their similarity to traditional Scottish songs and buttressing their authenticity and antiquity.[164] By the publication of *The Works of Ossian* in 1765, Hume had already become sceptical of the antiquity, if not the authenticity of the poems. At some point between 1773 and his death in 1776, Hume wrote but did not publish an essay titled 'Of the Poems of Ossian' with a scathing critique of the authenticity, antiquity, and even the literary merit of Macpherson's productions.

Already in the immediate aftermath of the publication of the *Fragments*, Hume stated in a letter to Sir David Dalrymple that the 'antiquity [of the poems] is a point which must be ascertained by reasoning.'[165] He noticed that some of the pieces presented by Macpherson seemed 'to be the work of a more cultivated age,' since it was unlikely that such 'regular' productions could have been composed by an 'uncivilized people' in a 'rough climate'. Uncivilized peoples such as the Hebrews or Arabians produced 'barbarous poetry', not that kind of regular poetry.[166] In 1763, Hume still held to the available external evidence but urged Hugh Blair to present further external evidence—'not arguments, but testimonies'.[167] In two letters to Hugh Blair, Hume warned him that the beauty of the poem—which was 'not so much to the general taste'—would not be sufficient to support Macpherson's claims.[168] The claim that the poems, originating in a barbarous society, withstood fourteen centuries of oral transmission without corruption posed a serious threat to their authenticity. And there were

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[162] For a review of the publication history and the Ossian affair, see Howard Gaskill, ed., *Ossian Revisited* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 1–18.

[163] For an account of Hume's remarks and their probable causes, see David Raynor, 'Ossian and Hume', in Howard Gaskill, ed., *Ossian revisited* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 147–163.

[164] See Hume to David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, 16 August 1760, in Hume, *Letters* vol. 1, pp. 328-331.

[165] *Id.,* p. 329.

[166] *Id.*, p. 330.

[167] Hume to Hugh Blair, 19 September 1763, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 399-400. See also Hume to Hugh Blair, December 1763, vol. 1, pp. 418-421, where Hume approved of Blair's plans to publish supporting external evidence.

[168] Hume to Hugh Blair, 19 September 1763, *id*, p. 399.

even 'internal reasons' against the poem, 'particularly from the manners.'[169] Still in 1765, Hume reassured Blair that 'my Scepticism extends no farther, nor ever did, than with regard to the extreme Antiquity of those Poems, and it is no more than Scepticism.'[170]

In the unpublished essay, Hume put together the sceptical arguments he had been accumulating since the publication of the poems.[171] Although the essay repeated Hume's concerns with external evidence, the internal aspect of the poems took the centre of the stage. Again, Hume questioned the 'insipid correctness, and regularity, and uniformity' of the poems, which showed an author incapable of imagining how uncivilized nations compose their artistic productions.[172] The manners depicted in the poems were still more striking: 'manners are the only circumstance which a rude people cannot falsify, because they have no notion of any manners beside their own.'[173] However, the manners depicted by Macpherson were entirely at odds with what anyone could know about or expect from third-century Gaelic culture. The poems were marked by the 'affected generosity and gallantry of chivalry,' which belonged to a much later period of European history. Homer and Virgil had no scruples portraying their heroes committing the grossest immoralities—to the dismay of some modern readers, as we learned in chapter two.[174] Why were such scruples found in a similarly barbarous production? The supremacy of courage and the inferiority of women, which are expected among barbarian societies, were nowhere to be found.[175] Even the state of the arts 'is totally incompatible with the age assigned to them [the poems],' with a degree of technological development entirely at odds with barbarous societies.[176] The consistency of genealogies and other details contrasted with all other histories of barbarous peoples (even early Roman and Greek histories), which are a 'heap of fiction

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[169] *Ibid.*
[170] Hume to Hugh Blair, 23 August 1765, in *id.*, p. *516.*
[171] The essay is reproduced in David Hume, *David Hume: Philosophical Historian*, eds. David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, 1965), pp. 389–400.
[172] *Id.,* p. 391.
[173] *Id.,* p. 394.
[174] *Id.,* p. 392.
[175] *Id.,* p. 393.
[176] *Id.,* p. 394.

and absurdity.'[177] However, the worse condemnation came from the total absence of religion and the supernatural in the poems. Rude peoples cannot falsify their manners, but they will always falsify everything else: they relish compositions that 'let loose their imagination, and violate the course of nature, in every other particular.'[178] Macpherson's characters were 'more complete atheists than ever were bred in the school of Epicurus.'[179] There were no monsters, giants, magic, and incredible deeds. 'Every transaction is conformable to familiar experience, and scarcely even deserves the name of wonderful.'[180] 'In Ossian, nature is violated, where alone she ought to have been preserved; is preserved where alone she ought to have been violated.'[181] Thus, Hume concluded, the Ossian poems, 'if you pardon the antithesis, are the most unnatural, merely because they are natural.'[182]

Even the external evidence Hugh Blair had provided could not overturn such gross discrepancies with the expected content of a barbarous production from an uncivilized nation. Hume compared the evidence favouring the Ossian poems to that in favour of the miracles of the Abbé Pâris, which we discussed earlier in this chapter. Scots, in particular those from the Highlands, were not unbiased witnesses. If anything, Hume claimed, 'the miracle is greater, but not the evidence, with regard to the authenticity of Ossian.' In such cases, piling up external evidence would not do—'a fact, incredible in itself, acquires not the smallest accession of probability by the accumulation of testimony.'[183] Although Hume claimed that external evidence could settle the matter, it is clear from his exposition that it is always the internal element that establishes the parameter against which external evidence would be judged. From 'Of Miracles' to 'Of the Ossian Poems', the internal probability of the report defined belief.

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[177] *Id.,* p. 396-397.
[178] *Id.,* p. 394.
[179] *Ibid.*
[180] *Id.* p. 393.
[181] *Id.* p. 394.
[182] *Id.* p. 396.
[183] *Id.* p. 400. As Raynor notices, Hume was probably including his earlier support in the category of biased confirmation of the poems, see Raynor, 'Ossian and Hume', p. 160.

However, 'Of the Ossian Poems' went further in connecting the state of manners that defines the internal probability of historical evidence to the production of the source itself and, therefore, to the appraisal of its external validity. A source originating from the circumstances Macpherson attributed to the poems was expected to be unreliable about the actions it described. Like Fontenelle, Hume believed the reliability of sources evolved in line with the cultural development of their creators. Hume was keenly aware of the paradox: a trustworthy source from the fabulous (or, if we will, the pre-Thucydidean) eras was precisely a source that could not be trusted about its details. The critical historian's business was to extract whatever element of truth that remained in his untruthful sources. As Hume put it in his account of the feats of Joan of Arc in the *History of England*:

> It is the business of history to distinguish between the *miraculous* and the *marvellous*, to reject the first in all narrations merely profane and human, to doubt the second, and when obliged by unquestionable testimony, as in the present case, to admit of something extraordinary, to receive as little of it as is consistent with the known facts and circumstances.[184]

In the case of classical historians, their circumstances meant only a deflation of the numbers was necessitated. Their situation meant that some sound political theory could even assure us of the truth of much of the political revolutions of the Roman republic detailed in Livy and other sources. In the case of Joan of Arc, Hume went on to expunge the miraculous accounts of divine intervention and to offer an account of how the marvellous situation of a young girl leading the French army to victory could be possible (Hume's answer: male French generals were behind her actions).[185]

The problem with the Ossian poems was that Macpherson's lack of imagination had led him to do the wrong job: as a translator, one would expect him to merely translate into English a document (or a collation of documents) expressing the views of a third-century Gaelic poet. Such sources are expected to be full of improbable

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[184] David Hume, *The history of England: from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (6 vols, Indianapolis, 1983), vol. 2, p. 398.
[185] It is worth noticing that the difference of critical work that must be applied to real and fabulous history is a matter of degree, not kind. Classical sources still necessitated some reworking, though not as deep as that required by medieval or other barbarous sources.

events. But he ended up doing some historical criticism by mistake. He unwittingly removed all superstition and belief in supernatural events from his 'source'. In any case, he seemed to ignore basic elements about the manners of barbarian peoples. For someone intent on forging an ancient epic poem, he should have known general causes better.

In conclusion, in 'Of Miracles', 'Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations, and 'Of the Poems of Ossian' (and one could add still more examples here, as the brief mention of the story of Joan of Arc suggests), the key point is that there was a background set of 'general causes', which established the parameters against which historical evidence (and even historical fiction, if one was interested in creating an epic in an ancient Gaelic setting) had to be judged. Further, that background often included the general causes determining the production of testimonies and evidence itself. Continuing the line that had begun with Fontenelle's '*histoire de l'histoire*' and was present in Fréret, Hume embedded the 'external' assessment of the source within the 'internal' aspect. What is reported gives the historian an understanding of the nature of the source itself. The 'audacity' of the historian, who extracted information from the source regardless of its original purpose and canonical authority, was grounded on her confidence in the science of human nature.

The background of general causes was derived, in the last instance, from the same experience it judged—indeed, generalisations about experience cannot be produced otherwise, given that even the present experience of others was at least one testimony removed from ourselves. However, we have seen that that background of general causes, which the academicians called the *fond de l'histoire*, was more than a bunch of loose causal reasonings about human behaviour derived from common experience. Although in the last instance it is always experience judging experience, the

'experience' that serves as the parameter is that collected from the sources and systematised by the historian.[186] The background of general causes was a construction made by the historian that used well established causal relations to determine the general aspects of the practices, institutions, and customs of the historical situation at hand. In that sense, the *fond de l'histoire* is not the same as the 'common course of the world.' As an example, in answering a question about the population of the ancient nations, the science of human nature is useful in providing some causal relations such as 'humans tend to form families and have more children if means of subsistence are available' or that 'in the absence of a convention, humans with partial affections will not respect the possessions of a person they do not know'. The background of general causes relevant to that question included the identification of general economic conditions such as slavery, the kind of political institutions, or social and moral practices concerning the treatment of slaves or women. Essays such as 'Rise and Progress' or 'Of Commerce' were structured in terms of first identifying a causal statement ('Republics give rise to laws and then to the arts and sciences' or 'the greatness of the state and the happiness of the subject are inseparable with regard to commerce'), but then gave accounts of how that causal relation had arisen, progressed, and ceased to be in history. As we saw in section two, in the period analysed here, Hume gradually incorporated more complexity into his analysis: he started with mostly political general causes, then gradually incorporated social and economic aspects.

We have seen in this chapter that, in Hume's case, the background of general causes grew in importance compared to the way the academicians had used it. De Pouilly complained that political theorists like Machiavelli were making theories based on shaky experience. Fréret and Sallier argued that the historian had to draw out the 'connections' to construct the *fond* that bestowed certainty on the particulars. Hume moved further: he made the internal side completely engulf the external in 'Of Miracles' and put the enquiry concerning causes before enquiry concerning facts in

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[186] Norton, 'History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought', pp. xlvi–xlix, argues the circularity of experience judging experience is the inevitable consequence of Hume's philosophy. However, he does not distinguish between history and common experience, as I have already noticed.

'Populousness'. Indeed, in the *Essays,* Hume developed a history *of* general causes: a historical account, fragmentary as it was, of practices, institutions, and customs. In this chapter, we focused on the delimitation of general causes; next, we will discuss the structure Hume was proposing.

Again, that Hume advanced in relation to the position of the academicians of the 1720s and 1730s should not be regarded as the philosopher dispensing with erudition (and the *érudits*). Hume knew his share of the erudition; he could execute sound historical criticism as much as Fréret could philosophise about his collations of ancient religions. Indeed, Hume registered his displeasure with fellow philosophical historians who did not know how to do the more tedious aspect of the trade—of Voltaire, for instance, he said 'I know that author cannot be depended upon with regard to Facts; but his general Views are sometimes sound, & always entertaining.'[187] Of Montesquieu, he had a different opinion: unlike most of the readers of the *Spirit of the Laws*, Hume was drawn not only to the grand theories about physical causes or the British constitution but also to the detail of the workings of French and Scottish courts of appeal, as their correspondence attests.[188]

In any case, the history of general causes of the *Essays* and the *Political Discourses* was not Hume's first statement about a pattern of historical development. Those works presented Hume's 'historical structure' in terms that mixed philosophical (that is, causal) statements with accounts of how institutions and practices embodying those causal relations existed and evolved in real history. Before them, Book III of the *Treatise* had already presented an account of the transition from rude to civilized societies detached from history. The transition from Book III of the *Treatise* to the history of general causes is the object of the next chapter.

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[187] Hume to Gilbert Elliot, Lord Minto, 1 May 1760, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 326.
[188] Hume to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 133-138. Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', pp. 115–116, notices how the final erudite chapters of the *Spirit of the Laws* caught Hume's attention.

FROM TIME TO HISTORY: HUME'S ANCIENTS AND MODERNS

Looking back at Adam Smith's life, Dugald Stewart, a former student of Smith, first defined as '*Theoretical* or *Conjectural* history' a particular kind of 'philosophical investigation' that had become prevalent in the Scottish Enlightenment, which he compared to the French '*histoire raisonnée*'. That kind of investigation attempted to narrate the origins and development of language, a particular art or science or a political institution.[1] Since the origins of those institutions often traced back to the earliest ages of human history from which very little evidence remained, 'we are under a necessity of supplying the place of fact by conjecture; […] when we cannot know the process by which an event *has been* produced, it is often of importance to be able to show how it *may have been* produced by natural causes.'[2] Those conjectures were produced 'from the known principles of human nature' combined with the circumstances of humankind in a particular situation. Some bits of information could be gleaned from 'the detached facts which travels and voyages afford us,' which allowed the enquirer to transpose the state of current 'rude' societies onto that of past rude societies.[3] From that combination of the principles of human nature, some bits of evidence about rude societies, and 'circumstances', the philosopher could extrapolate a whole conjectural history. On the one side, that kind of investigation provided a check to that 'indolent philosophy', which referred to a miracle whenever it could not explain moral or natural phenomena.[4] On the other side, since Montesquieu began to apply the method to the study of 'modes of government', it had replaced a previous form of historical enquiry that 'contented [itself] with an historical statement of facts, and with a vague reference of laws to the wisdom of particular legislators.'[5] Stewart identified a series of works

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[1] Stewart, 'An Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, L. L. D.', p. 293.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Id.,* p. 294.

in the Scottish Enlightenment with the conjectural method: Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, Book III of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Lord Kames' *Historical Law Tracts* (1758), and John Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771).[6] Of the *Wealth of Nations,* Stewart affirmed that its 'theoretical delineation […] of the natural progress of opulence in a country' was the opposite of what had *actually* happened in Europe.

Stewart's description of the Scottish historical method is opportune because it shows the difficulty of disentangling philosophy and history in the Scottish Enlightenment. As Marušić argues, it pulls in multiple, conflicting directions.[7] According to Stewart's definition, conjectural history is a kind of history, in the sense that it is meant to supply by conjecture what we do not know from direct evidence. It also refers to that kind of history of general causes discussed in the last chapter. Further complicating the definition, it is also a kind of 'theoretical' or philosophical enquiry that can conclude that the 'natural' process (what 'may have been') is the opposite of what actually was (and which is fully known), as is the case of Book III of the Wealth of Nations.[8]

Indeed, current scholars have avoided Stewart's all-encompassing definition, defining conjectural history as a purely philosophical method. Roger Emerson defines conjectural history as 'any rational or naturalistic account of the origins and development of institutions, beliefs or practices not based on documents or copies of documents or other artifacts contemporary (or thought to be contemporary) with the subjects studied.'[9] Malherbe, discussing the *Natural History of Religion*, suggests against

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[6] *Id*, pp. 294-295.
[7] Jennifer Marušić, 'Dugald Stewart on Conjectural History and Human Nature', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 15 (September 2017), p. 262.
[8] On the conflicts between the 'natural' progress of opulence and the actual development of commerce in Europe (the only occasion where the progress of opulence had reached the last stage of Smith's account of the natural progress), see Paul Bowles, 'Adam Smith and the "Natural Progress of Opulence"', *Economica*, 53 (1986), pp. 109–118, and Dimitrios I. Halikias, 'Adam Smith on the Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Commercial Society', *History of Political Thought*, 41 (2020), pp. 622–647.
[9] Roger L. Emerson, 'Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers', *Historical Papers*, 19 (1984), p. 65.

Dugald Stewart that conjectural history is not a historical '*faute de mieux*' but rather an exposition of the theoretical principles that govern the whole historical evolution of the institution in question.[10] Santos Castro defines it as 'a form of anatomy of the passions that adopts a historical, developmental perspective.'[11] In that sense, conjectural history is neither a method of filling the gaps of history nor a history of general causes, but only a temporalized philosophical account of the unfolding of a particular passion or institution, not necessarily connected to any definite historical process. Hume and the Scots adopted each of those three approaches for different purposes.[12]

With this narrower definition, it becomes clear that there are various 'philosophical' approaches to history, which may be more or less 'philosophical' or 'historical'.[13] Between a pure 'science of human nature' and the mere listing of past facts, there are a variety of approaches that use different degrees of philosophical generalizations and impress different degrees of temporalization (change over time) and historicity (relation to determinate historical events). From temporalized or developmental theories only loosely tied to any determinate historical event to histories of general causes and the articulation of a historical background to the assessment of individual sources, eighteenth-century historians and philosophers practised a combination of historicizing philosophies and philosophical histories. If Dugald Stewart's definition

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[10] Michel Malherbe, 'Hume's Natural History of Religion', *Hume Studies*, 21 (1995), p. 268.

[11] Juan Samuel Santos Castro, 'Hume and Conjectural History', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 15 (June 2017), p. 169. However, Santos Castro still extends the label of conjectural history to the histories of general causes Hume presented in the *Essays* and the *Political Discourses*, see the original doctoral thesis, Juan S Santos Castro, 'The Historical Convergence of Happiness and Virtue: A Reading of Hume's Theory of Moral Motivation' (unpublished thesis, University of Alberta, 2015).

[12] Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 6–7, argues that Scottish thinkers would most likely reject a definition of their works as attempting to merely supply by conjecture what their accounts lacked in historical evidence. Indeed, in most cases they were keenly aware that their conjectural histories were distinct from attempts to present a factual history. For instance, Hume was 'wilfully unscholarly' in the very *Natural History of Religion* mentioned by Stewart, as Serjeantson, 'David Hume's Natural History of Religion (1757) and the End of Modern Eusebianism', p. 281, argues: he knew the facts and the erudite debates but chose a different genre in which to present his argument.

[13] Phillips, *Society and sentiment*, p. 51, argues 'the essence of philosophical history is the desire to move toward more general truths and systematic methods in the study of history.' His definition of 'conjectural history' is framed in terms of departure from the neoclassical canon of narrative history, see p. 171. On the neoclassical rules of composition of traditional narrative histories in the first half of the eighteenth century, see Philip Stephen Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture: from Clarendon to Hume* (1996).

reminds us of the complexities of eighteenth-century Scottish (or perhaps European) philosophical-historical thought, the more recent and narrower definition may allow us to understand it better.

This chapter reconstructs the development of the structure/narrative side of Hume's historical thought as a transition between a temporalized but unhistorical conjectural history of morals and the philosophical history of general causes, whose form and method of construction we learned about in the previous chapter. Book III *Treatise* set the transition from a 'rude' to a 'civilized' state of society as the basic structure of historical development. That account, as has been extensively discussed in the last fifty years of literature, is situated in an intersection between the natural jurisprudence tradition of Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf and the conflict between neo-Epicurean and neo-Stoic moral philosophies represented in the early eighteenth century by Bernard Mandeville and Francis Hutcheson.[14] The *Treatise* was not in any way meant to be a historical work, and its narrative established an uneasy relationship with actual history: Hume identifies the 'rude' end of the narrative with the infancy of society and the civilized end with 'us' who have well-defined property rights protected by a government and make moral judgements from the general point of view. The central claim of this chapter is that over the next twelve years, Hume *reframed* the unhistorical rude-they/civilized-us narrative of the *Treatise* in terms of 'real history', that is, post-Thucydidean history.

The historical version of that narrative was framed in terms of an ancient-modern division. By 1752, the historical structure underlying Hume's thought was framed as rude-they-ancient/civilized-us-modern. The dislocation of the ancients to the rude-they pole was tied to a reworking of basic elements of established political, economic, and social theory. The chapter thus reconstructs how Hume's interventions in various debates of his period gradually dislocated the place of classical antiquity, distancing ancients and moderns. The focus of the chapter is the articulation of the notion of

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[14] See section one below.

modern civilized monarchies. Hume gradually disconnected liberty from republics (especially classical republics), arguing instead that it resulted from a historical process taking place even in absolute monarchies. The central element of that process was luxury and the expansion of commerce it fostered, which Hume explored in the *Political Discourses*. The emphasis on luxury and commerce allowed Hume to place classical antiquity firmly in the rude-they camp, even if it was an exceptional instance within that camp—with its rustic freedom and heroic virtues (the latter will be explored in the next chapter).

Now, *that* Hume's social, political, and economic thought is structured as a rejection of theories that proposed a return to classical antiquity is well-known. Hume is well understood to be part of a defence of modern commercial societies against the attacks of civic humanist, who criticized the primacy of wealth over virtue and the rejection of the independent freeholder as the bastion of liberty—or the political thinker responsible for adapting civic humanism to the new commercial age, depending on the interpretation.[15] However, there is still a gap in our understanding of Hume's answer to/adaptation of civic humanism. The usual answer has relied on the philosophical contexts of Book III of the *Treatise*: Hume (and other Scottish thinkers such as Adam Smith) as creating their political theory and political economy out of natural jurisprudential and neo-Epicurean moral philosophies.[16] Although those alternatives explain where Hume drew the broad rude-civilized narrative from, they do not fully

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[15] See Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, chap. 14. Pocock, 'Cambridge paradigms and Scotch philosophers: a study of the relations between the civic humanist and the civil jurisprudential interpretation of eighteenth-century social thought', shows how the Cambridge 'civic humanist paradigm' understood Hume as an answer to the British neo-Machiavellian view of the conflict between virtue and commerce. The view is represented in the same volume by John Robertson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition', Nicholas Phillipson, 'Adam Smith as Civic Moralist', and Istvan Hont, 'The "Rich Country-Poor Country" Debate in Scottish Classical Political Economy'. Hont (pp. 272-274) argued Hume transposed the language of civic humanist to the age of international commerce.

[16] Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 360–371, makes the case of Hume's political economy as the Enlightenment improvement on the neo-Epicurean moral philosophies of Bayle and Mandeville. Hont, *Jealousy of trade*, pp. 159–184, presents the Wealth of Nations as adding a fourth commercial stage to Pufendorf's three-stage theory, thus distinguishing between agrarian and commercial societies. Whether Smith is an Epicurean or Stoic thinker is not a matter I need to discuss here. For that question, see Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science* (2003), 68, chap. 6.

explain where he was drawing from in placing classical antiquity in the rude camp. Well before the Cambridge paradigms, Ernst Mossner had given the direction: Hume was, in his view, a third stage of the *querelle* that moved the battle between Ancients and Moderns to the domain of political economy, politics, and demography.[17] However, Mossner's view of the *querelle* was based on an opposition of the Ancients as defenders of classical authority against the modernising Moderns.[18] Pocock later noticed that the Scottish 'Unionist elites' answering civic humanism 'attached themselves to such themes as the quarrel between ancients and moderns.'[19] But it was not until 2020 that Moritz Baumstark drew attention to Hume's use of the *querelle*'s techniques of otherization of classical antique in the 'Dialogue' attached to the second *Enquiry* (which will be discussed in the final chapter).[20] This chapter shows that the dislocation of classical antiquity had begun already in 1741-1742, as Hume began to question the classical origin of many of the positive features of modern societies. Although the last and most significant step did indeed come in 1751-1752, it had begun a decade before that.[21] Not surprisingly, that process occurred in the essays that addressed 'ancient-modern' questions framed in a European context, rather than the narrower British context of many of Hume's political essays. They were also where Hume developed the method of his philosophical history of general causes the most, as we learned in the previous chapter. In extending the period of development of the historical/ancient-modern version of Hume's narrative of the modern back to the early 1740s, I am showing it was the result of a much more thorough engagement with the early eighteenth-century French debates about the nature of the modern discussed in chapter

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[17] Mossner, 'Hume and the Ancient-Modern Controversy, 1725-1752'.

[18] Mossner concluded that 'Cautiously, therefore, and without accepting either the idealization of the ancient world or the perfectionist myth (a point in which he differed from most other Modernists of the later Age of Enlightenment), Hume awarded the verdict to modern civilization,' see p. 153.

[19] Pocock, 'Cambridge paradigms and Scotch philosophers: a study of the relations between the civic humanist and the civil jurisprudential interpretation of eighteenth-century social thought', p. 241.

[20] Baumstark, 'The Biographical Background of the Second Enquiry', pp. 48–55. Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 104–112, explores the same issue, but without mentioning the *querelle*. The *querelle* is mentioned in pp. 76-77.

[21] Andrew S. Cunningham, 'David Hume's Account of Luxury', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 27 (2005), p. 231, observes that Hume's position on luxury—the central element of the great step towards placing classical antiquity in the rude-they pole—also evolved throughout his career.

two. By the time Hume wrote the 'Dialogue' with its references to French polite literature (including Montesquieu), he had been engaging with the French debate for at least a decade in published works (even more if we consider his reading of Dubos probably dated back to the 1730s).

1. THE *TREATISE*'S CONJECTURAL HISTORY OF MORALS

The core of Book III of the *Treatise* is a conjectural history of justice and moral judgement in which Hume explained how human societies develop conventional rules of property ownership and exchange and the ability to judge virtue and vice from a general point of view. The first part of Book III set the meta-ethical delimitations of Hume's moral philosophy: sections one and two show that 'Moral distinctions [are] not deriv'd from reason' and that 'Moral distinctions [are] deriv'd from a moral sense'.[22] Part two, devoted to the artificial virtues, opened with a search for the motive to repay a loan. What makes us think we ought to repay it? The immediate answer, Hume argued, is our 'sense of duty and obligation'. Those reasons, although 'satisfactory to man in his civiliz'd state, and when train'd up according to a certain discipline and education', 'wou'd be rejected as perfectly unintelligible and sophistical' by man 'in his rude and more *natural* condition'.[23] Hume then searched for possible natural motives to repay a loan: private interest, regard to public interest, 'love of mankind, merely as such' or private benevolence.[24] None of those motives could be a universal motive to repay a loan in that natural condition, so he concluded that 'the sense of justice and injustice is not deriv'd from nature, but arises artificially, tho' necessarily from education, and human conventions'.[25] The remainder of part two can be understood as an account of how this sense first arose and, once it was present, how society enforced it and to whom it entrusted the right to do so.

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[22] *Treatise* 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, respectively.
[23] *Treatise* 3.2.1.9.
[24] *Treatise* 3.2.1.10-14.
[25] *Treatise* 3.2.1.17.

The conjectural history of justice referred exclusively to a single passion, the 'interested affection'.[26] Hume denied that any other passion was as problematic to basic human sociability as our 'avidity' of acquiring goods. Vanity should be seen as a social passion; envy and revenge only posed problems at intervals. Only this avidity or our interested affection posed an existential threat to social life itself, which is necessary to basic human subsistence given the mismatch between our needs and our ability to satisfy them by ourselves.[27] The only solution to the problem was the interested affection itself, for no other had sufficient force to contain it. Hume's account of justice was an account of the 'alteration of its direction' through a series of conventions that set the terms of the relation between our interested affection and our external possessions.[28] The conventions explain how property relations were defined and stabilized, how the exchange of property was regulated and how promises became obligatory (thus allowing the exchange of services and absent goods).[29] As the conventions allowed social relations to expand, 'self-interested commerce'—that is, commerce between people who bear no natural affection to each other and who are not constrained by potential local reputational damage—became predominant in society. Magistrates then became necessary to enforce the conventions of justice, a development Hume explained in the subsequent sections of part two, where he also explained who the magistrates are and to what extent people owe allegiance to them.[30]

Thus, Hume's account of justice explained the 'natural obligation of justice', that is, what motivated humans in the 'rude' state of society to adopt property rules, promises and government. In the final paragraphs of 3.2.2, Hume sought to explain why we attach the idea of 'virtue' to justice or, in the terms with which he opened his account, why we not only think having a system of loan repayment is in our interest,

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[26] The importance of this exclusivity has been noted by the literature. See Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 85–86, and Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*, p. 37. The focus on a single passion, the interested affection, was an expression of the Newtonian aspect of Hume's application of the experimental method to natural law, Forbes argues. Although Hume focused on that single passion, Baier shows the complexities of the interested affection in chapter two of *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*.

[27] *Treatise* 3.2.1.2-3.

[28] *Treatise* 3.2.2.12-13.

[29] *Treatise* 3.2.2-5.

[30] *Treatise* 3.2.7-10.

but also that not fulfilling the obligations of such system is morally wrong. In part two, he limited his explanation to an account of how the initially interested motivation to participate in the conventions is converted into an increasingly more comprehensive sympathetic response. That response is initially limited to persons affected by unjust actions but then becomes a sympathy with the 'public interest,' a process furthered by private education, our concern for our reputation and the interest of politicians in a well-behaved populace.[31]

In the last half-century, this part of the conjectural history of morals has been interpreted primarily in terms of two interrelated contexts. Duncan Forbes interpreted the conjectural history of morals as Hume's attempt to introduce the experimental method into natural jurisprudence, liberating the tradition from its theological foundations. The 'new scene of thought' that Hume reported in his letter to a physician in 1729 was that encounter between the two main elements of Scottish philosophy in the early eighteenth century.[32] Hume's new scene of thought promoted the complete secularization of natural law, eliminating the last theological elements that were still found in the work of Francis Hutcheson.[33] A major consequence of Hume's introduction of a proper experimental method was the complete historicization of the traditional accounts of the emergence of property rights. In previous iterations, the relation between natural law and history was one of form and content: history gave the positive details of the duties entailed by natural law. Hume (and Smith) made history itself the source of the natural law.[34] The degree to which Hume historicized natural law meant his project belonged to a new kind of inquiry that fully detached the explanation of the origin of property rights and government from their justification, even if the natural

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[31] *Treatise* 3.2.2.24-27.
[32] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 16–17. Buckle, *Natural law and the Theory of Property*, p. 299. later argued that 'Hume's aim is not to replace natural law, but to complete it, by calling on the powerful resources of the new experimental philosophy.'
[33] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, p. 28. Forbes rejected claims that natural law had been liberated from its theological foundations because it no longer relied on revelation. It still depended on natural theology, see pp. 41-58.
[34] Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 7.

jurisprudential tradition remained the 'landscape' in which he worked.[35] Hume's reform of the natural jurisprudential tradition was also an attempt to correct the previous accounts of early human sociability. Preceding accounts failed to portray the development of human sociability correctly and started from the idea that humans were completely independent in the earliest stages of human history, which Hume emphatically rejected.[36]

That brings us to the second context in which Book III has been interpreted: as an attempt to find a solution to the conflict between Francis Hutcheson and Bernard Mandeville over the question of natural sociability and the artificiality of virtue.[37] Instead of drawing on the current moral and natural philosophical curriculum of Scottish universities, this interpretation places Book III as Hume's philosophical answer to the conflicts he experienced in his youth. Hume experienced what seems like a mental breakdown in 1729, most likely connected to his attempt to live up to a Shaftesburian Stoic ideal.[38] After the crisis, Hume found an answer to that ideal in the works of Bayle and Bernard Mandeville.[39] The conjectural history of morals was Hume's improvement on the accounts of the emergence of society in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (or more precisely the 'Enquiry into the origin of Virtue'), which was in turn closely connected to Bayle's account of the society of atheists in the *Pensées Diverses*.[40] It was conceived in response to Hutcheson's answer to Mandeville, rejecting the former's conception of 'natural' in terms of final causes in favour of proper use of the

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[35] Westerman, 'Hume and the Natural Lawyers: a Change of Landscape'. Westerman, 'Hume's Reception of Grotius', p. 65, criticized Forbes's interpretation: the justificatory element, inexistent in her reading of Hume, is essential to natural jurisprudence.

[36] James Moore, 'Hume's Theory of Justice and Property', *Political Studies*, 24 (1976), pp. 103–119. ''Tis utterly impossible for men to remain any considerable time in that savage condition, which precedes society; but that his very first state and situation may justly be esteem'd social,' *Treatise* 3.2.2.14.

[37] Hutcheson is central to both interpretations because he combined the roles of a teacher of natural jurisprudence at Glasgow and that of a Stoic moralist, see James Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson: on the Origins of the Scottish enlightenment', in M. A. Stewart, ed., *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 37–60.

[38] Harris, *Hume*, pp. 38–51, esp. p. 45.

[39] *Id*., pp. 51-64.

[40] James Moore, 'Hume and Hutcheson', in M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright, eds., *Hume and Hume's connexions* (University Park, Pa, 1995), pp. 27–29, argued the main topics of Hume's moral philosophy come from that Epicurean tradition. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, chap. 6, reconstructs the path from Bayle to Hume though Mandeville.

experimental method.[41] The main question of Book III was thus 'to enter upon the controversy, which of late years has so much excited the curiosity of the public, *Whether these moral distinctions be founded on natural and original principles, or arise from interest and education*,' as Hume himself described it in Book II of the *Treatise*.[42] On the one hand, Hume wanted to avoid Hutcheson's appeal to final causes; on the other, he rejected Mandeville's claim that moral sentiments were not genuine and were the invention of 'politicians'.[43] The conjectural history of morals presents the process by which genuine moral sentiments arise from our initially partial and limited generosity.

In both interpretations of Hume's moral philosophy, time plays a crucial role. Forbes argued that the point of part two of Book III of the *Treatise* was to show how conventions of justice evolve gradually.[44] Robertson argues that 'the influence of time on the sentiments' is the key to the development of justice.[45] Regardless of the preferred context in which we place Hume—they should not be regarded as contradictory, in any case—the essence of Hume's theory of justice was to explain how the rules of justice and their sentimental approbation came into being.

Neither of the two interpretations pays much attention to Hume's discussion of the nature of moral judgments in Part III of Book III. However, Hume began his description of how the natural (interested) obligation of justice comes to be perceived as a moral obligation referring to part three, which dealt with the natural virtues and moral

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[41] Moore, 'Hume and Hutcheson', pp. 44–47. Hume corresponded with Hutcheson about their disagreements in this area, see Hume to Francis Hutcheson, 17 September 1739, Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 32-35. Moore suggested Hume tried to find some areas of agreement with Hutcheson that led to some last-minute additions to the *Treatise*, probably including the meta-ethical arguments of Part I of Book III. Harris, *Hume*, pp. 123–124, accepts Moore's suggestion and concludes that therefore the *Treatise* cannot be considered primarily as an intervention against 'rationalist' moral philosophy. Without the probable last-minute additions, the role of the conjectural history in Book III would become even pronounced.

[42] *Treatise* 2.1.7.2. Harris, *Hume*, p. 120. draws attention to this passage.

[43] *Treatise* 3.2.2.25. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, p. 301, argues that 'In Hume's terms, Mandeville's defect was to have been incompletely naturalistic and insufficiently historical in his understanding of human behaviour.' Harris, *Hume*, p. 126. also states that 'Hume looked for a more recognisably historical account of the way in which the rules of justice were first established by human beings.'

[44] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 70–71.

[45] Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, p. 301.

approbation in general.[46] The first section of part III explained the movement from a sympathetic response of approval/disapproval of an agent's actions to a properly moral judgment of that agent's character. Hume acknowledged that our sympathetic reactions vary according to the observed agent's relative position: as he had explained in Book II, sympathetic reactions are affected by the principles of association of ideas (contiguity, cause and effect, resemblance), thus making our reactions more lively towards agents who resemble us or are closer in time and space.[47] That makes communicating our moral judgments to others impossible because each of us would experience different passions and reach different judgments according to our position. In moral judgments, Hume argued, we correct for this variability in our passions, even when we cannot correct the passions themselves.[48] This correction takes the form of sympathy with the person herself and those who are immediately connected to her.[49] We also correct our judgments for 'virtue in rags': since we sympathize with a person's character through her actions (which are motivated by character traits), we cannot sympathize with, say, a benevolent person who is prevented from doing benevolent actions by an external factor (say, lacking the resources to do so). Here we reason in terms of general rules, inferring the usual tendency of a character and thus correcting our sympathetic response in judgment if not in the passions themselves.[50] Those two corrections eliminate the contradiction 'betwixt the *extensive sympathy¸* on which our sentiments of virtue depend, and that *limited generosity* which I have frequently observ'd to be natural to man, and which justice and property suppose, according to the precedent reasoning.'[51] They allow us to judge from 'some *steady* and *general* points of view' and 'form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners.'[52]

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[46] *Treatise* 3.2.2.23.
[47] For Hume's account of the mechanics of sympathy, see *Treatise* 2.1.11.1-8.
[48] *Treatise* 3.3.1.14-18.
[49] *Treatise* 3.3.1.30.
[50] *Treatise* 3.3.1.19-23.
[51] *Treatise* 3.3.1.23.
[52] *Treatise* 3.3.1.15 and 3.3.3.2 respectively.

That part of Hume's moral philosophy has received more attention from philosophers than intellectual historians. Establishing the coherence between Hume's account of the general point of view and his concept of extended sympathy is a complicated task at best, most likely yielding fragile conclusions. There are questions about whether the general point of view is ideal or an actual judgment (and how it differs from other judgments if it is an actual judgment),[53] whether Hume's corrections of sympathy can actually yield stable judgments,[54] and what exactly are a just character or sympathy to the public interest.[55] Hume seems to have noticed those problems because some of the most significant changes he made in the move from the *Treatise* to the second *Enquiry* related to the moral sentiment and the role of reason and sympathy in it, as we will see.

Although Hume's account of the general point of view has been considered primarily from a philosophical point of view, there is no reason not to include it as part of the conjectural history of morals. Annette Baier acknowledges that some artifice must be involved in the approval of natural and artificial virtues alike.[56] Indeed, Hume identified partial affections and limited generosity as problems in relation to the approbation of natural and artificial virtues alike: as he put it, 'this partiality, then and unequal affection, must not only have an influence on our behaviour and conduct in society, but even in our ideas of vice and virtue.'[57]

Incorporating the account of moral judgement into the conjectural history of justice highlights how wide-ranging Hume's conjectural history was. It covers everything from the first formation of society to how members of a fully civilized society learn to correct their sentiments—including perhaps even a transformation of such

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[53] Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, 'On Why Hume's "General Point of View" Isn't Ideal–and Shouldn't Be', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 11 (1994), pp. 202–228.
[54] James King, 'The Place of the Language of Morals in Hume's Second Enquiry', in Donald Livingston and James King, eds., *Hume: a re-evaluation* (New York, 1976), pp. 351–354; Taylor, 'Hume on the Standard of Virtue'; and Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, pp. 101–116.
[55] Harris, 'Hume on the Moral Obligation to Justice'.
[56] Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, pp. 171, 177–179.
[57] *Treatise* 3.2.2.8, italics are mine.

basic things in Hume's portrayal of human psychology as pride.[58] Indeed, it seems reasonable to conclude that the 'history' to which the conjectural history of morals referred is the totality of human history. Hume's phrasing could be taken as another indicator of that broad temporality: it often established the 'rude' stage of society as 'they' and talked about that process in the third person, whereas the end state of that process is often described in the first-person plural. So Hume stated in the opening of his account that he would examine questions '*concerning the manner in which the rules of justice are* <u>*establish'd by the artifice of men*</u>; and *concerning the reasons, which* <u>*determine us*</u> *to attribute to the observance or neglect of these rules a moral beauty and deformity*.'[59] That is not to mention the more explicit semi-historical markers referring to the 'infancy of society'[60] The discussion of moral judgment, however, is always conducted with reference to 'us', never to that rude state incapable of extending its sympathy beyond its partial affections.

Indeed, Hume's choice of loan repayment as the starting point of that totalizing conjectural history of morals seems fitting.[61] Credit was, after all, one of the main political and economic concerns in the kind of modern commercial society in which he lived. And yet nothing could be more foreign to a man living in the rude state of society than the idea that one *ought* to repay a loan to a complete *stranger* out of a

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[58] Lorraine Besser-Jones, 'The Role of Justice in Hume's Theory of Psychological Development', *Hume Studies*, 32 (2006), pp. 253–276, argues that before the conventions of justice pride must have been too partial and therefore incapable of being 'seconded' by the sympathy of others, itself one of the chief sources of pride, T 2.1.11.1. On the role of 'seconding' in Hume's moral psychology see Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, pp. 65–69.

[59] *Treatise* 3.2.2.1, underline is mine. Hume repeated the same formulation in the introduction of the moral obligation of justice, asking '*Why* <u>*we*</u> *annex the idea of virtue to justice, and of vice to injustice*' (*Treatise* 3.2.2.23, underline is mine). Similarly, it is 'no other than that natural appetite betwixt the sexes, which unites *them* together' and initiates the conventions, *Treatise* 3.2.2.4, italics are mine.

[60] *Treatise* 3.2.8.1. Hume clearly identified the origin of government—which, we must remember, comes after the conventions of justice—with the 'infancy of society'. In this moment of a society's history, he argued, possessions are few, so disputes around them are rare: 'an *Indian* is but little tempted to dispossess another of his hut, or steal his bow, as being already provided of the same advantages.'

[61] Carl Wennerlind, 'David Hume's Political Philosophy: A Theory of Commercial Modernization', *Hume Studies*, 28.2 (2002), pp. 247–270, argues that the *Treatise* 3.2 can be regarded as a 'philosophical' distillation of the process described in the *History of England*. While we will eventually reach the conclusion that Hume made the abstract rude-civilized account discussed here with his view of the development of modern Europe, it is important to ask *how* he got there.

'sense of duty and obligation' alone.[62] The conventions of justice must be in place and a strong sense of the common point view must also be there. The whole history of humanity from its infancy to public debt and the Bank of England are in a sense encompassed in that question about why we repay our loans.

However, the only actual historical event he discussed at (some) length in Book III established an analytical rather than narrative connection to the conjectural history of morals. Instead of situating his discussion of the Glorious Revolution within the narrative, Hume used the principles of association of ideas and impressions to understand it. The subject was brought up in the discussion of the specific objects of allegiance to government.[63] In the first part of the section, Hume employed the principles of association and imagination to explain the different criteria according to which a particular magistrate (or group of magistrates) comes to be regarded as the legitimate object of allegiance. The oddity of the English case lies in its mixed constitution, which presents more than one object of allegiance (king, lords, commons) that could come into conflict with one another. The Glorious Revolution brought to the fore the possibility that those legitimate objects of allegiance could conflict with each other. Hume's explanation (and justification) of the Revolution was grounded on the role of the imagination and the principles of association of impressions and ideas. However, he could not provide a *genetic* account of allegiance in that case because the central causal factors that led to the Revolution were absent from the conjectural history of morals: as his later works would show, the breakdown of allegiance in the seventeenth century was tied to changes in the class/rank composition of English society in the preceding centuries. Inequality of property and mixed governments reflecting the structure of ranks in society were not parts of the conjectural history of morals.[64]

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[62] Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*, chap. 1 esp. p. 33, draws attention to the importance of Hume's choice of example.

[63] *Treatise* 3.2.10.16-19.

[64] Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, p. 239, notices that Hume's conventions of justice presupposed a reasonable degree of equality in possessions anterior to the stabilization of property, since otherwise those without possessions would have no interest in adhering to the convention in the first place. The possibility of inequality appeared in the process that led to the creation of government (*Treatise* 3.2.8.1-

The way Hume addressed the Revolution here must not be regarded as problematic in any way. We can reasonably assume he would bring it back in the planned fifth book of the *Treatise*, which would cover politics.[65] Rather, it is just a symptom of the difficulty of the task Hume set to himself in Book III. As Michael Gill argues, the *Treatise* ended up trying to simultaneously present the 'chronological' and 'conceptual' origins of morals.[66] It combined a conjectural history of the origins of morals with an attempt to underpin every phenomenon it narrated in the anatomy of the human mind developed in Books I and II. Book III was perhaps a model with too many variables, so a complete solution became too complex and unwieldy: every new conceptual element demanded a place in the narrative; every new event had to be reduced to the most minute springs of the human mind. Facing unmanageable complexity, Hume had to choose between connecting the temporalized conjectural account to history or the mind. On the one hand, history could not take a role in Book III (or indeed in the *Treatise*) *as history*, even if its bits could (and were) used as part of the 'cautious observation of human life' and 'the common course of the world' required by Hume's experimental method.[67] On the other, Hume had to sacrifice some of the most interesting aspects of the account of the passions in Book II for the sake of the conjectural account.[68]

As we will see, Hume dealt with this problem differently in the *Enquiry*. He largely abandoned his reductionist impetus. He also dispensed with the sequential narrative. Instead of incorporating a conjectural account, the second *Enquiry* referred to

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2) but, as I mentioned, Hume did not include in the conjectural history the possibility that groups holding different amounts/kinds of property might pledge their political allegiance to distinct elements of the political constitution.

[65] Harris, *Hume*, pp. 141–142, speculates that Book V would probably include a conjectural history of forms of government of the kind Adam Smith presented in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. It seems fair to assume the origins of mixed governments would be discussed there.

[66] Michael Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 239. Harris, *Hume*, pp. 253–254, also emphasizes Hume's multitasking in the *Book III* of the *Treatise*, contrasting it with the second *Enquiry*.

[67] *Treatise*, Introduction.10.

[68] Although this is not our subject, history was not the only casualty of Book III: Hume left behind it much of the complex social interactions he described in Book II, as Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, p. 100, notices. On the complexities and how they could affect Hume's moral philosophy, see Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, pp. 33–70, 71–97.

the fragmentary philosophical history of ancients and moderns Hume had been developing since the *Treatise*. This history is the object of the rest of this chapter.

2. ANCIENT AND MODERN FORMS OF GOVERNMENT: THE CONCEPT OF CIVILIZED MONARCHY

Even before the conjectural history of Book III of the *Treatise* was published, Hume was already writing some of the essays that would appear as the first two volumes of the *Essays, Moral and Political* in 1741 and 1742.[69] Those two volumes began to set out the 'real history' version of the development of societies from rude to civilized. More importantly, they began—and it will become clear it was only the beginning—to address how the relationship between classical antiquity and modern Europe fitted within that move from rude to civilized.

The essays addressing the world of Bolingbroke's *Craftsman*, the political half of the *Essays*, were attempts to react to—by criticizing, elaborating, and improving—James Harrington's fundamental principle that the distribution of landed property determined the organization of power and authority in a political constitution.[70] While it is undoubtedly true that Harrington's principle was a guiding light for Hume's analysis of British politics, there was another aspect of Harrington's thought that was being reformed in the first volume of the *Essays*: the distinction between 'ancient prudence' and 'modern prudence'. The former was, according to Harrington, 'an art whereby a civil society of men is instituted and preserved upon the foundation of common right

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[69] In June and July 1739, Hume sent two 'papers' to Henry Home, later Lord Kames, and suggested more would arrive, see Hume to Henry Home, 4 June 1739 and 1 July 1739, in Hume, *New Letters of David Hume*, pp. 5–7.

[70] Hume said in the advertisement of the 1741 volume that most of the essays 'were intended to comprehend the Designs of both of the SPECTATORS and CRAFTSMEN,' he said referring to the publications created by Joseph Addison and Henry Bolingbroke, respectively (*Essays* (1741), p. iii). On the Harringtonian foundation of Hume's politics, see Harris, *Hume*, pp. 175–183, and Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 207–211.

or interest, or (to follow Aristotle and Livy) it is the empire of laws and not of men.'[71] Modern prudence, in contrast, was 'an art whereby some man, or some few men, subject a city or a nation, and rule it according unto his or their private interest.'[72] Ancient prudence had guided the Israelites, the Greeks, and the Roman Republic, with which it had died. The invasion of the German tribes had inaugurated the era of modern prudence—except for the Republic of Venice. The historical perspective of the *Commonwealth of Oceana* was centred on reconstructing how revolutionary England had been gifted with an opportunity to *return* to the maxims of ancient prudence.[73]

'Of Liberty and Despotism' opened the conceptual space Hume would use to build a narrative of the modern that, while very similar to that of Harrington insofar as the British constitution was concerned, did not look back to classical antiquity for guidance or direction.[74] The essay opened with a warning that the world was perhaps still too young for the science of politics to establish eternal truths. Hume noticed that Machiavelli's reasonings concerning monarchies was defective, for he had had only the tyrants of antiquity and the petty Italian principalities of his own time to work with. Similarly, trade had only become an affair of state and an object of the science of politics in the previous century, so no ancient writer on politics or even 'the Italians' had taken it into account.[75] The growth of trade and the supremacy of Europe's centralised territorial monarchies were relatively recent political phenomena 'contrary to

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[71] James Harrington, *'The Commonwealth of Oceana' and 'A System of Politics'*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1992), p. 8.

[72] *Id*, p. 9.

[73] On this topic, see J.G.A. Pocock, 'Introduction', in J.G.A. Pocock, ed., *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 43–75. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, p. 96, later added that '"ancient prudence" was Spartan and Roman, a commonwealth of armed freeholders which had been corrupted and feudalized by emperors and their Gothic mercenaries, but might now be restored to its true principle in England in consequence of the decay of military tenures.' He termed that a 'process of classicization', p. 97.

[74] Hume did agree with Harrington that the political history of modern England could not be understood without considering the shifts in the balance of property. However, he had a different explanation for that phenomenon: instead of Henry VII's changes in feudal property law, Hume pointed to the change in manners, explicitly rejecting Francis Bacon and Harrington's arguments (Hume, *History of England*, vol. 4, p. 384). On this topic in the *History*, see Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', pp. 43–44, 144–150.

[75] *Essays* (1741), pp. 173-175.

the Expectation of the antients' and thus required reconceptualising some key aspects of political thinking that had been developed before their advent.

The critical reconceptualization was that concerning forms of government and their consequences: their compatibility with liberty, their connection to economic, artistic and scientific achievements. As the original title of the essay suggested, the essay started from the traditional comparison between liberty and despotism. The comparison began with the connection between the Arts and Sciences and free governments 'observ'd by the Antients': although empires such as Persia and Egypt had lived with opulence and luxury, it was only with the free (though turbulent and not nearly as opulent) governments of Greece that the arts and sciences arose. The Greeks lost their liberty and their letters under Alexander but increased their wealth simultaneously. The arts and sciences found a new home in Rome, the last free state of antiquity; however, learning declined as liberty vanished from the classical world. The arts and sciences could only flourish in a free state, the Ancients and, after them, 'several eminent writers in our own Country' concluded. That modern writers such as Addison or Shaftesbury still held to the opinion of the ancients only showed that they 'either confin'd their view merely to antient Facts, or entertain'd too great a Partiality in Favour of that Form of Government, which is establish'd amongst us.'[76] For in modern times, the most prominent place of learning and the arts was 'despotic' France—'which had never enjoy'd any Shadow of Liberty.' The Italian principalities had only attained perfection in the arts after they lost their liberty to the usurpations of the Medici and the like.[77]

Here we notice the similarity between Hume and Dubos again: both rejected the idea that the form of government alone could determine whether the arts and sciences would flourish in a particular place or time. In the previous chapter, I observed that Dubos employed this argument to turn towards 'physical causes', whereas Hume used a similar argument to present the complex interaction between multiple general

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[76] *Id.*, p. 177.
[77] *Id.*, pp. 177-178.

(moral) causes. There was more disagreement in that shared argument than I acknowledged: Hume departed from Dubos not only to introduce a different kind of causality but also to introduce a new historical division. Dubos' critique of forms of government was ultimately connected to his gradualist narrative of the philosophical spirit, with knowledge growing gradually by the random discoveries of a perennial curiosity and genius bursting out here and there when the mysteries of climate produced it. In contrast, Hume limited the explanatory power of forms of government by heightening the importance of social and economic causes, a reality that had become more apparent in the modern world.

Hume introduced his alternative in the analysis of the connection between liberty and commerce. Although that connection is based on 'a longer and larger Experience than the foregoing', the recent commercial jealousy against France indicates that something had been changing: 'Private property seems to me fully as secure in a **civiliz'd** *European* **Monarchy**, as in a Republic.'[78] Avarice, the 'Spur of Industry' is an 'obstinate passion' and, in any case, risks to commercial activity had been decreasing in European civilized monarchies. Hume admitted that the great difference between republics and monarchies was not so much the risks, but the rewards:

> Commerce, therefore, in my Opinion, is apt to decay in absolute Governments, not because it is less *secure*, but because it is less *honourable*. A Subordination of Ranks is absolutely necessary to the Support of Monarchy. Birth, Titles, and Place, must be honour'd above Industry and Riches.[79]

That was one of the 'Alterations that Time has produc'd, or may produce in Politics': in 'modern Times', both free and 'despotic' forms of government were improving their domestic and foreign management.[80] Monarchical government, however, received the 'most considerable Improvements' and the civiliz'd monarchies of Europe now deserved the praise that had been restricted to Republics: '*that they are a government of Laws, not of Men*'. Modern civilized monarchies were now much closer to 'popular' governments than their ancient (or uncivilized) counterparts had been. Hume pushed

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[78] *Id,* p. 180 (bold is mine, italics in the original).
[79] *Id,* p. 182.
[80] *Ibid*.

further, insisting that 'Our modern Education and Customs instil more Humanity and Moderation than the Antient,' even if that alone could not overcome the disadvantages of the monarchical form of government (he would change his mind on this matter, as we will see below).[81] If anything, one should expect the differences to diminish in the future because modern free governments like Britain were abusing their public credit without the possibility of defaulting (their creditors were their own citizens). In contrast, it was in the interest of the French nobility and the crown to address the most significant limitation of their despotic government, the arbitrariness of their tax system.[82]

Thus, 'Of Liberty and Despotism' began to draw a historical distinction where previous political thinkers had seen only a conceptual one. Machiavelli, the Italians, and the Ancients (perhaps even Harrington) could not have seen that distinction because they lived in a world where it did not exist. Theirs was a world where the distinction between monarchies and republics had great explanatory power. True, Hume was cutting against the grain of established political thought in 'Of Liberty and Despotism',[83] but the point was not that Machiavelli and everyone before had been wrong (though Addison and Shaftesbury could perhaps have done better had they looked beyond Britain). Causal relations had changed as a new historical factor appeared. The causal relations that now prevailed had to be articulated in terms of new political concepts. Unsurprisingly perhaps, Hume's new concept, 'civilized European monarchy', contained geographical (this part is often forgotten) and temporal markers.

That shift away from a division based on the distribution of power and towards a division based on the historical processes that shaped constitutional forms meant Hume had less to worry about when he analysed British party politics. If the worst that

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[81] *Id.*, p. 184.
[82] *Id.*, pp. 184-187.
[83] As many commentators have noted. See Koen Stapelbroek, 'Republics and Monarchies', in Richard Whatmore and Brian Young, eds., *A companion to intellectual history* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 276–287; Sakamoto, 'Hume's Political Economy as a System of Manners', p. 88; and Paul Cheney, 'Constitution and Economy in David Hume's Enlightenment', in Carl Wennerlind and Margaret Schabas, eds., *David Hume's political economy* (London, 2008), p. 224.

could happen to Britain was to become France, as much contemporary political discourse insisted, there was no need for all the excessive party rage Hume abhorred. If anything, it looked as if civilized monarchies like France had an advantage in confronting the distinctively modern problem of public credit. The 'lesson in moderation'[84] Hume wanted to convey would be much easier to accept once his readers understood that perhaps not so much was at risk (or at least not so much was at risk in determining the precise limits of executive power in the British constitution; there were other, much more real risks like the public debt).

In any case, Hume still retained in 1741 much of the conceptual distinction that had prevailed until then. The greater humanity and moderation instilled by modern education and customs still could not surpass the superiority of republican government. Even the acknowledgement that constitutional defects 'produc'd the tumultuous Governments of *Athens* and *Rome*' and eventually led to their ruin did not convince Hume that republics were not always governments of laws, not of men.[85] Absolute governments were still somewhat repugnant to commerce. Luxury was still associated with the despotisms of Persia and Egypt. Indeed, the title of the essay was still 'Of Liberty and Despotism'. It was still, in many ways, a perspective that looked back to the ancients. In the following decade, Hume would change his perspective, but the 1741 essays had already begun to open a rift between ancients and moderns.

'Of Liberty and Despotism' did not dwell much on the process that had made modern European monarchies civilized, presenting the change more than explaining it. This question was tackled in 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', which came out in the 1742 volume. As we have already seen, the essay was the most explicit articulation of Hume's historical method as the analysis of general causes. It was also the first major articulation of the historical connections (and disconnections) between classical antiquity and modern Europe.

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[84] *Essays* (1741), p. 43.
[85] *Id.*, p. 41.

As we saw, the conjectural history of the *Treatise* did not have much to say about the role of forms of government in the rude-civilized transition. Rude or uncultivated societies are 'instructed […] in the advantages of government' during war; camps, 'the true mother of cities', teach them the benefits of giving authority to a single person.[86] Hence, there is a plausible reason to believe monarchical government was the first form of government (which Hume took the pains to distinguish from patriarchal theories). Republics appear only as reactions to the abuses of monarchical and despotic power.[87] However, it is hard to square these passing mentions about forms of government to the overall conjectural history. The first establishment of government is based on a promise by the chosen person to keep the *already established* conventions of justice.[88] That first (probably monarchical) government, in a rude society, is considered fully capable of enforcing the rules of justice. Somehow, it may be corrupted; resistance to the corruption of the first (probably monarchical) government creates the first republics.

'Rise and Progress' flatly denied that a barbarous monarchy could ever achieve such respect for general laws concerning property.[89] But again, this comes only to remind us that the conjectural history of the *Treatise* is not tied in any way to real history. It is, as Hume put it in his last essay, 'Of the Origin of Government', 'viewing matters in an abstract light'.[90] 'Rise and Progress…' dealt with real history—that history in which 'there scarce is any race of kings, or form of commonwealth, that is not primarily founded on usurpation and rebellion.'[91] It was a philosophical argument about history, trying to identify the general causes at work in real history. In other words, it was philosophical history.

In any case, the first observation of 'Rise and Progress' maintained that '*it is impossible for the Arts and Sciences to arise, at first, among any People, unless that*

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[86] *Treatise* 3.2.8.2.
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] *Treatise* 3.2.8.3.
[89] David Hume, *Essays, Moral and Political* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1742), pp. 60–61.
[90] *Essays*, 38.
[91] *Treatise* 3.2.10.4.

People enjoy the Blessing of a free Government.'[92] In a monarchy in the 'barbarous and ignorant' situation, the ruler delegates all his power to his subordinates because the idea of general laws restraining their behaviour is yet unknown. In that situation, without any development of the arts and sciences, a ruler would not know the benefits of general laws (acquired by trial and error).[93] A people governed without any restraint on the part of the ruler or his subordinates 'are *Slaves*, in the full and proper Sense of the Word;' no refinements in taste or reason can be developed in this situation.[94] There is nothing in the form of government itself that would impel it towards adopting general laws. Indeed, Hume argued, the monarchical form of government 'contains something repugnant to Law'. Only 'Great Wisdom and Reflection' can reconcile them, but this cannot be expected in a situation of barbarism and ignorance. Monarchies are caught in a vicious cycle: 'unlimited despotism' prevents the development of knowledge, which is requisite to instruct magistrates on the benefits of limited authority.[95]

In contrast, the very form of government makes republics open to the development of laws. A republic may be barbarous in its infancy, 'supported by as few Laws as a barbarous Monarchy' and giving full authority to magistrates, but the very process of electing magistrates will, in time, lead to the development of laws restraining them. Thus, 'by an infallible operation,' republics give rise to law, creating security and then knowledge.[96] Unlike monarchies, republics *do not* depend on the prior development of knowledge and science to come to a government of laws, not of men. Rather, the 'very Nature of the Government' generates laws, which are a prerequisite for the development of the arts and sciences (which is the question the essay sought to answer).

The second proposition of the essay answered why the arts and sciences had first flourished in Greece and flourished again in Europe instead of other places. It stated that '*nothing is more favourable to the Rise of Politeness and Learning, than a*

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[92] *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, p. 60, italics in the original.
[93] *Id.*, pp. 60-61.
[94] *Id.*, p. 62
[95] *Id.*, p. 65.
[96] *Id.*, pp. 63-65.

Number of neighbouring independent States connected together by Commerce and Policy.'[97] Again, the argument centres on the role of law in the development of the arts and sciences. The limited territorial extension of Greek states provided a check to both the internal authority of rulers and the external authority of each state. A small territory means every act of tyranny is known and felt across the whole country, whereas rulers of larger territories may inflict oppression on one region without the others knowing it. Further, small states create proximity between rulers and the ruled, which prevents the former from turning themselves into semi-divine beings, a central element of despotic governments.[98] Division into small states also leads to 'mutual jealousy' in political and military matters and in terms of opinion. That jealousy creates such a barrier that 'nothing but Nature or Reason' can overcome it: one nation will hardly share the follies of another (say, the attribution of semi-divine status to rulers or misguided philosophical systems). [99]

Europe and Greece were particularly well suited to produce such an environment. The continent is divided by multiple seas, rivers, and mountains; Greece is a miniature version of that kind of terrain. That kind of terrain favours political division into small states.[100] If the terrain favoured political division, linguistic and cultural similarity meant the small Greek states were very closely connected. Political fragmentation and (a degree of) cultural unity created a particularly propitious environment: it limited internal political authority, fostered intense cultural exchange, but at the same time limited total uniformity. Healthy cultural jealousy ensued.

In the European continent at large, a similar situation had been playing out since the Reformation. Before the Reformation, the Catholic Church had 'engrost all the Learning of the Times, being really one large State within itself, and united under one Head.'[101] Philosophy was limited to the Aristotelian dogma, and there was no

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[97] *Id.*, p. 67, italics in the original.
[98] *Id.*, pp. 67-69.
[99] *Id.*, p. 69.
[100] *Id.*, pp. 72-73.
[101] *Id.*, p. 70.

place for that healthy cultural and intellectual jealousy (the essay does not discuss political fragmentation). Hume compared the situation to China which, despite its 'considerable Stock of Politeness and Science', could not 'ripen' it into 'something more perfect and finish'd.' It suffered from the same disease of the Catholic world: a single unified empire, speaking one language, governed by one law and the same manners.[102] Unlike China, Europe had since the Reformation 'thrown off this Yoke' and become 'at present a Copy at large, of what *Greece* was formerly a Pattern in Miniature.'[103] In its new situation, different nations checked each other's philosophical systems (English Newtonian philosophy was opposed to the excesses of Cartesianism) as well as their manners and arts (French theatre gave the English a standard of decency to judge their own licentiousness on the stage).[104]

The second observation is a pristine example of the historical method we met in the previous chapter. It puts political causal relations in interaction with other general causes, including geographical, cultural, and religious causes. Even though commerce and international trade are not very important at this point, we can notice here the difference between Hume's conjectural and philosophical histories. The *Treatise* and the *Natural History of Religion* are characterized by their emphasis on a single or small set of passions (interest, fear, etc.). In contrast, 'Of the Rise and Progress' dwells on the encounter of multiple general causes (religious, geographic, cultural, political). More important, it is that confluence of general causes that explains history in its historicity: it is the confluence that determines the temporal and spatial location of the phenomenon under analysis; it explains why Greece and then Europe and not, say, China (or anywhere else). Indeed, if the republican form of government engenders law (and may from there generate knowledge) from within, it is the confluence of this political element with the non-political causes that made Greece and Europe the place and time in which the development of the arts and sciences took place.

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[102] *Id.*, p. 72.
[103] *Id.*, p. 71.
[104] *Ibid.*

The third proposition of the essay connected the ancient Greek miniature and the modern European copy at large. The first half of the observation argued '*that tho' the only proper Nursery of these noble Plants be a free Government, yet they may be transplanted into any Government.*'[105] Hume began by restating the argument that a monarchy, 'before it be civiliz'd', cannot generate laws and thence science. Even in the 'manual Arts or manufactures', improvements would be 'scarce'.[106] However, luxury and the liberal arts only affect a few people who have the leisure or fortune to enjoy them. Laws and the 'coarser and more useful Arts' affect the whole population and, once discovered, are harder to destroy—unless there is a 'furious Inundation of barbarous Invaders, as [to] obliterate all Memory of former Arts and Civility'— which means they can be transplanted from the places they originate to other places.[107] 'From these Causes proceed civiliz'd Monarchies': it is impossible that 'a pure Despotism, establish'd among a barbarous People, can ever, by its native Force and Energy, refine and polish itself,' but it can adopt the laws generated in republics (and eventually be benefited by the consequences of having laws).[108] At this point, Hume introduced a more precise description of a civilized monarchy than that of 'Of Liberty and Despotism':

> In a civiliz'd Monarchy, the Prince alone is unrestrain'd in the Exercise of his Authority, and possesses alone a Power, which is not bounded by any Thing but Custom, Example, and the Sense of his own Interest. Every Minister or Magistrate, however eminent, must submit to the general Laws, which govern the whole Society, and must exert the Authority delegated to him after the Manner, which is prescrib'd. The People depend on none but their Sovereign, for the Security of their Property. He is so far remov'd from them, and is so much exempt from private Jealousies or Interests, that this Dependence is not felt.[109]

In other words, in a civilized monarchy, the prince is in the same position described in book III of the *Treatise*: the prince is far enough from the subjects to be able to make his own the common interest of the subjects (or at least a large number of

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[105] *Id.*, p. 74, italics in the original.
[106] *Id.*, p. 75.
[107] *Id.*, p. 76.
[108] *Ibid.*
[109] *Id.*, p. 77.

them).[110] Only in 'a high political Rant' would a civilized monarchy be considered a 'tyranny', Hume concluded.[111] The political arrangement of civilized monarchies thus can generate 'sufficient Security to the People, and may fulfil *almost* every End of political Society.'[112] The 'almost' here is important: although a civilized monarchy can achieve 'sufficient Security', which is the main goal of government according to the *Treatise*, it still does not generate what Hume called civil liberty (and we would call political liberty, that is, having an active role in the political constitution). A civilized monarchy still does not give its subjects any constitutional role, even though it may be called a free government in terms of the personal liberty it provides to its subjects.

The lack of *civil* liberty is tied to the method by which republics and civilized monarchies achieve the status of government of laws that secures the property of its citizens/subjects: republics achieve it by *restraining* the magistrates with elections and laws; civilized monarchies do so by leaving the prince alone *above* the law and thus able to identify with the common interest. This difference means civilized monarchies lack civil liberty, but it is also the foundation of the advantage they had been gaining over republics in the modern world, as Hume speculated in 'Of Liberty and Despotism'. The prince's position above the law made it easier to default on the public debt if it became unmanageable, whereas the internal mechanism of republics (and of the British mixed constitution) did not.

In any case, as Tatsuya Sakamoto notices, there seems to be some circularity in 'Rise and Progress'.[113] As we have seen, monarchical governments do not contain an internal motor that generates laws and thus depend on a wise ruler deciding to limit his own power. That is unlikely to happen: wise rulers are unlikely to flourish in barbarous conditions, particularly in the situation where a 'furious Inundation of barbarous Invaders' uproots even the hardier plants of knowledge and refinement. Hume

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[110] *Treatise* 3.2.7.7-8.
[111] *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, p.77.
[112] *Id.*, p. 78, italics is mine.
[113] Sakamoto, 'Hume's Political Economy as a System of Manners', pp. 89–90.

seems stuck in a chicken-and-egg problem: only a wise monarch can civilize a monarchy, but only a civilized monarchy is likely to produce a wise monarch. In the first observation, Hume himself noticed that even Peter the Great, who had a 'noble Genius' and a fondness for European arts, still preferred the 'Turkish Policy' when it came to government.[114] However, the differences between the methods of republics and civilized monarchies discussed above again point to the solution Hume would arrive at in 1752: the *Political Discourses* would explain how barbarous absolute monarchs came to identify with the interests of a growing group of subjects in early Modern Europe, the 'middling rank of man'. In the 1742 essay 'Of the Middle Station of Life', Hume remarked that that rank provided the best circumstances for the development of virtue, happiness, and wisdom, even if it did not discuss how it could come into existence.[115]

The third observation is the moment where Hume appeared to have changed horses, as Harris notices.[116] If the first and second observations favoured republics, the third observation began to turn the tide in favour of monarchies. The introduction of the concept of civilized monarchies brought a more favourable view of monarchies. The second half of the third observation begins to show that civilized monarchies were a modern achievement with at least part of its roots entirely within the modern—that is, post-ancient—world.

The second sentence of the third observation states that '*a Republic is most favourable to the Growth of the Sciences, and a civiliz'd Monarchy to that of the polite Arts*.'[117] Hume's claim is based on the way those in positions of supreme authority distribute stately honours and advantages. In a republic, candidates for office must look down and make themselves useful by their 'Industry, Capacity, or Knowledge.' In a monarchy, those seeking positions of authority must make themselves agreeable to the powerful, which ends up favouring agreeable qualities like 'Wit, Complaisance, or Civility.' The two sets of qualities are associated with the sciences and the polite

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[114] *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, pp. 61-62.
[115] *Id.*, p.43-52.
[116] Harris, *Hume*, p. 188.
[117] *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, p. 74.

arts, respectively.[118] However, civilized monarchies seem to have got the upper hand in that division. As Hume stressed in the previous observations, civilized monarchies could achieve a government of laws by imitating republics. However, republics could not imitate civilized monarchies to develop politeness. In civilized monarchies, the 'long Train of Dependence from the Prince to the Peasant' creates that situation where everyone has to please their superiors. That 'train of dependence' apparently could not be imported into republics. Modern European republics like England, Holland or Switzerland were known for their lack of good manners and politeness (at least when compared to the French and Italians).[119] Still, at least they had models to emulate and had been making some progress (Hume pointed to the Venetians, who were in close contact with Italian principalities and thus had absorbed some of the local culture of politeness).

Unlike the moderns, the ancients seemed to lack politeness altogether. Although Hume tried to limit the boldness of his statements—''tis difficult to pronounce any Judgment concerning the Refinements of the antient Republics'—he went for a lengthy description of the lack of good breeding, delicate sentiments and proper conversational skills among prominent ancient figures.[120] The superiority of the Moderns in politeness had its origins in 'the modern Notions of *Gallantry* and *Honour*, the natural Product of Courts and Monarchies.'[121] Alluding to Shaftesbury, Hume dismissed the claim made by 'the most zealous Partizans of the Antients,' that those 'inventions' 'are foppish and ridiculous, and a Reproach, rather than an Honour to the present Age.'[122] Gallantry, he explained, is an improvement upon the natural attraction between the sexes; it is a way of avoiding the unnatural 'confinement of the appetites' and expressing it in a more refined and polished way.[123] It is also an expression of generosity, correcting and limiting our vices that may cause injury to others. It teaches

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[118] *Id.*, pp. 78-80.
[119] *Id.*, pp. 80-81.
[120] *Id.*, pp. 82-87.
[121] *Id.*, p. 87
[122] *Ibid*.
[123] *Id.*, pp. 87-89.

people to treat generously those who are inferior or in a vulnerable situation: the young showing respect to their frail elders; the host giving preference to the vulnerable foreigner; men alleviating the effects of their 'greater strength both of Mind and Body' over women.[124]

The better treatment of women in modern societies represented a new form of exercising authority that Hume would later associate with modern politics, as we will learn below. If the superiority of men over women seemed beyond question in his eyes, modern societies had discovered in gallantry a way of exercising such superiority in 'a less evident Manner; by civility, by Respect, by Complaisance.' The essays of 1741-42 included other references to the role of women in polite society: in 'Of Essay-Writing', Hume presented himself as an ambassador from the world of learning in the 'conversible world' in which women were the sovereign.[125] The presence of women in this conversible world is associated with the move away from a Republic of Letters that was 'shut up in Colleges and Cells, secluded from the World and Good Company.'[126] It was also the cause of the moderation, gaiety and politeness of men: 'what better School for Manners, than the Company of virtuous Women?' he asked.[127]

The modern exercise of male authority contrasted starkly with the seclusion of women into the domestic sphere in the ancient world and with the generally brutal treatment of women in uncivilized societies.[128] If the modern way of exercising male authority found a parallel in the world of politics, so had the ancient. Hume was not alone in this move. In the *querelle*, Perrault attacked ancient rusticity and mistreatment of women in the *Parallèle*, giving preference to modern gallantry. Like Hume, Perrault

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[124] *Id.*, pp. 90-91.

[125] *Id.*, p. 4.

[126] *Id.*, pp. 2-3. There was a debate in the last decades of the twentieth century about whether Hume could be considered a 'feminist philosopher'. Despite his sympathetic gestures towards women as good intellectual and social judges, Hume did at many points stress the superiority of man over woman, as noticed above, and defended patriarchal social structures (most prominently his defence of female chastity as an artificial, though necessary, virtue in *Treatise* 3.2.12. On this debate, see the contributions collected in Anne Jaap Jacobson, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of David Hume* (University Park-PA, 2000). For a sympathetic reading that puts the account of 'Rise and Progress' to the fore, see Lívia Guimarães, 'The Gallant and the Philosopher', *Hume Studies*, 30 (2004), pp. 127–147.

[127] *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, p. 93.

[128] *Id.*, pp. 91-94.

connected gallantry to modern European courts.[129] Later in the Scottish Enlightenment, the treatment of women became an integral part of Scottish stadial theories as an index of 'civilization'. As societies lifted themselves out of barbarism, the situation of women improved, with less mistreatment and more roles in social intercourse.[130]

Modern honour presented the negative side of modern sociability. The 'point of honour' and the practice of duelling were 'not only *useless* but *pernicious*.' It separated the notion of honour from virtue and allowed vicious men to pass as honourable. Even then, Hume still reckoned that *some* elements of modern honour were 'the most essential parts of Morality': fidelity, observance of promises, truth-telling.[131]

Hume's position in 'Rise and Progress' was a change in relation to what he had said about modern gallantry and honour in his earliest extant piece of writing, the 'Historical Essay on Chivalry and modern Honour'.[132] The essay is critical of modern gallantry and honour. Hume dismissed the 'extravagant Gallantry & Adoration of the whole Female Sex', the 'submiss Reverence & Adoration to one of the Sex', and the 'affectation of Civility' involved in displays of modern gallantry and honour.[133] That was quite distant from the naturality and generosity Hume attributed to modern gallantry in 'Rise and Progress'. Indeed, he said in the early Essay that between 'the great Men of the first antient History & the first modern', 'one cannot but prefer the plain roughness' of the former. Hume was not very concerned then that the bravery of the

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[129] See Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 120–130.

[130] On this topic, see Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 133–152, and, more broadly, Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Enlightenment Debate on Women', *Hist Workshop J*, 20 (October 1985), pp. 101–124. For instance, Millar opened the first chapter of his *Of the Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* with a discussion of the relation between the position of women in different stages of civilization, seeJohn Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (Indianapolis, 2006), pp. 93–115.

[131] *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, pp. 94-95. On Hume on chivalry, see Ryu Susato, 'The Idea of Chivalry in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Case of David Hume', *Hume Studies*, 33 (2007), pp. 155–178.

[132] M. A. Stewart dates the essay to some point between 1731 and 1734, see Stewart, 'The Dating of Hume's Manuscripts', p. 270. A complete and reliable transcription of the manuscript is available in Wright, 'Hume on the Origin of "Modern Honour": A Study in Hume's Philosophical Development', pp. 204–209. Wright, pp. 199-204, notices the change, in which he is followed by Harris, *Hume*, pp. 58, 190. Both Wright (p. 203) and Stewart (p. 34), define the essay as a natural or conjectural history. Although the focus of the fragment is indeed the unfolding of some key passions, it discusses a clearly determined set of historical events. In the scheme set in the introduction of this chapter, it would thus be closer to a philosophical discussion of a particular historical period than to a pure conjectural history.

[133] Wright, 'Hume on the Origin of "Modern Honour": A Study in Hume's Philosophical Development', pp. 208–209.

heroes of antiquity 'bore that Air, which naturally attends it when not corrected by Reason or better Example, of Savageness & Barbarity, which converted them in a manner into Pirates & Robbers.'[134]

There is perhaps another difference that is much less noticed. The 'Historical Essay' explicitly connected modern chivalry, gallantry, and honour to the appropriation of Roman politeness by the conquering Germanic peoples. The barbaric conquerors were overawed by the impressive culture of the empire they had conquered. Incapable of understanding the degree of virtue and politeness they had found, their primitive and imaginative minds imitated them with excessive ornaments. The same process took place in architecture and manners: Gothic columns and Chivalric love were characterized by their excessive ornaments, flourishes, and ceremony; both were incapable of achieving the regularity and beauty of the ancient models.[135] Hume would never connect modern gallantry to the decline and fall of the western Roman Empire again. As we have seen, 'Of the Rise and Progress' severed the connection between ancient and modern sociability entirely. When Hume returned to the topic in the medieval volume of the *History of England*, he simply ascribed modern notions of chivalry to 'feudal institutions' the Normans had brought to England, not going any further. While there is a risk of reading too much meaning out of an absence (or two), the disconnection cannot, I think, be separated from Hume's change of position.[136] Indeed, the separation between ancients and moderns *and* Hume's preference for the latter would only grow.

If the separation between ancients and moderns grew throughout Hume's intellectual development, that between republican and monarchical forms of government diminished proportionately. Duncan Forbes noticed how Hume's revisions of 'Of Liberty and Despotism' and 'Rise and Progress' brought republics and monarchies closer

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[134] *Id,* 208.

[135] *Id*, 205-207.

[136] Susato, 'The Idea of Chivalry in the Scottish Enlightenment', p. 165, argues that this is probably because Hume was writing a history of England, not of Europe. This is a statement that depends on ignoring Hume's awareness of the European nature of much of what he was narrating in the *History*, where Hume often commented on the state of manners and learning in Europe. The European context was all the more central in the 'Rise and Progress'.

to each other.[137] To begin with, Hume changed the title of the former to 'Of Civil Liberty' in 1758. The 1741 title suggested an opposition between free/republican and despotic/monarchical governments, with modern civilized monarchies appearing as a modern exception. However, it seems Hume deemed 'despotism' too strong a word to be used in relation to modern monarchies. They were free governments, after all. What modern civilized monarchies lacked—and thus what distinguished them from republics—was civil liberty, but that did not mean they were not free (in the sense of providing personal liberty).[138] Hence, the new version of the essay was intended to advance 'a full comparison of civil liberty and absolute government' rather than the original comparison between liberty and despotism'.[139] Other similar changes lowered the pitch of the essay: in 1741, France had 'never enjoy'd any Shadow of Liberty'; in 1770 it had 'scarcely ever' done so.[140] In 1741, property was 'fully as secure in a civiliz'd *European* Monarchy'; in 1770 it was only 'almost as secure'.[141] In 1741, monarchical governments were 'still much inferior' to republican ones; in 1770 they were simply 'inferior'.[142]

Hume made similar changes in 'Rise and Progress'. The essay received a systematic revision in 1770, removing many paragraphs and changing the wording in some places. 'Despotic power' became 'arbitrary power' in 1770, even if it remained 'somewhat oppressive and debasing'.[143] In 1742, after describing how republics generate law from within, Hume concluded 'here then are the advantages of Republics'; in 1770 those had become the advantages of 'free states'.[144] Hume also removed the paragraph immediately after, in which he hammered in the conclusion that barbarous monarchies could not generate law from within and that law therefore did not precede science in monarchies.[145] The paragraph on the point of honour and duelling was also

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[137] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 125–192 esp pp. 156-160.
[138] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, p. 156.
[139] Compare *Essays* (1741), p. 175, and *Essays* 89.
[140] Compare *Essays* (1741), p. 178, and *Essays* 91.
[141] Compare *Essays* (1741), p. 181, and *Essays* 92-93.
[142] Compare *Essays* (1741), p. 184, and *Essays* 94.
[143] Compare *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, p. 62, and *Essays* 116.
[144] Compare *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, p. 65, and *Essays* 118.
[145] Compare *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, p. 66, and *Essays* 118.

removed in the 1770 edition, which made the comparison between ancients and moderns all the more favourable to the moderns.[146] Before that, Hume had added a paragraph in the 1753-1754 edition arguing that 'no advantages in this world are pure and unmixed': modern politeness often 'runs into affectation and foppery, disguise and insincerity; so the ancient simplicity, which is naturally so amiable and affecting, often degenerates into rusticity and abuse, scurrility and obscenity.[147] One could say that the Hume's choice of words again leaned in favour of the moderns.

In 1748, Hume added a footnote to his considerations about China in the second observation of 'Rise and Progress'. The footnote provided a solution to the apparent contradiction of China having always been a monarchy endowed with laws and a 'considerable stock of politeness and science'. Hume's claim that monarchies needed to borrow their laws from republics (which would then create knowledge and science) did not seem to explain China. The footnote argued that the Chinese government had been forced to govern by general laws due to the military circumstances of the country: without external enemies capable of matching their population and overcoming the great wall, the government had neglected military discipline. In that situation, 'their standing army are mere militia, of the worst kind' and 'the sword, therefore, may properly be said to be always in the hands of the people', which proved to be 'sufficient restraint' and obliged to monarch to govern by general laws. Hume concluded that a 'pure monarchy of this kind', were it capable of defending itself, 'would be the best of all governments, as having both the tranquillity attending kingly power, and the moderation and liberty of popular assemblies.'[148] As Robertson argues, the footnote paved the way for Hume's extensive discussion of military organisation and its relation to economic development and political power.[149] For our purposes, it matters that by 1748 Hume had already moved one step farther from an analysis that focused exclusively on constitutional form towards a more complex analysis of general causes. As

[146] Compare *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, pp. 94-95, and *Essays* 134.
[147] Compare *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, p. 87, and *Essays* 130-131.
[148] *Essays*, 122.
[149] See John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 60–75.

we learned in the last chapter, 'Of National Characters', published in that year, still had government at the centre of the dynamics of 'contagion', but that was less because of constitutional matters and more because government sets the limits to social and economic interactions. It was the moment Hume concluded that neither the naturalist nor the politician could make sense of European societies with their monocausal models.

That brings us to our conclusion: although they introduced the notion of (modern European) civilized monarchies, the essays of 1741-1742 still treated forms of government as the core of the science of politics. In 'Of Liberty and Despotism' and 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', the ancient-modern division co-existed uneasily with the republic-monarchy division. In the former essay, the introduction of the concept of civilized monarchies, a distinctively modern European phenomenon, blurred the traditional division: the pair liberty-despotism did not match the pair republic-monarchy; their difference was instead the lack of *civil* (but not personal) liberty in monarchies. If anything, civilized monarchies had the upper hand in the modern period. In any case, Hume's attention to trade, overlooked by Machiavelli and even some eighteenth-century political thinkers, prompted him to revaluate the traditional division.

The first observation of 'Rise and Progress' again started with the republic-monarchy distinction. The lack of any internal mechanism in monarchies that could lift them out of barbarism meant that Hume's study of the general causes behind the rise and progress of the arts and sciences had to rely on the unexplained existence of a wise prince in an otherwise barbarous polity. The nature of learning meant it was acceptable to leave Homer unexplained in terms of general causes, but it seems something was missing when Hume had to appeal to individual wise princes to explain the rise of a government of laws in monarchies. Domestic politics, after all, was *the* object most amenable to analysis in terms of general causes. The second and third observations began to make ground for a general causal explanation of modern European civilized monarchies that went beyond constitutional forms. Hume identified the context of modern monarchies that made their success possible and pointed to some of their

distinctive social features. The second half of the third observation, in particular, gave the essay more contours of an ancient-modern division.

In 'Rise and Progress' as in 'Liberty and Despotism', the analysis of historical phenomena from the perspective of the interaction of multiple general causes—trade, manners, constitutional forms, geography—is closely aligned to the construction of a historical structure based on the ancient-modern pair. In 1741-1742, that analysis was still somewhat limited. Commerce—the missing factor in much of modern political thought by Hume's own estimation—was still missing from the picture, particularly in 'Rise and Progress'. The introduction of commerce in the *Political Discourses* would also mark the maturation of Hume's ancient-modern narrative.

3. COMMERCE AND MODERNITY: THE POLITICAL DISCOURSES

'Of Commerce', the first essay of the *Political Discourses*, took as its starting point the proposition that 'the greatness of a state and the happiness of its subjects, however independent they may be suppos'd in some respects, are commonly allow'd to be inseparable with regard to commerce'.[150] While Hume deemed the maxim 'true in general', he acknowledged that it may admit of exceptions. Understanding the exception, I argue in this section, is key to understanding the historicity of the rule.

In order to discuss the exception, Hume presented a two-sector economic model. Once societies leave the savage state, they are composed of two kinds of workers, husbandmen and manufacturers. At first, most workers are devoted to agriculture, but as its productivity grows, fewer people are needed to produce the subsistence of the whole population. That surplus of hands can be employed either in the manufacturing sector or in service of the state and its aggrandizement. Hence the potential opposition between the greatness of the state and the happiness of the subjects.[151] That

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[150] Hume, *Political discourses*, p. 4.
[151] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 4-6. Hume's reference to Jean-François Melon at this point, though discussing the distribution of population in modern European countries, indicates where he was taking

reasoning was not 'chimerical', Hume conceded. It was based on ancient history: the Spartans, for instance, used all the surplus produced by the enslaved Helotes to sustain a class of free citizen-soldiers in their military enterprises. In the ancient world, small republics like Rome and Athens were often able to field armies much larger than similarly sized modern European nations could, but that came at the cost of limiting the availability of luxury.[152]

Hume then asked whether modern European nations should return to the 'maxims of ancient policy'. The answer hinged on the fact that 'man is a very variable being and susceptible of many different opinions.'[153] Whether or not modern European societies should return to ancient policy depended on whether they had manners and opinions similar to the ancients. Hume's answer explored not only the great distance between ancient and modern manners and opinions, but also the extreme particularity of the circumstances surrounding the greatness of ancient republics such as Sparta. Indeed, he suggested that 'were the testimony of history less positive and circumstantial, such a government [Sparta], wou'd appear a mere philosophical whim or fiction'.[154] As we saw in chapter three, philosophical fiction was the name Hume gave to Plato's *Republic* and the state of nature in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. They were fictions because they portrayed a state of affairs that could not be implemented (in the case of Plato) or had never existed (in the case of Hobbes). The kind of motivations and institutions they portrayed were entirely at odds with usual human behaviour. Sparta would receive the same label were it not for the abundance of evidence of its existence. It was governed by such 'peculiar laws' that everyone 'who consider'd human nature, as it

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his cue from. The conclusions concerning luxury and manufacturing are similar, but it is interesting to note that Hume is much keener to discuss how the two-sector model functioned differently in ancient and modern contexts. That is certainly related to Hume's rejection of Melon's claims concerning sectorial population distribution: modern Europe seemed much more urban to Hume than to Melon, which is connected to a greater distance between ancient agrarian societies and modern commercial societies. Melon's estimates were much closer to reality than Hume's. On Melon's two-sector model see Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 340–347, and Loïc Charles, 'French '"New Politics"' and the Dissemination of David Hume's Political Discourses on the Continent', in Carl Wennerlind and Margaret Schabas, eds., *David Hume's Political Economy* (London, 2008), pp. 181–202.

[152] *Political Discourses* (1752), pp. 7-8.
[153] *Id.*, p. 4.
[154] *Id.*, p. 8.

has display'd itself in other nations and other ages,' would find it hard to believe a human society could have existed, much less thrived, under such conditions.[155] Other famous ancient republics such as Rome, though governed by laws 'somewhat more natural', were still quite distant from the general experience of human nature.

The greatness of the ancient republics, achieved at the expense of the happiness of the subjects (that is, without the development of manufacturing), was only possible because of their highly particular circumstances:

> They were free states; they were small ones; and the age being martial, all the neighbouring states were continually in arms. Freedom naturally begets public spirit, especially in small states; and this public spirit, this *amor patriae*, must increase, when the public is almost in continual alarm, and men are oblig'd, every moment to expose themselves to the greatest dangers for its defence. A continual succession of wars makes every citizen a soldier[.][156]

The circumstances that, in 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', had made Greece the first cradle of the arts and sciences now resurfaced in 'Of Commerce' as the source not just of a healthy emulation but also continuous wars that beget a public spirit strong enough to overcome the regular workings of human nature. In that situation, a city could be converted into a 'fortified camp', each man infused with 'martial genius' and willing to work and fight for the sake of the public. In those cities-cum-camps, all luxury must indeed be banned because it is a waste of resources and working hands.[157] Citizen-soldiers, animated by their public spirit, devote themselves exclusively to war while extracting surplus from the enslaved agricultural labourers (or trying to extract, for, as Hume noticed, ancient armies often subsisted by plunder).[158] That policy, however, was 'violent, and contrary to the more natural and usual course of things.' If anything, that policy moved societies closer to their origins than to any degree of civilization, for, as Hume put it in the *Treatise*, 'camps are the true

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[155] *Ibid*.
[156] *Id.*, p. 9.
[157] *Id.*, p. 14.
[158] *Id.*, p. 7.

mother of cities.'[159] They seemed closer to that state in which war was the only bond among men.

That such policies worked and even led to greatness only proved that states like Sparta were, as McArthur puts it, 'a perfect storm of peculiar laws, demographics, and luck.'[160] The public spirit and *amor patriae* that allowed Rome and Sparta to achieve the greatness of their states without commerce were 'too disinterested and too difficult to support.'[161] Further, Hume insisted that 'sovereigns must take mankind as they find them.' Trying to force men into Spartans without the extraordinary conditions that produced them was a violent policy. Only 'a long course of time, with a variety of accidents and circumstances' could produce such revolutions in human affairs. The 'less natural' the principles, the more difficult it is to introduce and sustain them. The best policy is to 'comply with the common bent of mankind, and give it all the improvements, of which it is susceptible.'[162]

In the absence of the extraordinary circumstances of classical antiquity—that is, 'according to the most natural course of things'—only a budding manufacturing sector can induce greater productivity in agriculture. Where the manufacturing sector is underdeveloped, the agricultural sector does not have incentives to achieve higher productivity. If agricultural labourers have nothing to exchange for their surplus, they will not generate any surplus in the first place; they will be lazy and unproductive. When war comes, productivity cannot be raised on a sudden; part of the agricultural workers are dislocated to the army and food production declines. Wars must be kept short, or the very subsistence of society may be at risk.[163] In contrast, agricultural workers have incentives to produce surplus and trade it for manufactured goods when the manufacturing sector is developed. Agricultural productivity increases and fewer workers are required to produce the necessary food. In times of war, the sovereign

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[159] *Treatise* 3.2.8.2.
[160] Neil McArthur, *David Hume's Political Theory: Law, Commerce and the Constitution of Government* (Toronto, 2016), p. 90.
[161] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 14.
[162] *Id.*, p. 10-11.
[163] *Id.*, pp. 10-12.

imposes a tax on manufactures, which forces part of the manufacturing workforce into unemployment. The sovereign can then employ them in the army. In times of peace, the subjects enjoy the comforts of life; in times of war, the sovereign can divert the productivity that sustain it towards the war effort.[164]

The transition from an agrarian society to a commercial society with a manu-facturing sector is led by foreign luxury. 'If we consult history,' Hume argued, we discover that foreign trade acquaints a nation with new pleasures and create profitable opportunities for those who export superfluous home products in exchange for those new commodities. The profits from foreign trade then tempt other 'adventurers' to imitate foreign luxuries at home, thus beginning the development of the home manu-facturing sector.[165] At the heart of that transition is the accumulation of a 'stock of labour' in societies where manufacturing flourishes. 'Trade and industry are really nothing but a stock of labour', Hume said in 'Of Commerce'.[166] Although a public granary or a magazine of arms must be considered 'real riches in any state', the most important stock of labour is a habit of industrious work. Manufacturing acquaints farmers and proprietors of land with luxuries, which prompt them to 'study agriculture as a science, and redouble their industry and attention.'[167] Once industry becomes a habit, the sovereign may even (temporarily) remove the underlying incentive without people returning to pre-manufacturing habits of laziness.[168]

In both 'Of Commerce' and 'Of Luxury', Hume used striking colours to de-scribe the first contact with luxury and how it instilled a habit of industrious work in modern men. In the former, he talked about how the contact with foreign luxury awak-ened men's 'delicacy and industry', promoting 'improvements in every branch of

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[164] *Id.*, pp. 12-14.

[165] *Id.*, pp. 16-17. As Alan Macfarlane, 'David Hume and the Political Economy of Agrarian Civiliza-tion', *History of European Ideas*, 27 (January 2001), pp. 79–91, argues, explaining how agrarian soci-eties leave the 'agrarian trap' was crucial in eighteenth-century thinkers' understanding of modern Eu-ropean societies.

[166] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 14. In the subsequent essay, 'Of Luxury' (later 'Of Refinement in the Arts'), Hume again insisted that 'the encrease and consumption of all commodities […] are a kind of *store-house* of labour,' *Id.*, p. 29.

[167] *Id.*, p. 12.

[168] *Id.*, p. 13.

trade', 'rousing men from their lethargic indolence and presenting the gayer and more opulent part of the nation with objects of luxury, which they never before dream'd of.'[169] In 'Of Luxury', he connected human happiness directly to the habit of industrious work. The presence of luxury unites the three elements necessary for human happiness: action, pleasure, and indolence.[170] Indolence and repose, which predominate in agrarian societies, are necessary but insufficient components of human happiness. In a refined society, indolence alternates with action, so people develop both a taste for 'that quick march of spirits, which takes a man from himself' and a proper relish for the well-deserved repose that follows. In other words, instead of enjoying only the product of labour, they enjoy both the product and the 'honest industry' employed in making it. That makes indolence and the taste for the comforts of life moderate and utterly different from the decadent and excessive Epicurean pleasures imagined by Stoic philosophers.[171] Indeed, the growth of 'unnatural appetites' is more frequent in societies where people live at 'ease and idleness'—the Tartars feasting on their dead horses are guilty of more gluttony than European courtiers with their refined banquets.[172] In 'Of Interest', Hume returned to the question in his praise of merchants: the human mind craves for exercise and employment; 'deprive a man of all business and

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[169] *Id.*, pp. 16-17.

[170] 'According to the most receiv'd notions,' Hume added, hedging his position, *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 25. The underlying psychological mechanics of the habit of industrious work has been the object of a considerable literature by scholars associated with the history of economic thought. Rotwein, 'Introduction', esp. chapter 2, is the classical interpretation, connecting the habit of industrious work described in 'Of Commerce' and 'Of Refinement in the Arts' to Hume's theory of the passions, particularly in Book II of the *Treatise*. Berry, 'Hume and the Customary Causes of Industry, Knowledge, and Humanity', explains how Hume's account of human nature as prone to habit-formation is essential to the political and economic dynamics described in the *Political Discourses*. Franklin A. Kalinowski, 'David Hume on the Philosophic Underpinnings of Interest Group Politics', *Polity*, 25 (March 1993), pp. 355–374, and Till Grüne-Yannof and Edward F. McClennen, 'Hume's Framework for a Natural History of the Passions', in Carl Wennerlind and Margaret Schabas, eds., *David Hume's political economy* (London, 2008), pp. 86–104, step back from Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton, 1977). Kalinowski and Grüne-Yannof and McClennen show that, in the *Political Discourses*, Hume relied on an interaction between love of pleasure and love of gain, rather than the redirection of self-interest of the *Treatise*. I explain the dynamics of the passions and the secondary literature at length in Pedro Faria, 'The relation between David Hume's Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals and the Political Discourses' (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2017), chap. 2.

[171] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 27.

[172] *Id.*, p. 28.

serious occupation, he runs restless from one amusement to another.' Thus, commerce is not merely the means by which pleasure is achieved; it is a pleasure in itself and a moderation of other pursuits of pleasure.[173]

The introduction of luxury and the development of commerce and manufacturing put in motion cascading effects in the social and political realms. Refinements in the mechanical arts produce refinements in the liberal arts: the same ages that produce great poets also produce skilled weavers and artisans. 'The spirit of the age affects all the arts; and the minds of men, being once rous'd from their lethargy, and put into fermentation, turn themselves on all sides, and carry improvements into every art and science,' Hume claimed.[174] As the refined arts advance, men also become more sociable and begin to leave the countryside in search of company and society—'they flock into cities; love to receive and communicate knowledge; to show their wit or their breeding; their taste in conversation or living, in cloaths or furniture.'[175] The improvements in the liberal arts, the 'easy and sociable manner' in which both sexes meet, and the general improvement in sociability lead to an increase in humanity. 'Thus,' Hume concluded, '*industry, knowledge,* and *humanity* are linkt together by an indissoluble chain, and are found, from experience as well as reason, to be peculiar to the more polish'd and luxurious ages.'[176]

Those sweeping social and political changes set the context for Hume's revision of the argument of 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', solving the dependence on wise legislators in his account of civilized monarchies. First, as

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[173] Id., pp. 69-70. Our craving for activity and employment is a recurring theme in Hume's works. It appeared in the *Treatise* 2.2.4.4, the 1742 essay 'The Sceptic' (see *Essays* (1742), vol. 2, pp. 156-157) and in the *Political Discourses*. Mazza and Mori, '"Loose Bits of Paper" and "Uncorrect Thoughts"', pp. 23–27, question the usual connection to Pascal's discussion of ennui in the *Pensées*, connecting it instead to the opening argument of Dubos' *Réflexions Critiques*, 1.5-11. While the *Treatise*'s reference to 'those, who take pleasure in declaiming against human nature' would suggest Pascal rather than Dubos, the positive role the desire for action and occupation has in the multiple instances in which it is invoked places Hume much closer to Dubos. Eugene Rotwein, 'Introduction', esp. pp xxxvi-xli, made that craving for activity the central element of Hume's political economy.
[174] *Political Discourses* (1752), pp. 26-27.
[175] *Id.*, p. 27.
[176] *Ibid*.

Sakamoto observes, 'Of Luxury' presented a self-reinforcing causal relationship between knowledge and industry: on the one hand, 'we cannot reasonably expect, that a piece of woolen cloth will be wrought to perfection in a nation, that is ignorant of astronomy, or where ethics are neglected.'[177] On the other hand, 'laws, order, police, discipline; these can never be carry'd to any degree of perfection, before human reason has refin'd itself by exercise, and by an application to the more vulgar arts, at least, of commerce and manufacture.'[178] Thus, in the more polished and luxurious ages, the development of commerce and manufacturing spreads a new 'spirit of the age' that leads to the development of knowledge, which then becomes itself a source of further economic development. 'Of Luxury' thus found another causal explanation for the growth of the arts and sciences, one that was derived from the modern experience of commercial expansion, not from the internal dynamics of republican governments.

Second, Hume connected the indissoluble chain of industry, knowledge, and humanity to changes in modern political practice and constitutions. In 'Of Luxury', luxury and refinement were the cause of two political changes. First, there is a general improvement in moderation and humanity in political practice. The refinement of the human mind in the vulgar arts of commerce leads to improvements in the arts of government—'can we expect, that a government will be well model'd by a people, who know not how to make a spinning wheel, or to employ a loom to advantage?' Hume asked.[179] Knowledge, in turn, instructs men about the benefits of political moderation, which is combined with the general increase in moderation. Mildness and moderation in politics become 'the chief characteristic, that distinguishes a civiliz'd age from times of barbarity and ignorance': rebellions become less frequent, political factions less inveterate, foreign wars less cruel; even in the battlefield, 'the combatants divest themselves of the brute, and resume the man.'[180] The importance of the increased humanity in modern political interactions will become clearer below when we get to Hume's

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[177] *Id.*, p. 26. For Sakamoto's discussion, see Sakamoto, 'Hume's Political Economy as a System of Manners', pp. 93–94.
[178] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 30.
[179] *Ibid.*
[180] *Id.*, pp. 30-31.

dissection of the brutality and barbarism of ancient politics (including or perhaps foremostly those of the great classical republics).

The standard case against luxury argued that it would dampen courage, enervating men and eventually leading to loss of martial spirit and the ability to defend the country.[181] Hume reacted by arguing that, first, courage, if unaccompanied by military discipline, was an unreliable foundation for military strength. The 'old Romans' were the only uncivilized people who had ever attained a substantial degree of military skill and discipline. In contrast, refined societies instil in men a 'sense of honour' that is a more robust, reliable, and governable principle.[182] In any case, Hume denied both that luxury was the reason for the effeminate character of modern Italians and the source of the decline of the Roman Republic. Concerning the former, the 'degeneracy' of modern Italians was related to the many ways in which the Italian principalities and republics had 'dropped the sword' and left the business of war (and thus the fate of the region) to mercenary soldiers.[183] On the decline of the Roman Republic, Hume argued against 'all the *Latin* classics' that the decline of Roman liberty was not caused by their welcoming '*Grecian* and *Asiatic* luxury' but their 'ill model'd government, and the unlimited extent of conquests.'[184]

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[181] On the pre-modern history of arguments against luxury, see Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 45–98. On early eighteenth-century arguments against luxury see Istvan Hont, 'The Luxury Debate in the Early Enlightenment', in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 379–418. For a new interpretation of the most widely read argument against luxury in the early eighteenth century, Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, *The Political Philosophy of Fénelon* (Oxford, *The Political Philosophy of Fénelon*, 2020), pp. 49–82. Hanley's interpretation of *Télémaque* within the context of Fénelon's other reform proposals takes the sting out of that text, which Istvan Hont compared to the reform plans of Mao and Pol Pot, see Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society* (Harvard, 2015), p. 105. While Hanley at times seems to overemphasize Fénelon's moderation, it has the merit of positioning Fénelon within the *querelle* as seen from the historiographical perspective that underpins chapter two of this thesis: that even the Ancients were well aware that classical antiquity was a different historical moment.
[182] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 31. For an explanation of the sense of honour in terms of Hume's theory of the passions, see Ryu Susato, *Hume's sceptical enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 2015), pp. 110–112. As Susato argues, that sense of honour is closely connected to a concern with one's reputation, a feature much more common in societies where people leave in close contact with each other.
[183] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 32.
[184] *Id.*, p. 33.

At least in modern societies, luxury actually had a *positive* effect on political constitutions, which is the second causal connection between luxury and politics. That connection functioned through the economic consequences of luxury. Considered in the correct light, 'luxury and the arts are rather favourable to liberty, and have a natural tendency to preserve, if not produce a free government.'[185] In 'rude and unpolish'd nations, where the arts are neglected' and all labour is agricultural, society is divided into two classes, landowners and their vassals. 'The latter are necessarily dependent and fitted for slavery and subjection; […] The former naturally erect themselves into petty tyrants.' In that situation, either the landowners subject themselves to an absolute sovereign or they 'throw the whole society into such confusion, as is perhaps worse than the most despotic governments.'[186]

As we learned above, luxury is introduced by foreign trade, which then fostered a domestic manufacturing sector. The development of the domestic manufacturing sector brings with it the ascension of the 'middling rank of men', that is, the tradesmen, merchants and manufacturers that produce and trade luxury and manufactured goods. The presence of luxury and manufactures also improves productivity in the agricultural sector, making farmers richer and thus placing some of them closer to the ascendant middle rank. The middling rank of men changes the composition of the country's political constitution. First, their social and economic situation makes them simultaneously incapable of tyrannizing over others and capable of resisting the tyranny of the landowning barons. Instead, 'they covet equal laws, which may secure their property, and preserve them from monarchical, as well as aristocratical tyranny.'[187] In 'Of Commerce', Hume noticed that the ascension of the middling rank also meant a general increase in the general standard of living: farmers were wealthier because they produced more and even workers improved their lot. Besides the immediate benefit to the people, the general improvement in living standards also mattered politically: better distribution of wealth meant tax collection was easier because the government now

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[185] *Id.*, p. 34.
[186] *Id.*, p. 35.
[187] *Id.*, pp. 35-36.

had a larger tax base at its disposal and did not have to rely on the assent of a narrow group of wealthy barons.[188] Crucially, Hume argued that this process was not related to forms of government: Francis Bacon had noticed that England had held a military superiority over France despite its smaller territory and population thanks to the better conditions of the common people; Hume added that at the time both governments were similar (and similarly absolute for that matter).[189] Although 'the poverty of the common people is a natural, if not an infallible consequence of absolute monarchy', Hume argued, their opulence was not always a consequence of liberty. Other 'particular accidents' are necessary to produce opulence.[190] It turned out that luxury and the expansion of commerce produced both the opulence of the common people and the rank of men that defended the security of property necessary to sustain it.

Thus, Hume reversed the causal relation that had predominated in the 1741-42 essays. In 'Of Liberty and Despotism', he had made commerce dependent on the security of property and, in 'Rise and Progress', he had made laws a product of the internal dynamics of republics. Now, liberty and laws were regarded as the product of commercial expansion and luxury.[191] Commerce could civilize absolute monarchies; in England, commerce had begun working its effects before resistance to absolute monarchy surfaced in the political scene. In England, commerce and liberty began to rise when the monarchy was at the zenith of its power in the Tudor era.[192] Still, the precedence of commerce over liberty in the *Political Discourses* does not mean Hume abandoned his earlier position. Forms of government still mattered in many aspects, not least in achieving *civil* rather than personal liberty—commerce could make even the French monarchy civilized, but it did not give French subjects any constitutional role.

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[188] *Id.*, pp. 17-18.
[189] *Id.*, p. 19. For Bacon's claim, see Francis Bacon, *Oxford Francis Bacon, XV: The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford, 2000), pp. 92–93.
[190] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 19.
[191] It is not the case then, as Istvan Hont argued, that 'when large monarchies replicated the trade of republics, Hume claimed, the causal nexus between liberty and commerce was reversed', see Hont, *Jealousy of trade*, p. 23. What changed was Hume's view, not the underlying causal relation.
[192] Hume would develop this argument at length in the *History of England*, see Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', pp. 137–150, esp. p. 145.

The *Political Discourses* solved the puzzle neither the naturalist nor the politician could solve: its analysis of the effects of commerce integrated political, economic, social, and moral changes (more on this in the next chapter) within the notion of a 'spirit of the age'. Commerce allowed Hume to integrate political and social phenomena: on the one side, commerce explained the rise of the rank of men who embodied the new spirit of the age and their interest in defending that spirit and its institutions; on the other side, it explained how that spirit shaped the modern world. In particular, the way Hume explained the effects of luxury through the habit of industrious work freed him from an appeal to wise legislators: it gave a general effect (civilized monarchies) its general cause (industry). What should not be missed is the extent to which Hume's answer to the naturalist-politician puzzle is the completion of Fontenelle's agenda for a new history in *Sur l'Histoire*. It completed a historical method that focused on the development of human society as a whole, not on the actions of great men. As we saw in chapter two, Fontenelle's account of the philosophical spirit was concerned chiefly with the arts and sciences as they were expressed by a few people of genius. Fontenelle did not actualize the kind of history he thought it was necessary to write. Hume's spirit of the age got closer to the kind of comprehensive view of society *Sur l'Histoire* called for.

The comprehensiveness of the 'spirit of the age' is even more evident in Hume's treatment of classical societies in 'Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations'. In the previous chapter, we learned that 'Populousness' opened with the 'enquiry concerning causes' because the set of relevant general causes at work in ancient societies established the background against which the 'enquiry concerning facts' would be pursued. The first two essays of the *Political Discourses* defined the basic historical structure of those general causes: Hume identified two basic historical situations, unrefined-barbarous-agrarian and refined-civilized-commercial, and presented a theory of how modern Europe had transitioned from the former to the latter. The '*fond de l'histoire*' changes through time; the *Political Discourses* showed how. 'Of

Populousness' firmly identified classical societies with the unrefined-barbarous-agrarian pole.[193] Even the greatest republics of the classical period were repositioned as part of that pole.

Hume's repositioning of classical antiquity began with domestic slavery, 'the chief difference betwixt the *domestic* oeconomy' of ancients and moderns.[194] In line with 'Of Commerce', the opening salvo was directed against those seeking to emulate the ancients in the modern period—'some passionate admirers of the antients and zealous partizans of civil liberty' who regretted the loss of the institution of slavery.[195] This time, the point was not so much the inapplicability of ancient policy but the outright rejection of it. Hume stressed that the same authors who defined monarchical government as slavery would gladly impose 'real slavery' upon the greatest part of humankind. They seemed not to understand the meaning of liberty. Indeed, Hume argued, 'human nature, in general, really enjoys more liberty at present, in the most arbitrary government of *Europe*, than it ever did during the most flourishing period of antient times.'[196] The closer the master is to the subject/slave, the more intense is the oppression. As we have learned multiple times now, an absolute monarch is not an impediment to personal liberty. Quite the opposite, absolute monarchies had presided over the early moments of the growth of commerce and personal liberty in modern Europe. Domestic slavery was the polar opposite: it put masters and enslaved persons

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[193] Sebastiani also stresses the fact that 'Populousness' is unambiguous about the barbarity of classical societies, see Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 40. However, she argues that 'Populousness' 'historicized the argument' of the other essays in the *Political Discourses*. I disagree that the other essays are not as 'historical' as 'Populousness'. True, they are not pieces of source criticism, but the point here is exactly that arguments such as those of 'Of Commerce' (and, for that matter, the 'enquiry concerning causes') are necessary for the kind of historical criticism performed in the second half of 'Populousness'.

[194] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 161.

[195] *Ibid*. Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun fits the bill. Fletcher was a Scottish republican thinker concerned with the political-economic situation of Scotland at the turn of the century. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 168–170, positions Fletcher's proposals as a Neo-Harringtonian attempt to solve the problems of the Scottish agrarian economy. Box and Silverthorne, 'The "Most Curious & Important of All Questions of Erudition"', p. 246, also identify Fletcher as Hume's target.

[196] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 161.

in direct contact, making the former's 'inspection and control' of the latter the most oppressive.[197]

The effect of such unmediated oppression was general inhumanity. 'Populousness' paraded a long list of cruel and inhumane practices depicted in ancient sources, often without even their noticing the cruelty of the actions they narrated: quoting from Seneca, Hume noticed that the author describes a habit of whipping enslaved servants during the night as 'disorderly' rather than cruel. The problem was the inappropriate time of the action, not the action itself.[198] From Ovid, he noticed the practice of having a chained slave for a porter. All sense of compassion had to be gone for anyone to welcome their guests with such a scene.[199] Hume stressed the effect of inhumanity not just on the lives of the enslaved persons, but also on the character formation of the slaveowners. A child raised in such an environment is accustomed from infancy 'to exercise great authority over their fellow creatures, and to trample upon human nature.' All the checks are on the inferior, none on the superior; nothing forces the slaveowner to engage in the 'reciprocal duties of gentleness and humanity.' Every 'man of rank' becomes a 'petty tyrant'—the same appellation Hume used to describe the 'Gothic barons' in 'Of Luxury'. Domestic slavery, he concluded, was the most probable reason 'for the severe, I might say, barbarous, manners of ancient times.' The 'remains' of domestic slavery in European colonies should have reminded his contemporaries about the nature of ancient manners.[200]

All that came before Hume had even begun the actual argument: that ancient slavery reduced the population of antiquity: that was the 'rhetoric' I mentioned in chapter three. Now we see that the 'rhetoric' was actually the heart of the argument. The argument proper made classical antiquity look even worse: the defenders of the ancients argued that it was in the interest of slaveowners to treat enslaved persons well

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[197] *Id.*, pp. 161-162.
[198] *Id.*, pp. 164-165.
[199] *Ibid*.
[200] *Id.*, p. 162. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, pp. 90–92, 168–171, and Watkins, 'Virtues Sublime and Suspect', pp. 66–81, provide extended accounts of Hume's views on slavery beyond 'Populousness', including the connection between the *Essays* and Hume's theory of the passions.

so that they would form families, have children and thus increase their owner's property. Hume argued that the reality of slavery was better compared to the management of cattle—'the comparison is shocking', he admitted, but it was true.[201] He then showed how ancient sources demonstrated that slaves were imported from the periphery of the Empire to the centre in the same way as cattle. It was too expensive to raise an enslaved child at the heart of the empire. It was better simply to import enslaved adults.[202] Again, any knowledge of the situation in European colonies in the Americas would have proved the same point.[203]

The inhumanity of masters to their slaves had its parallels in the political customs and institutions of classical antiquity. Hume opened his second argument with a summary of the usual defence of equality and civil liberty (of free men) in classical societies: by providing each citizen with a house and field to work, the population was distributed evenly across the country, and the propagation of humankind was assured.[204] That rosy picture of classical societies did not hold, though. Ancient equality (among free men) had pernicious consequences in both national and international politics. Concerning international politics, Hume repeated the argument of 'Of Commerce': small states in close neighbourhood and led by a caste of free men in love with their liberty (and accustomed from infancy to the grossest inhumanity, as we have seen) were bound to generate a strong martial spirit and perpetual war.[205] In 'Of Balance of Power', Hume also argued that, although prudent politics includes trying to keep a balance of power between states, the kind of perpetual war witnessed in antiquity was caused by jealousy more than prudence.[206] His fear concerning modern Britain was exactly that it seemed increasingly 'more possest with the antient *Greek* spirit

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[201] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 167.
[202] *Id.*, pp. 168-173.
[203] *Id.*, p. 170, footnote.
[204] *Id.*, pp. 182-187.
[205] *Id.*, p. 188.
[206] *Id.*, pp. 103-104.

of jealous emulation, than actuated with the prudent views of modern politics.'[207] 'Greek spirit' was hence synonymous with unnecessary warmongering out of national jealousy. The state of ancient military technology only compounded the damage: close-quarter combat between armies organised in deep columns assured every battle resulted in a bloodbath rather than a strategic confrontation.[208]

Bloodbaths were not confined to wartime. Ancient politics was extremely violent even in times of peace. Domestic politics in classical antiquity was marked by attempts to exclude completely the losing faction from government, something only religious parties attempted in modern times. The prevailing party 'immediately butcher'd' the opposition once it got to power. No proper process, laws, or trials were involved. Those who survived plotted revenge in exile. [209] As with slavery and international politics, Hume illustrated his point with a whole train of examples from classical sources.

Again, the problem was the very equality praised by defenders of the ancients: 'the very quality of a *freeman* gave such a rank, being oppos'd to that of *slave*, that it seem'd to intitle the possessor to every power and privilege of the commonwealth.'[210] The pride of free men made it impossible to form stable and moderate political institutions because they would not accept any hierarchy within their own rank. Whenever 'even the meanest and most beggarly' were excluded from political office, 'perpetual

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[207] *Id.*, p. 110. Hume did praise Britain for trying to restrain French attempts of establishing a universal monarchy in Europe (pp. 108-110). However, he feared Britain was overextending that genuine concern and making wars out of national jealousy. An 'enormous monarchy', although 'destructive to human nature', tends to collapse onto itself. Hume's revision of the causes of the fall of the Roman Republic apply to monarchies as well: the problem are unlimited conquests, not the form of government (pp112-114). After the French defeat in the Seven Years War, Hume removed the paragraph that suggested France was still a threat to the balance of power in Europe. In this context it became even clearer that threats of universal monarchy were exaggerated in order to disguise national jealousy as prudent politics (see *Essays* 338 and 634-635). For a discussion of Hume's views of the threat of universal monarchy in the context of European political thought, see Robertson, 'Universal Monarchy and the Liberties of Europe: David Hume's Critique of an English Whig Doctrine'.
[208] *Political Discourses* (1752), pp. 189-190.
[209] *Id.*, p. 192.
[210] *Id.*, pp. 203-204.

discentents' and sedition were guaranteed.[211] Without social distinctions and conse-quent social structure, all problems had to be solved within the political arena. Hence, ancient states swung 'betwixt a severe, jealous aristocracy, over discontented subjects; and a turbulent, factious, tyrannical democracy' according to the ebb and flow of fac-tions (each movement accompanied by a bloodbath).[212] Hume stressed that the prob-lem was not the form of government but the manners and opinions of the men who formed them: even the 'mixed monarchies' that preceded the republican governments of Greece were subject to political instability. Not to mention the Greek tyrannies, which were 'altogether horrible'.[213] If anything, republican governments made it worse. Speaking of the late Roman republic, Hume suggested that their laws were so 'absurdly contriv'd' that parties were *obliged* to appeal to 'extremities' to solve polit-ical disputes.[214] If republics had been, in 1742, the only form of government capable of generating laws from within, now Hume was arguing that those laws (in the Roman republic at least) only furthered the inhumane spirit of the age. In contrast, Hume added in the 1777 edition, modern republics were all 'well-tempered aristocracies.' All of them were well-known for their 'justice, lenity, and stability, equal to, or even beyond […] the most celebrated in antiquity.'[215]

All that political turmoil made property remarkably insecure in ancient states. Hume documented the tranquillity with which ancient sources depicted the grossest abuses of property rights. The orator Lysias, for instance, seemed unconcerned that the Athenian people had adopted as a maxim the habit of killing a rich citizen or foreigner and seizing his property whenever the city needed money.[216] Indeed, the character Charmides from Xenophon's *Symposium* argued that losing his wealth had made him

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[211] *Ibid.*
[212] *Id.*, p. 204.
[213] *Id.*, p. 199.
[214] *Id.*, p. 202.
[215] *Essays*, 416.
[216] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 198.

happier because he was now freed from all the fear and insecurity that came with own-ing property; if anything, his poverty now struck fear on others.[217] Overall, Hume ar-gued, 'these people were extremely fond of liberty; but seem not to have understood it very well.'[218] What they were truly fond of was the ability to go about unrestrained, to trample on their slaves, slaughter their political opponents, and prevent the neighbour-ing countries from ever achieving more glory than their own. Ancient liberty was no liberty at all, it was mere licentiousness. The state of ancient politics was so abysmally violent and inhumane 'that it seems superfluous to give any particular reason for the violences committed at any particular period,' Hume argued.[219] It was, in other words, simply the spirit of the age. Even worse, if that was the 'disposition of mens minds' among the 'refined' Athenians, what were we to expect from the peoples *they* denom-inated barbarous?[220]

The widespread violence and insecurity of property bring us to Hume's third and final argument in 'Populousness': the lack of trade and manufacturing in ancient nations. *Both* the 'barbarity of antient tyrants' *and* their 'extreme love of liberty' ban-ished merchants and manufacturers from ancient states.[221] At this point, Hume referred back to 'Of Liberty and Despotism' and asked whether there was any reason to think that ancient policy was any better than modern policy.[222] True, unequal, hierarchical, and absolute monarchies had something that made commerce a less noble activity, but what was that compared to the ancient situation?

Even then, Hume accepted that agriculture could flourish without a growing manufacturing sector and acknowledged that it had indeed 'flourished mightily' in an-cient Greece and Italy—'at least in some parts of them, and at some periods,' he ob-served immediately. But he also insisted that the 'infallible and universal method' is

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[217] *Id.*, pp. 197-198.
[218] *Id.*, p. 193.
[219] *Id.*, p. 202.
[220] *Id.*, p. 200.
[221] *Id.*, p. 208.
[222] *Id.*, p. 210.

to develop a manufacturing sector that pulls the productivity of agriculture.[223] The only kind of commerce that existed among the ancients resulted from differences in soil and climate. No ancient author ascribed the growth of a city to the development of manufacturing.[224] As Sakamoto notices, that kind of commerce is incapable of spurring the development of a local manufacturing sector since, it is impossible to emulate the imported product.[225] Without the development of local manufacturing, all the virtuous consequences of luxury do not happen. Indeed, Hume would later say in the *History of England* that the 'progress of the arts' (that is, luxury) 'seems, among the Greeks and Romans, to have daily encreased the number of slaves', whereas in modern times it was the very source of liberty.[226] Although Hume did not explain his reasoning behind the ancient case, we can conjecture from his account of the modern case that the very equality and spirit of the age prevalent in antiquity prevented the positive consequences of luxury. As he explained in the *History*, in the modern case, the introduction of luxury led the local barons to switch from keeping retainers to the consumption of luxury; that process eventually eroded the foundation of their power and paved the way for the consolidation of absolute monarchy and the rise of the middling rank. In contrast, the ancient context involved, on the one hand, luxuries that could not be imitated locally and enslaved agricultural labourers (who could not therefore ascend socially and economically), so there could be no middling rank due to both economic and juridical restrictions. On the other hand, the ancient love of liberty prevented anything like the modern dynamic of an absolute power rising along with the middling rank (and respecting basic property rights despite its absolute nature). Commerce and luxury in the ancient world could only lead to the freemen increasing the exploitation of the enslaved population.

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[223] *Id.*, pp. 208-209. This time Hume adduced Switzerland as a modern example of developed agriculture without a correspondent manufacturing sector. As we will see, he had also brought attention to the Swiss exception in the second *Enquiry*, see section three of the next chapter.

[224] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 207.

[225] Sakamoto, 'Hume's Political Economy as a System of Manners', p. 89.

[226] Hume, *The History of England*, vol. 2, p. 523. The passage is noticed (but not explained) by both Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, p. 297, and Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', p. 170.

With the account of commerce (or the lack thereof) in antiquity, Hume concluded the three arguments of the 'enquiry concerning causes.' Concerning population, he concluded that the disadvantages were 'a sufficient counter-balance' to the supposed advantages derived from the equality of property.[227] If anything, we learned that ancient equality was part of the problem, not the solution. More important for our present purposes is the striking connectedness of the three aspects of Hume's account. Ancient societies were ruled by a caste of free citizens who were brought up in a domestic environment characterized by cruelty and inhumanity where they were never taught to face the consequences of their behaviour. In adulthood, they became inflexible citizens, excessively proud of what they understood as liberty but was actually plain licentiousness. Those proud free citizens were incapable of achieving compromise in politics and unwilling to accept any degree of social hierarchy that might contribute towards the stabilization of their societies. Instead of the modern 'long Train of Dependence from the Prince to the Peasant'—or from the aristocrat to the peasant, in the case of modern republics— antiquity had proud, bloodthirsty citizens constantly fighting and shedding blood in a quest for political power. Internationally, those free citizens would not admit another nation achieving more glory than theirs, so they were perpetually at war. Any achievement in agriculture was either destroyed by plunder or used to feed the army that would plunder others. Commerce was limited, manufacturing non-existent. Even their contrived republican laws often worked only to ensure slaughtering the opposition was the only viable alternative. It was a barbarous spirit of the age, with political and economic institutions to match.

4. CONCLUSION

In equating the spirit of classical antiquity with barbarity, 'Populousness' thus made possible the complete transposition of the 'they-us' conjectural narrative of the

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[227] *Political Discourses* (1752), pp. 210-211.

Treatise to real history. Let us recapitulate the whole process and appreciate some of its consequences. Beginning with section one, we saw that Hume presented a developmental account of human society from rude/they to civilized/us, but that account did not have a clear connection to actual history. It was not clear whether Hume was referring to the infancy of human society in general, the infancy of each society or a particular part of history. That was not a problem in itself, given the aims of the *Treatise*, but the question would require an answer when Hume turned to history (and Hume was already doing so as book III of the *Treatise* was published).

The main problem with 'real history' was how to make sense of classical antiquity and its connection to modern societies. How would they fit in that move from rude to civilized? Section two above argued that the 1741-42 *Essays* produced a hybrid historical account: on the one side, classical antiquity was regarded as the first source of law and the arts and sciences; modern society had only reappropriated the classical achievement in a new form. Nevertheless, some aspects of the history of civilized European monarchies had no roots in the classical world. Gallantry, politeness, and indeed law-abiding absolute monarchs seemed to have no connection to classical antiquity. Historical hybridism was matched with conceptual hybridism: Hume established an uneasy compromise between forms of government and the ancient-modern distinction as the central conceptual element of his analysis.

The introduction of commerce in the *Political Discourses* removed the extant tension from the 1741-42 *Essays* (eventually reaching the early essays themselves as Hume revised his works). The *Political Discourses* presented an account of the transition from barbarism to civilization centred on the rise of luxury in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. That account explained the rise of civilized monarchies (and civilized republics) wholly without recourse to classical antiquity. Indeed, classical antiquity was considered an exceptional case defined by its unique circumstances. 'Populousness' placed those circumstances firmly within the side of history dominated by the barbarism that preceded commerce. Even forms of government now had to be understood in terms of the spirit of the age: a modern commercial republic of moderate and humane merchants and artisans was not the same thing as a classical republic of

slave-owning soldiers, even if both had somewhat similar political structures. The maturity of Hume's historical method was also the maturity of his historical narrative. The structure first expressed as a developmental account in the *Treatise* now had a version in real history. In the *History of England*, it would become a 'history of civilization in England,' as Duncan Forbes put it.[228]

However, the notion of classical antiquity as barbarism sounds strange, almost an oxymoron, especially when it comes from Hume. After all, the same Hume had written in the second *Enquiry* that the ancient Athenians and Romans were refined peoples and that ancient moral philosophy was better than modern moral philosophy.[229] The same Hume would write a History of England after 'the concise manner of the antient Historians.'[230] The crucial step here is understanding classical antiquity as the exception that proves the rule. Hume's repositioning of classical antiquity was not meant to deny the genuine achievements of those societies. It was meant to convey how extraordinary must have been the set of circumstances that allowed a set of agrarian societies made of slave-owning, bloodthirsty soldiers to achieve so much. Agrarian societies of slave-owning, bloodthirsty soldiers had preceded and succeeded Greece and Rome's great moments. That had been the rule until the sixteenth century. Hume believed it still was the rule in most of the world by the time he was writing. In many ways, as Hume sought to make clear in 'Populousness', even those great moments had not been as great as modern readers believed. Hence the conclusion of the essay:

> The humour of blaming the present, and admiring the past, is strongly rooted in human nature, and has influence, even on persons, endu'd with the profoundest judgment and most extensive learning.[231]

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[228] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, p. 298.

[229] On refinement of the ancients, see *EPM* D.25. On ancient moral philosophers understanding that moral judgments are matters of taste and sentiment, see *EPM* 1.4.

[230] Hume to the Abbé le Blanc, 12 September 1754, in Hume, *Letters*, p. 193. On Hume's 'Thucydidean' style, see Baumstark, 'David Hume', pp. 147–155.

[231] *Political Discourses* (1752), p. 261. Harris, *Hume*, p. 250, comments that, like Montesquieu, Hume had no nostalgic feelings towards the ancient world. Hume did spot the narrative of the modern in the chapters of the *Spirit of the Laws* on the French feudal monarchy and understood that it was a narrative of the modern totally detached from classical antiquity. But this passage is at least partially directed to Montesquieu, who was one of the targets of 'Populousness'.

In making classical societies the exception that proved the rule of barbarism, Hume had finally rested his case that there was no need of looking back. Until luxury ushered in the modern age, looking back to the days of glory of classical antiquity had been the only possibility. By contrast with its role in antiquity, modern commerce, politeness, and humanity had improved both monarchical and republican governments. They made personal liberty possible in absolute monarchies and civil liberty (somewhat) stable in republics and mixed governments. Unlike the classical route, modern commerce did not go against the grain of human nature: it harnessed the human desires for pleasure and action, made them complementary rather than mutually destructive and put them to the service of wealth rather than war. There was no need to look back to classical antiquity anymore. The ancients had truly become ancients, different from the people of today. Machiavelli, who had lived during the dawn of modern commercial societies, could be excused for not having seen it. Harrington had seen the change but failed to embrace it: in Montesquieu's famous words, he had 'built Chalcedon with the coast of Byzantium before his eyes.'[232] Hume would repeat Montesquieu's words to his nephew less than a year before his death. Republics were the best form of government, but the ancient republics were 'somewhat ferocious, and torn [internally] by bloody factions'; modern manners had 'corrected this abuse.'[233]

Hume's refusal to look back to classical antiquity persisted even as his pessimism about commercial societies grew. We saw in section two above that already in 1741 Hume had expressed the view that civilized monarchies were developing an advantage concerning public credit. In the *Political Discourses*, Hume further elaborated his views concerning public credit. He acknowledged the superiority of the ancient policy of hoarding treasure in times of peace to be spent in wartime. Modern policy, based on mortgaging future taxes by means of the public debt, was clearly inferior.[234] Worse, modern states were reviving Greek jealousy and funding their wars with debt,

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[232] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 166.
[233] Hume to David Hume the Younger, 8 December 1775, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 306-307.
[234] *Political Discourses* (1752), pp. 123-125.

which Hume likened to 'a match of cudgel-playing fought in a *China* shop.'[235] After the Seven Years War, Hume's fears only got worse. The revised 1764 edition of the essay had an even greater sense of urgency.[236] It was only part of a series of revisions in which Hume expressed increasing dismay with the state of British (particularly English) politics.[237] However, at the height of his pessimism, Hume did not turn back to classical ideals: he became even more interested in the French monarchy and in the role of a landed nobility in sustaining modern liberty.[238] Even though Hume still thought that 'the Republican Form of Government is by far the best,' as he said to his nephew not long before his death,modern problems required modern solutions. Modern civilized monarchies and tempered aristocracies could find them if only they looked in the right direction.[239]

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[235] *Id.*, p. 137.

[236] *Essays*, 357-360 (see p. 638 for an explanation of the additions).

[237] I have already discussed the revisions to the 1741-42 essays in section two above. For the other revisions of the 1752 essays, see Harris, *Hume*, pp. 421–431.

[238] With 'the middle power between king and people being totally removed, a grievous despotism must infallibly prevail' after the inevitable collapse of public debt, Hume commented in the addition to 'Of Public Credit', see *Essays, 358.* Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, pp. 125–141, esp. pp. 138-141, argues that Hume was returning to a view that stressed the incompatibility between wealth and virtue, which would suggest that Hume *was* looking back to some extent. More recent scholarship has contested Pocock's arguments. Istvan Hont, 'The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and Voluntary State Bankruptcy', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 321–348, esp. p. 345, contested Pocock's argument, noticing the centrality of the nobility as the Montesquieuian 'intermediate power' that assured the moderation of modern monarchies, in which he is followed by Harris, *Hume*, pp. 423–425. Pye, 'Histories of Liberty', pp. 174–177, also connects Hume to Montesquieu, emphasising (as I do in this chapter) that Hume's account of modernity is centred on commerce and manners, not political liberty.

[239] Hume to David Hume the Younger, 8 December 1775, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 306.

Chapter 5

A HISTORIAN'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY: THE ROLE OF HISTORY IN THE SECOND ENQUIRY

The second *Enquiry* has received increased attention in the last two decades, with philosophers investigating it as more than a mere 'casting anew' of Book III of the *Treatise*.[1] The latest contributions to the debate indicate how Hume's mature moral philosophy was much more historically inflected than the *Treatise*.[2] This chapter incorporates the insights of that literature to an account of how the second *Enquiry* made Hume's moral philosophy a part of his historical thought. As I argued in the last chapter, Hume consolidated his narrative of the modern and his view of European history during this period, completing the process that had begun in 1741. This final chapter shows how the changes in the second *Enquiry*, both in the structure of the work and its content, must be understood as connected to the development of Hume's narrative of the modern. From the perspective of Hume, the historian, it furthered the narrative of the modern he had been building in the previous decade. From the perspective of Hume, the moral philosopher, the second *Enquiry* was a work capable of extracting the principles of morals from that history instead of itself proposing a conjectural history of morals. From the perspective of moral agents (that is, the readers of the book), the second *Enquiry* offered an account of how an eighteenth-century polite reader could acknowledge the sublime moral practices of the ancient past without desiring to live in them.

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[1] This effort is to a large extent the result of the efforts of Jacqueline Taylor, who has repeatedly drawn attention to the differences between the moral philosophies of the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*. See Taylor's, *Reflecting Subjects*, 'Hume on the Standard of Virtue', and 'Justice, Sympathy and the Command of our Esteem', *Diametros* (2015), pp. 173–188.

[2] This chapter was first drafted as two collected editions of philosophical and historical commentaries on the second *Enquiry* came out: Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals*, and Kroeker and Lemmens, eds., *Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Contributions to those collected editions will be mentioned throughout this chapter. The role of history in the second *Enquiry* had been noted before by Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, esp. pp. 120-129, and Harris, *Hume*, p. 252, for instance.

The first section shows how Hume dropped the conjectural history of morals in favour of a philosophical study of moral practices as *already existent*. Instead of providing a genetic account of moral sentiments, Hume started from moral practices as they are found in history and tried to discover the foundational principles underlying them. Section two discusses how the second *Enquiry* dealt with moral diversity. It begins with an analysis of the account of justice and how it reflected that new approach to moral phenomena as historical practices. Hume's account of justice, the core of the moral philosophy of the *Treatise*, was now articulated in 'Montesquieuian' line, trying to extract fundamental principles from observed historical diversity. The second *Enquiry* could refer to the historical perspective Hume had been articulating in his post-*Treatise* works instead of providing a conjectural history itself. However, the second *Enquiry* did more than merely referring to a historical perspective external to itself. In its attention to historical diversity, the second *Enquiry* also contributed to the ancient-modern historical structure that found its fullest expression in 'Of Populousness'. The most radical kind of moral diversity, that between the sublime and the social virtues, was structured in ancient-modern terms. Finally, the last section explores how a good moral judge must be aware of history and his historical position. Hume's theory of the standard of taste, which appeared in 1757 and shared the same foundation as the *Enquiry*, was influenced by Dubos' theory of taste. However, despite both authors' interest in historical awareness, Hume had a more pluralistic perspective, acknowledging that standards of taste as well as of morals could vary. In morals, a good *modern* moral judge would understand why the sublime virtues of the ancients were genuine virtues but acknowledge that things had changed and modern morals and taste were different.

1. UNDENIABLE MORAL DISTINCTIONS

The *Enquiry* opened with an invective against the 'disingenuous disputants' who 'have denied the reality of moral distinctions.'[3] Those disputants, Hume argued, could not really believe in what they preached and only engaged in the controversy for the sake of it. The best reaction, he suggested, was to leave them to themselves. Notwithstanding, Hume kept those ingenious disputants constantly in sight: the *Enquiry* devoted significant space to rejecting doctrines Hume deemed not worthy of argument.[4] Indeed, in all but the last edition of the *Enquiry* Hume oversaw, the very first argument after the introduction was a rejection of moral scepticism and the 'selfish theories'.[5] In what we now know as Appendix 2, Hume provided a strong rebuttal of those forms of 'scrupulous scepticism.' The most extreme form of moral scepticism assumed moral distinctions to be a mere disguise to our interested 'machinations'—Hume did not give names, but the target here is probably Mandeville. To this, Hume answered only asking 'what heart one must be possessed of who professes such principles, and who feels no internal sentiment that belies so pernicious a theory.'[6] Again in section five, Hume dismissed Mandeville's argument that morality was an invention of politicians to keep the populace well-behaved. Although education does play a relevant role, it would be impossible to inculcate notions of morality if notions of praiseworthy and blameable characters were not an ineliminable part of the human constitution.[7]

The 'selfish theories' were a more elaborate form of moral scepticism that reduced all human affections to self-interest. In this view, all actions, even other-regarding actions, are motivated by selfish pleasures. Benevolent actions, in this view, are

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[3] *EPM* 1.1-2

[4] Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*, pp. 246–247. identified 'theological moralists' as the main target of the *Enquiry*. Although Hume did spend considerable efforts rejecting the 'monkish virtues' and their defenders, those efforts were always preceded by a similar effort in rejecting moral scepticism.

[5] On the history of the text, see Tom Beauchamp's introduction in *EPM*, pp. i-lxxxiii. On the philosophical relevance of the changes in the text, see Taylor, 'Hume's Revisions, and the Structure and Main Argument of EPM'.

[6] *EPM* A2.1.

[7] *EPM* 5.3.

merely a way of producing in oneself the pleasure of having done good to others. Hume's answer followed Joseph Butler's: the selfish theorists were combining a misguided 'love of simplicity' that thwarted every human affection into self-interest by a kind of 'philosophical chymistry.'[8] Against the selfish theorists' misguided love of simplicity, Hume proposed that, in philosophical matters, the 'simplest and most obvious case, which can there be assigned for any phaenomenon, is probably true.'[9] In the case of the foundations of morality, the question of whether 'general' and 'particular' benevolence could be resolved into self-love was 'a question more curious than important.' Hume simply assumed 'general benevolence, or humanity, or sympathy, [which] we shall have occasion frequently to treat of in the course of this enquiry […] as real, from general experience, without any other proof.'[10] Again, section five settled the matter:

> It is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others. It is sufficient that this is experienced to be a principle of human nature. We must stop somewhere in our examination of causes; and there are, in every science, some general principles, beyond which we cannot hope to find any principle more general.[11]

The *Enquiry*'s claim that the moral philosopher could stop at the point in which general experience proved the reality of the phenomenon in question flew in the face of Hume's own approach in the *Treatise*. As Peter Millican notices, the *Treatise* did precisely what the *Enquiry* exhorted moral philosophers not to do: it attempted to re-

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[8] *EPM* A2.2-6. For Butler's argument, see sermon XI, 'Upon the Love of our Neighbour, Preached on *Advent* Sunday' in Joseph Butler, *The works of Bishop Butler* (Rochester, 2006), pp. 110–118.

[9] *EPM* A2.7.

[10] *EPM* A2.6 n. 60. Hume's more emphatic rejection of ideas associated with Mandeville and his acceptance of 'general benevolence' could be read as a capitulation to Hutcheson, thus reversing the *Treatise*'s inclination towards Mandeville. In the last century, interpreters of Hume's philosophy have debated whether that was the case, see Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals*, p. 4. and Peter J. E. Kail, '"Concerning Moral Sentiment": The Moral Sense in the Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals', in Jacqueline Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, March 2020), pp. 158–159. for summaries of the different positions. Kail suggests that the second *Enquiry* is even less 'Hutchesonian' than the *Treatise*, in the sense that it is farther from a straightforward moral *sense* theory; it is much more concerned with how the cool approbation of the sentiment of humanity takes shape in history, see p. 159. Although taking a position on this issue is not necessary to the purposes of the chapter, Kail's position aligns well with the position I articulate here.

[11] *EPM* 5.17 n. 19.

duce moral phenomena to the workings of the minute springs of the human mind. Further, the *Treatise* could, according to Millican, be reasonably labelled as a work founded on 'Lockean psychological egoism,' given that an agent's moral approbation was reduced to her pleasant/unpleasant reaction to the sympathetic feelings *in her own mind* (even if those feelings are copies of the feelings of others).[12]

Worse still, Hume had made the redirection of the 'interested affection' the centre of the conjectural history of morals in Book III of the *Treatise*, as we learned in the last chapter. To be fair, he had explicitly rejected Mandeville's claim that morality was solely the product of inculcation by shrewd politicians and also denied that humans were incapable of genuinely other-regarding affections.[13] Those claims, however, did not prevent his critics from accusing him of moral scepticism and of 'sapping the foundations of morality.'[14] In his 1745 attempt to defend the doctrines of the *Treatise*, Hume went out of his way to deny both charges and explain how his account of justice as artificial and based on self-interest did not lead to them.[15] The weight of the accusations of moral scepticism as well as the complications generated by the associationist foundations seem to have convinced Hume to frame the *Enquiry* differently. Much of the scholarly debates concerning the differences between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* boil down to whether those changes make his moral philosophy significantly different.

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[12] See Peter Millican, 'The relation between Hume's Two Enquiries', in Jacqueline Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, 2020), p. 274. Other authors have argued that Hume maintained his commitment to the principles of association of impressions and ideas in his mature works. See, for instance, Debes, 'Has Anything Changed?', pp. 326–327, and Vitz, 'Sympathy and Benevolence in Hume's Moral Psychology', pp. 274–275. Hume did continue to use the principles of association, including in the *Enquiry*, even if sparingly. The point, however, is that Hume no longer relied on such principles to explain moral phenomena, even if he still believed the human mind functioned according to them.

[13] *Treatise* 3.2.2.25 and 3.2.2.4, respectively.

[14] David Hume, 'A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh: containing some observations on a specimen of the principles concerning religion and morality, said to be maintain'd in a book lately publish'd, intituled, A Treatise of Human Nature, &c.', in David Fate Norton and Mary J Norton, eds., *A Treatise of Human Nature* (2 vols, Oxford, 2007), p. 425.

[15] *Id.,* pp. 423-424 and 429-430.

More important to our purposes is the fact that the *Enquiry*'s open and forceful rejection of moral scepticism meant no moral sentiment appeared as 'to-be-developed'. There is no necessity of explaining how moral sentiments come into existence. In contrast to the *Treatise*'s claim that even our noblest affections suffer from our natural partiality (and therefore a process was required to leave the state in which such partiality predominated), the *Enquiry* insisted that agents are always capable of adopting a moral point of view *despite* our selfish passions and natural partiality.[16] Rather than being concerned with how moral sentiments first came about (and what minute springs of the mind made it possible), the *Enquiry* approached morality as *already existent*. As James King puts it, the existence of moral distinctions and a moral language is taken as 'a historical fact about men in society, something *positive* and unproblematic.'[17]

Indeed, the unproblematic nature of moral language anchored the *Enquiry*'s search for the principle of morals. In the original edition, Hume reaffirmed his commitment to the experimental method, suggesting that, instead of starting with formal definitions of virtue and vice, the moral philosopher ought to look at the mental qualities which receive approbation or disapprobation from the 'generality of mankind.'[18] In 1764, Hume added that 'the very nature of language guides us almost infallibly in forming a judgment of this nature; […] the least acquaintance with the idiom suffices, without any reasoning, to direct us in collecting and arranging the estimable or blameable qualities of men.'[19]

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[16] In *EPM* 5.42, Hume said 'And if these sentiments [of moral praise and blame], in most men, be not so strong as those, which have a reference to private good; yet still they must make a distinction, even in persons the most depraved ad selfish; and must attach the notion of good to a beneficent conduct, and of evil to the contrary'.

[17] King, 'The Place of the Language of Morals in Hume's Second Enquiry', p. 344.

[18] For the original text, see David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (London, 1751), p. 9. Alternatively, see the editors' annotations in *EPM*, pp. 215-216.

[19] *EPM* 1.10. This addition was part of a series of revisions by means of which Hume sought to give more emphasis to the role of language in moral judgment. Hume systematically substituted 'personal merit' for 'virtue'. As Taylor, 'Hume's Revisions, and the Structure and Main Argument of EPM', pp. 13–15, 26–27, notices, this shifts the emphasis away from the moral content of virtue/personal merit and towards the agreement among agents about the moral content, thus emphasizing the intersubjective nature of morality in Hume's views. The *Enquiry*'s new emphasis on language and social discourse has

Here, the content of the *Enquiry* preceded the revisions in its introductory section. Hume emphasized that the mere capacity to feel a concern for others is sufficient to generate moral distinctions and then a moral language. As I have already hinted, regardless of any selfish dispositions, no one is absolutely indifferent to the public good or the private good of others. Where everything else is equal, Hume argued, only a 'monster' would choose what is hurtful to the public good or the private good of others. No matter how 'cool' this preference for the public good or the private good of others is, or how unlikely the agent may be to act out of this preference, she will still cast her judgment in favour of what contributes to the good of the community or of others. 'Now this distinction is the same in all its parts, with the *moral distinction*,' and this sentiment of morals is the same with the sentiment of humanity.[20] Social intercourse amalgamates each agent's individual sentiment of humanity into a 'general language', which 'must be moulded on some more general views, and must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community.'[21]

Hume then opposed this moral language to what he called the 'language of self-love.' Moral judges always understand that when an agent refers to someone else as her 'enemy' or 'rival', she speaks the language of self-love. That is, she is referring to that person from her private point of view. In this case, the agent does not expect

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been constantly highlighted by recent commentary. See King, 'The Place of the Language of Morals in Hume's Second Enquiry', pp. 344–353; Jacqueline Taylor, 'Hume's Later Moral Philosophy', in David Fate Norton and Jacqueline Anne Taylor, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Hume* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 336–339; Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, p. 192; and Kail, '"Concerning Moral Sentiment": The Moral Sense in the Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals', p. 169.

[20] *EPM* 6.4-5. See also *EPM* 5.43 on the disposition to act out of this 'cool preference'. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, p. 126, and Hanley, 'David Hume and the "Politics of Humanity"', pp. 221–222, interpret the sentiment of humanity as a cool preference distinct from the virtue of benevolence. James Moore, 'Utility and Humanity: The Quest for the *Honestum* in Cicero, Hutcheson, and Hume', *Utilitas*, 14 (November 2002), pp. 365–386, identifies this minimum cool preference with an absolute aversion to cruelty.

[21] *EPM* 5.42. It is important to emphasize that the sentence partly quoted here is embedded in a paragraph largely lifted from the *Treatise*'s account of the corrections to our sympathetic responses and the formation of the general point of view. The quoted sentence referring to the formation of a general language is the *only* part that is completely new.

agreement from her audience. However, if she mentions epithets like 'vicious' or 'depraved', she then 'speaks another language, in which, [s]he *expects*, all [her] audience are to concur with [her].'[22] The very use of such terms implies the agent is *seeking* agreement with her audience, that she 'has chosen this common point of view and has touched the principle of humanity, in which every man, in some degree, concours.'[23] Because the required degree of concurrence is minimal (it only requires that 'cool preference' for the good of others), this sentiment of humanity is felt universally and reaches universally. That is, it is felt in common by all humankind, and it is capable of reacting to all actions, regardless of distance in time or space, 'render[ing] the actions and conduct, even of the persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure.'[24]

Further, the expectation of agreement and the similarity of our sentiments create a process of social reinforcement that makes the individually weak sentiment of humanity a formidable social force, capable of controlling self-love and other passions.[25] Although the *Enquiry* still mentioned many of the corrections to sympathetic responses we found in the *Treatise*—how agents correct for distance in time and space and virtue in rags—it emphasised, particularly in the concluding section, this process of creation of a powerful, socially shared sentiment.[26] This 'social and universal' principle, expressed in a shared language, 'form, in a manner, the *party* of human kind against vice or disorder.'[27] Moreover, agents' concern for their reputation brings extra force to the sentiment of humanity: 'our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world' leads us to largely internalise the sentiments conveyed by the shared moral language, thereby creating a 'constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection.'[28] In a sense, all the social mirroring and seconding

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[22] *EPM* 9.6, italics is mine.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] *EPM* 9.5.
[25] 'Certain general ideas are framed of human conduct and behaviour: Such measures are expected from men, in such situations: This action is determined to be conformable to our abstract rule; that other, contrary. And by such universal principles are the particular sentiments of self-love frequently controuled and limited.' *EPM* 9.8.
[26] Corrections to sympathetic responses are mentioned in *EPM* 5.41 and 5.43, for instance.
[27] *EPM* 9.9.
[28] *EPM* 9.10.

mechanisms developed in Book II of the *Treatise* and neglected in Book III resurface here, but this time organized around the notion of a moral language.[29] Instead of emphasizing the inner workings of the mind, the *Enquiry* analysed the correction of our sympathetic responses in terms of their relationship to a shared moral language.[30]

Hume concluded his account of the social power of moral language based on the sentiment of humanity with an admission of its limits. His account had nothing to say to the sensible knave, the person who exploits the honesty of others but does not lose her 'peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, [and] satisfactory review of [her] own conduct.'[31] If that person could not feel the loss in exchanging those intangible goods for some material gain, Hume had no way of convincing her to join the 'party of human kind.' He could only hope sensible knaves would be few and that the magistrate would be able to deal with them.[32] That final answer to the sensible knave is yet another example of how the conjectural history of morals lost importance in the second *Enquiry*. The paradigmatic case of partiality and inability to share (and ultimately to comply with) conventional moral language no longer takes the form of a temporal division between a rude 'they' and a civilized 'us', but between the knave and 'us', coexisting within the same society.

The entire analysis of the sentiment of humanity and moral distinctions referred only once in a footnote to the rude-civilized conjectural history. In the conclusion of the book, Hume wrote that

> it seems certain, both from reason and experience, that a rude, untaught savage regulates chiefly his love and hatred by the ideas of private utility, and has but faint conceptions of a general rule or system of behaviour. The man who stands opposite to him in battle, he hates heartily, not only for the present moment, which is almost unavoidable, but for ever after; [..] But we, accustomed to society, and to more enlarged reflections, consider, that this man is serving his own country and community; […] that we ourselves,

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[29] Again, I refer to Taylor's interpretation of such mechanisms in *Reflecting Subjects*, pp. 33–97.

[30] As King, 'The Place of the Language of Morals in Hume's Second Enquiry', p. 354, footnote 20, observes, 'the locus of talk about correction in the *Enquiry* approach to the moral judgement relates to the manner of the individual's participation in the common language of morals.'

[31] *EPM* 9.23.

[32] As argued by Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*, pp. 239–242.

> in like circumstances, observe a like conduct […] And by these supposi-
> tions and views, we correct, in some measure, our ruder and narrower pas-
> sions.[33]

Although the footnote recovered the basic polar opposition between the rude and civ-ilized that guided the conjectural history of the *Treatise*, the whole argument of the second *Enquiry* worked within a synchronous framework: it opposed the shameless sensible knave to his contemporaries who do feel proud of their own virtue when re-viewing it; and it opposed the language of morals to the language of self-interest, be-tween which we all switch constantly.

Thus, the core sections of the *Enquiry*—one, five, and nine, those which pre-sented the principles of morals—sought to find the unifying elements of morality. They asserted the universal and undeniable existence of moral distinctions and identi-fied a universal capacity to distinguish the moral worth of mental qualities. They con-nected this capacity to a single sentiment, the sentiment of humanity which made us capable of issuing moral judgment *despite* the partiality of our non-moral sentiments. The distinction between moral and non-moral sentiments was clearly expressed in our use of language, which has a moral and a non-moral register. In relation to the *Treatise*, the notable difference was the absence of the temporal nature of moral phenomena. Except for the footnote noticed above, the opposition between natural partiality and shared moral sentiments was not analysed in terms of a movement from rude to civi-lized; instead, it was analysed as a tension between constitutive parts of life in society, regardless of time.

2. MORAL DIVERSITY IN THE ENQUIRY

The dismissal of the conjectural history did not mean a dismissal of change or diversity in morality. Quite the contrary, the *Enquiry* embraced moral diversity whole-heartedly. The very structure of the book reflected this embrace: whereas the *Treatise*

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[33] *EPM* 9.8 n. 57.

followed the flow of the conjectural history of justice and the common point of view, the *Enquiry* was structured in terms of the kinds of qualities we approve of (useful and agreeable, to self and others), with the core sections discussed above bringing home the principles that unified them.[34] The analysis of each kind of quality was also presented differently: Hume presented the diversity of actual moral practices found in history and then attempted to find their shared elements and what made them different from one another.

That was most notably the case of justice. Section three of the second *Enquiry* opened with the claim that 'public utility is the *sole* origin of justice, and that reflections on the beneficial consequences of this virtue are the *sole* foundation of its merit'.[35] Although Hume mentions the 'origins' of justice, he offered the reader a counterfactual account of situations in which justice is not useful and thus not considered a virtue instead of the conjectural history of the origins of justice. The counterfactuals established the theoretical space of justice delimited by two pairs of opposite extremes in which property distinctions are not useful.[36] On the one side, he established that in the extremes of human altruism and selfishness, distinctions between mine and thine are unnecessary: if humans were absolutely altruistic, they would live in a state of perfect communion, no property distinctions would be necessary (this is the case of a family unit, which has no internal distinctions of property); if humans were absolutely selfish, anyone trying to respect distinctions of property would only make him or herself a fool. On the other axis, he established the extremes of abundance and scarcity, which similarly make property distinctions redundant: in the 'golden age' of poets, there is no need to determine property because each individual can always find more of whatever she happens to desire; in situations of extreme penury (such as

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[34] The *Treatise* did use the terminology of useful and immediately agreeable qualities to self or to others in Part III of Book III, see *Treatise* 3.3.2.16. Inversely, the second *Enquiry* did mention the conjectural-historical account of the transition from the rude to the civilized state, as we saw above and will see in another instance below. The point here concerns the overall structure of the books and their arguments.
[35] *EPM* 3.1.
[36] *EPM* 3.1-9.

a shipwreck), everyone has a free pass to seek their own individual survival, so no property distinctions exist.

'The common situation of society is a medium amidst all these extremes.' Given this reality, 'ideas of property become necessary in all civil society: Hence justice derives its usefulness to the public: And hence alone arises its merit and moral obligation.'[37] There no longer was any need to explain how agents *come* to approve of justice. It is useful, therefore it is approved of. Hume did follow up sections two and three with an explanation of *why* utility pleases but, as discussed above, section five argued that we approve of the useful virtues of benevolence and justice despite our naturally partial dispositions. The whole problem of 'sympathy with the public interest' and how it became possible after the correction of our limited generosity disappeared.[38] The approval of justice is simply assumed as present whenever justice is useful.

The conjectural history of justice subsisted only in the final paragraph of the first part of section three. Here, Hume briefly narrated the 'natural progress of human sentiments' as social life progressed from a simple family unit to tribes of a few family units and then complex nations. Even then, the story is somewhat different: Hume simply stated that the 'rules, which preserve peace and order, enlarge themselves to the utmost extent of that society.'[39] Hence, there is no distinction between before and after the conventions. Instead, Hume affirmed that there will always be a conventional set of rules proportional to the existing state of society. As societies progress from family unities to nations, sentiments progress with them.

The question about the artificiality of justice, so central to the *Treatise*, received a similar treatment. The whole question was side-lined to Appendix 3, where Hume discussed how the utility of benevolence and justice worked in different ways.

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[37] *EPM* 3.13.

[38] As even some commentators who reject the view that there are significant differences between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* concede. See, for instance, Pitson, 'Sympathy, Humanity, and the Foundation of Morals', p. 107. Harris, 'Hume on the Moral Obligation to Justice', suggests that Hume's search in the *Treatise* for the character trait of 'being just' (which we supposedly approve of when we sympathize with it) was fruitless.

[39] *EPM* 3.21.

Instead of the narrative offered in the *Treatise*, Appendix 3 is framed in terms of a *comparison* between justice and other conventional practices such as rowing, language, and money. True, all of those comparisons were present in the *Treatise*, but in the *Enquiry* they defined the structure of the argument, replacing the narrative. The conjectural history of justice did appear in a footnote to the Appendix, where Hume said his theory of justice was 'in the main, the same with that hinted at and adopted by GROTIUS', followed by a passage from *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* arguing that humans first moved out of the primaeval communion of goods due to their desire to enjoy a choicer (*exquisitum*) lifestyle.[40] However, as James Harris argues, the critical aspect of this passage is Hume's denial that justice was the product of 'a mere internal act of the mind.' Justice must have been a product of human interaction and, as a product of human interaction, it must have had a history. The difference between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* was thus not so much that justice must have had a history, but how the moral philosopher ought to approach it. Here, the two works were at odds.[41]

The difference between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* becomes clear when we proceed to Hume's treatment of the particular laws of justice. As we have seen, the *Treatise* emphasized the connection between particular laws and the workings of the human mind. In the *Enquiry*, Hume approached the topic with an analysis of how 'all questions of property are subordinate to the authority of civil laws, which extend, restrain, modify, and alter the rules of natural justice, according to the particular *convenience* of each community.'[42] Here, Hume subscribed to the ideas of Montesquieu, 'a late author of genius, as well as learning' (or 'of great genius, as well as extensive learning', as Hume had it in the first edition): 'the laws have, or ought to have, a constant reference to the constitution of government, the manners, the climate, the religion, the commerce, the situation of each society.'[43] As Harris puts it, in the *Enquiry*, 'law, we might say, is not to be understood *philosophically* so much as *historically* and

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[40] *EPM* A3.8 n. 63.
[41] James Harris, 'Justice in An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals', in Jacqueline Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 91–92.
[42] *EPM* 3.34.
[43] *Ibid*.

(to use terms not available to Hume) *sociologically* and *anthropologically*.'[44] The *Enquiry* substituted an analysis of historical practices for the conjectural history that had featured in the *Treatise*.

The transition away from the conjectural history of the *Treatise* is also notable in section four, 'Of Political Society'. Instead of a conjectural history of the origins of government, Hume simply stated that 'the sole foundation of the duty of allegiance is the *advantage*, which it procures to society, by preserving peace and order among mankind.'[45] The section then marshalled examples of other conventional associations for mutual advantage, some of which had featured in the *Treatise* (the law of nations, chastity). As Marc Hanvelt argues, dropping the conjectural history and the emphasis on the principles of the mind and imagination meant Hume could focus on how people articulate conventional rules/institutions in actual, contingent historical situations.[46] The second *Enquiry* focused on extracting the principle from the examples it marshalled: in section four, the principle that conventions emerge to reduce conflict and keep 'peace and order'.[47] They could (and often were) analysed in their historical detail in other places such as the *Essays* or the *History of England*.[48]

Another addition to the *Enquiry* highlights how Hume abandoned his earlier conjectural history. Here he added a new dimension of justice that was not present in the *Treatise*, namely who is included in the rules of justice. If there were a rational but physically inferior species living alongside humans, Hume argued, the latter would not

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[44] Harris, 'Justice in An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals', p. 88. Elsewhere Harris comments that 'Reading *De l'Esprit des Lois* appears to have changed Hume's sense of how much could be achieved by an experimental science of human nature in general. Such a science, it was now clear, needed to be supplemented and deepened by more particular and localized histories of morals and manners,' see *Hume*, p. 252. Hanley, 'Justice and Politics in the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals', pp. 64–66, agrees that Hume's distancing from the question of artificiality is connected to a more historical approach that emphasizes how legislators *extend* 'natural justice' by adapting it to the historical, geographical, climatic, religious and other kinds of circumstances of their people.

[45] *EPM* 4.1.

[46] Hanvelt, 'History, Context, and the Conventions of Political Society', p. 88.

[47] *Id*, p. 90.

[48] Indeed, Richard Dees, 'Hume and the Contexts of Politics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 30 (1992), pp. 219–242, argued convincingly that Hume's theory of resistance is 'contextualist', that is, the justification of resistance to government depends on what is established, not on philosophical principles.

be bound to the rules of justice in their relations with the former. Since the weaker species would be unable to 'make us feel the effects of their resentment,' there would be no utility, on the human side, to abide by any conventional rules in relation to them. Only the 'laws of humanity' would apply, and those creatures would be at the mercy of human benevolence.[49] That was the case of animals (though Hume distanced himself from the debate about animal reason). He further stated that 'the great superiority of civilized EUROPEANS above barbarous INDIANS, tempted us to imagine ourselves on the same footing with regard to them.'[50] It is not my aim to discuss Hume's intentions here, but we must notice how Hume's identification of this question was yet another step away from his conjectural history of justice: the account of justice is no longer a single story of 'society' in the abstract, with no inequality among the members of that society or between that society and other societies.[51] Even if we conclude that Hume naturalized the brutal treatment afforded to those who (supposedly) could not make their resentment felt, the account of justice of the *Enquiry* now acknowledged that the 'progress of sentiments' may be lacking in relation to some people and, therefore, that there might be multiple histories of how those who were excluded from justice came to 'break the confederacy' of those who created it. The unitary story was replaced by a set of concepts that could analyse the multiplicity of practices observed in history.

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[49] *EPM* 3.17-19. Hume's treatment of this new questions highlights how the very meaning of justice was broadened in the *Enquiry*: although property remained central, justice was no longer exclusively about property rights. It seemed to include any conventional rules of equitable behaviour towards others. Justice became simply 'the rules which preserve peace and order', as stated in *EPM* 3.21. On the broadened scope of justice, see Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*, pp. 83–98. As Baier argued, the expansion of justice continued after the *Enquiry*.

[50] *EPM* 3.19. To which he added: 'In many nations,' it was also the situation of women, though the latter were more capable of using their abilities to 'break the confederacy' of men.

[51] Some interpreters have read Hume as, to a certain extent, justifying the barbarous treatment of Native Americans by denying that any injustice is involved (since there could not be 'justice' in the first place), only a lack of humanity. He was, in this reading, naturalizing a situation of oppression by placing it in a scale where Native Americans feature between women and animals, all of them below men. See, for instance, Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 37. Others have read the passage as Hume's a condemnation of European practices (even if a clearly insufficient one), that can be developed into a stronger and more comprehensive critique by contemporary moral philosophers interested in Humean ethics; see, for instance, Taylor, 'Justice, Sympathy and the Command of our Esteem', pp. 173–176. On Hume's racism, see Aaron Garrett and Silvia Sebastiani, 'David Hume on Race', in Naomi Zack, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 31–43.

Hume connected the diversity of forms of justice to the role of reasoning in moral judgment. Utility is the foundation of justice whatever form it takes; local variations are the result of a society's response to its circumstances. In the same way humans build houses with different shapes and parts to make life convenient in different environments, the variety of 'municipal laws' is meant to make life in society convenient in different situations.[52] Hume stressed that reasoning about justice is a collective affair: the 'debates of civilians; the reflection of politicians; the precedents of history and public records; are all directed to the same purpose', namely, the discovery of the rules which best attend to the public good. Modern commentators have noticed the enlarged role of reason and moral reasoning in the *Enquiry*.[53] Although strictly speaking the role of reason remained the same—'it is not alone sufficient to produce any moral blame or approbation'—Hume now admitted that '*reason* and *sentiment* concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions,' which was quite an improvement from being a slave of the passions.[54]

There was, however, a more radical kind of moral diversity that posed more complex problems to Hume. If the core sections considered 'moral language' mainly in the singular, opposing it to the 'language of self-love', 'A Dialogue' attached to the *Enquiry* and section seven introduced the existence of a plurality of moral languages. The Dialogue presented a conversation between a narrator espousing the views presented in the *Enquiry* and his well-read and well-travelled friend Palamedes. The Dialogue belonged to a well-established literary genre in Europe that sought to present the reader to the otherness of distant societies (in time or space) and raise awareness of the idiosyncrasy of the reader's own customs and manners.[55] Palamedes introduced

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[52] *EPM* 3.45.

[53] Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue*, 246–47, shows that the 'enlargement of reason' is a movement that spanned Hume's entire intellectual career. By the time he wrote the last volume of the *History of England*, Hume was arguing that virtue 'is nothing but a more enlarged and cultivated reason,' see Hume, *History of England*, vol. 1, p. 179. See also Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, pp. 122–125, and Hanley, 'Justice and Politics in the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals', pp. 69–71.

[54] *EPM* A1.3, SBN 286, and 1.9.

[55] On the literary genre and the Dialogue's place in it, see Baumstark, 'The Biographical Background of the Second Enquiry', pp. 48–55.

the question of diversity in morals by expressing the 'double pains' he had to go through to learn the language of Fourli, a country 'no matter for its longitude or latitude, whose inhabitants have ways of thinking, in many things, particularly in morals, diametrically opposite to ours.'[56] In that strange country, Palamedes discovered that he had to learn both the language proper—that is what term in the Fourlian language corresponded to, say, 'benevolence'— and what sentiment of praise or blame was attached to each term. The catalogue of virtues and vices of the Fourlians was utterly at odds with his own: the narrator reaction was that he must be jesting, since those 'barbarous and savage manners are not only incompatible with a civilized, intelligent people, but are scarcely compatible with human nature.'[57] However, they turned out to be an amalgam of ancient Greek and Roman customs and famous events. The narrator argued that this could be done to any nation, then performed the same exercise with modern French manners.[58] Palamedes drew a sceptical conclusion from the exchange: it was impossible to find a single standard of morals among such diverse moral practices; 'the uncertainty of all these judgments concerning characters' and to the fact that 'fashion, vogue, custom, and law, were the chief foundation of all moral determinations.'[59] The narrator rejected Palamedes' scepticism, affirming that a standard could be found

> By tracing matters […] a little higher, and examining the first principles, which each nation establishes, of blame or censure. The RHINE flows north, the RHONE south; yet both spring from the *same* mountain, and are also actuated, in their opposite directions, by the *same* principle of gravity. The different inclination, in which they run, cause all the difference of their courses.[60]

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[56] *EPM* D.2. As Taylor, 'Hume's Later Moral Philosophy', pp. 336–339, observes, Palamedes' double pains brings forward again the emphasis on language as the locus of morality in the *Enquiry*.
[57] *EPM* D.12.
[58] *EPM* D.19-24.
[59] *EPM* D.25.
[60] *EPM* D.26. In a letter to James Balfour, Hume acknowledged that the narrator represented the point of view of the second *Enquiry*: 'I have surely endeavoured to refute the Sceptic [in the Dialogue] with all the force of which I am master, and my refutation must be allowed sincere, because drawn from the capital principles of my system,' see Hume to James Balfour, 15 March 1753, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 173.

Higher up, however, Hume's narrator found four categories of qualities that define moral standards, not one: 'there never was any quality recommended by any one, as a virtue or moral excellence, but on account of its being *useful*, or *agreeable* to a man *himself*, or to *others*.'[61] Those were, as we have seen, the kinds of qualities that structured the whole *Enquiry*. The qualities immediately agreeable to the possessor or to others, analysed in sections seven and eight of the *Enquiry*, differ from the social virtues of justice and benevolence in being unmediated by reasoning about their tendencies. Qualities immediately agreeable to the possessor touch spectators by a 'contagion or natural sympathy' they 'cannot forbear' sharing.[62] They have a 'peculiar lustre', in particular 'sublime' qualities such as courage, greatness of mind, and philosophical tranquillity.[63] Others such as benevolence (which is also a quality useful to others and thus a social virtue) 'being delightful in themselves, are necessarily communicated to the spectators, and melt them into the same fondness and delicacy.'[64] Qualities immediately agreeable to others also have this unmediated appeal to spectators. In conversation, Hume argued, 'there is a manner, a grace, an ease, a genteelness, an I-know-not-what, which some men possess above others, which […] catches our affection almost as suddenly and powerfully.'[65] While Hume acknowledged that 'views of utility or of future beneficial consequences' do not have a role in the approbation of immediately agreeable virtues, he reckoned the 'the same social sympathy […] or fellow-feeling with human happiness or misery, gives rise to both' kinds of approbation, useful or agreeable.[66]

Although both kinds of qualities depend on the same basic capacity for fellow-feeling, the immediately agreeable can get in the way of our reasonings about the usefulness of some qualities: 'We must sacrifice somewhat of the *useful*, if we be very anxious to obtain all the *agreeable* qualities; and cannot pretend to reach alike every

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[61] *EPM* D.37.
[62] *EPM* 7.2.
[63] *EPM* 7.11.
[64] *EPM* 7.19.
[65] *EPM* 8.14. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, pp.148-152, and Watkins, 'Virtues Suspect and Sublime', p. 145, stress the unreflective character of the agreeable virtues.
[66] *EPM* 7.29.

kind of advantage.'[67] That opposition between the useful and the agreeable was connected to the way moral practices (and their moral languages) were embedded among each society's social, economic, political, and religious practices. Here again the *Enquiry* opened itself to the kind of 'Montesquieuian' analysis of moral practices: the moral philosopher could trace a society's inclination to the useful or agreeable back to its circumstances: different customs and 'particular accidents' could make a particular kind of sentiment 'flow with greater abundance than another.'[68] The Dialogue listed some of those 'accidents': first, 'as the difference between war and peace is the greatest that arises among nations and public societies, it also produces the greatest variations in moral sentiment.'[69] Second, 'the differences of moral sentiment, which naturally arise from a republican or monarchical government, are also very obvious; as well as those, which proceed from general riches or poverty union or faction, ignorance or learning.'[70] More than the balance between useful and agreeable, political and economic practices could also tilt preferences among the qualities useful to self, which Hume discussed in section six. Where birth is the main form of distinction, 'the generous and ambitious seek honour and authority and reputation and favour. Where riches are the chief idol, corruption, venality, rapine prevail: Arts, manufactures, commerce, agriculture flourish.'[71] Birth and the train of merit/demerit associated with it suit monarchies better, riches and its consequents suit republics better.[72]

However, Hume's narrator was careful to emphasize that his approach of 'tracing matters higher' did not work in relation to what he and his interlocutor characterized as 'artificial lives.' Although Palamedes conceded that he could make sense of the diversity of moral sentiments with the general principles established by the narrator, he argued that those principles could not make sense of such 'extravagant' moral

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[67] *EPM* D.47.
[68] *EPM* D.42.
[69] *EPM* D.39.
[70] *EPM* D.51.
[71] *EPM* 6.35.
[72] *Ibid*.

systems as the austere religious devotion of Pascal or the philosophical zeal of Dioge-nes. Both men lived their lives according to extremely rigorous interpretations of the philosophical or religious views of their ages. Diogenes' public indulgence of his 'beastly pleasures' and Pascal's refusal of even the most innocent pleasure in private were both praised by their contemporaries (despite one being the extreme opposite of the other). Could the narrator speak of a standard of morals in face of this evidence, even a pluralistic standard that admitted some diversity? 'An experiment', he an-swered, 'which succeeds in the air, will not succeed in a vacuum.' Those two men were different from us, 'the natural principles of their mind play not with the same regularity' as ours, who are free from religious superstition or philosophical enthusi-asm.[73] Although their willingness to live to the letter of speculative systems of their times may have impressed their contemporaries, they were not seen as common life models. Unlike the differences created by forms of government, wealth and poverty, war and peace, the systems of Diogenes and Pascal were not part of the 'natural effects' of custom and could not be lived out by whole societies.[74] Hume's attempt to make sense of actual moral practices was concerned only with moral practices that were expressed by moral languages moulded from the general sentiments of those who par-took in it. In other words, Hume's moral philosophy dealt with historical moralities, as James King puts it.[75]

Artificial lives apart, the opposition between the useful and the agreeable found its starkest expression in the opposition between a particular set of qualities immedi-ately agreeable to self, what Hume called the 'sublime virtues', and the social virtues of justice and benevolence. The main sublime virtue was courage. Of courage, he af-firmed that among nations 'enflamed by continual wars' such as the Romans, the value

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[73] *EPM* D.57.

[74]'These, I say, are the *natural* effects of such customs,' Hume said in *EPM* D.50.

[75] James King, 'Hume on Artificial Lives: With a Rejoinder to AC MacIntyre', *Hume studies*, 14 (1988), pp. 60–66. Indeed, in the conclusion of the *Enquiry*, Hume denied the 'monkish virtues' (celibacy, fasting, penance, etc) were virtues at all: they did not render their possessor valuable to society nor made him agreeable company, 'except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself' (*EPM* 9.3).

and lustre of courage could swell to such a degree that it became synonym with virtue.[76] The Scythians, Hume affirmed quoting Herodotus, used the scalps of their enemies as clothing to display their courage and military prowess; the warrior with the most scalps had the most esteem in society.[77] Indeed, he concluded, courage is the 'predominant excellence' among 'all uncultivated nations' who have not yet experienced the advantages of the social virtues. In those nations, 'so much had martial bravery, […] destroyed the sentiments of humanity; a virtue surely much more useful and engaging.'[78] Even the polite Athenians would rather boast about their military prowess than their pioneer development of laws and agriculture—a partiality 'which, though condemned by calm reason and reflection, appears so natural in the mind of man.'[79] The preference for the sublime virtue of courage at the expense of the sentiment of humanity was not exclusive to scalp-wearing barbarians; it was a characteristic of the martial age as a whole. Indeed, the way Hume discussed courage seems almost designed to paint it as a 'vice immediately agreeable to self' (and, sympathetically, to the spectator), as Margaret Watkins argues.[80]

Courage was not the only sublime virtue. Hume also placed 'greatness of mind' and 'philosophical tranquillity' in the same category. In the first case, he repeated the example of Alexander the Great he had given in the *Treatise*: his greatness of mind gave him such a 'dignity and right of empire' that he could not believe anyone would refuse to obey him: 'Wherever he found men, he fancied he should find subjects,' Hume concluded.[81] Besides Alexander, Hume enlisted Medea and Phocion as exemplars of greatness of mind in the face of tragedy, standing tall even when fate turned against them.[82] The philosopher's ability to transcend his earthly existence with the pain, sorrow, poverty, and humiliation that comes with it was the last of the sublime virtues. Again, Hume enlisted ancients as examples: Socrates and Epictetus had shown

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[76] *EPM* 7.13.
[77] *EPM* 7.14.
[78] *Ibid*.
[79] *EPM* 7.25.
[80] Watkins, 'Virtues Sublime and Suspect', p. 137.
[81] *EPM* 7.6. The passages appeared in *Treatise* 3.3.2.12.
[82] *EPM* 7.7-8.

that 'magnanimous care of preserving liberty' and avoiding 'dependence'.[83] Watkins names the sublime virtues 'suspect virtues': they unite that irresistible sublime quality that 'strikes' us and with which we 'cannot forbear' sympathizing and the capacity to make their possessors regard themselves as above or beyond society.[84]

The opposition between the sublime and the social virtues is explicitly associated with the ancient-modern historical structure that was the backbone of the *Political Discourses* (which, we must remember, Hume wrote at the same time as the second *Enquiry*):

> Among the ancients, the heroes in philosophy, as well as those in war and patriotism, have a grandeur and force of sentiment, which astonishes our narrow souls, and is rashly rejected as extravagant and supernatural. They, in their turn, I allow, would have had equal reason to consider as romantic and incredible, the degree of humanity, clemency, order, tranquillity, and other social virtues, to which, in the administration of government, we have attained in modern times, had any one been then able to have made a fair representation of them. Such is the compensation, which nature, or rather education, has made in the distribution of excellencies and virtues, in these different ages.[85]

Neither Hume's criticism of courage nor his examination of Alexander the Great's greatness of mind was a new feature of the second *Enquiry*. The novelty in the second *Enquiry* was the ancient-modern historical argument within which they were embedded.[86] Although Hume called Alexander's pride a 'heroic pride' in the *Treatise*, it becomes a more widespread characteristic of the great men and women of the ancient world only in the second Enquiry.[87] Similarly, Hume's criticism of martial courage was very much the same as in the *Treatise*. However, the *Treatise* established an opposition between '*the generality of mankind*', who praise courage 'as the most sublime

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[83] *EPM* 7.16-17.
[84] Watkins, 'Virtues Sublime and Suspect', p. 146.
[85] *EPM* 7.18
[86] Watkins, 'Virtues Sublime and Suspect', p. 139. makes an important reminder: Hume's negative picture here should not include ancient moral *philosophy*, in which Hume was very much interested. The picture here refers to what she calls the 'ancient ethos' or what I would call ancient moral practice and its moral language.
[87] A point made by Taylor, *Reflecting subjects*, pp. 151–152.

kind of merit', and the 'men of cool reflection' who consider the 'confusions and disorder' courage causes.[88]

Indeed, the sublime virtues were particularly well-suited to societies constantly embroiled in turmoil, where a man can be elevated to the status of a demi-god, only to face the most tragic and violent death afterwards. As we learned in the last chapter, that was the usual situation of Greek and Roman polities swinging between jealous aristocracies and tyrannical democracies. Courage was necessary to fight in their constant civil wars; magnanimity was indispensable to lead those courageous men; greatness of mind to suffer the inevitable turn of the political tide; philosophical tranquillity to isolate oneself from all the turmoil and be able to think. They are the virtues of a society always on the brink of tearing itself apart.

Moreover, the sublime virtues were spectatorial virtues. They were sublime to watch but hardly pleasant to live with. When they are not fancying themselves above or independent of the rest of humanity, the great men of antiquity could turn into a dangerous and disagreeable company. Quoting Shakespeare's character of Cassius, Hume criticized the rude and unsociable character of some stern models of ancient virtue: they had 'little enjoyment within themselves' so could never become agreeable to others or 'contribute to social entertainment'. However, 'in all polite nations and ages, a relish for pleasure, if accompanied with temperance and decency, is esteemed a considerable merit, even in the greatest men.'[89] In the end, the sublime virtues are virtues of the few, not the many.[90] They are the virtues of an age in which heroes conducted both politics and war, and the rest were slaves, as we have learned. They are far from the virtues of that middling rank of men that was the foundation of modern

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[88] *Treatise* 3.3.2.15.

[89] *EPM* 7.3.

[90] Watkins, 'Virtues Sublime and Suspect', p. 139, makes a similar point about the virtues of the few and of the many. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, pp. 86–97, discusses how Hume's account of pride in the *Treatise* included the description of the many ways in which the pride of those in condition of power (and wealth) is reinforced and turned into mechanisms of further social exclusion (and some mechanisms of resistance). That complexity, as I noted above following Taylor, was left out of the conjectural history of morals of the *Treatise*.

commercial societies. They are of no use to the men and women 'flocking into cities', meeting in an 'easy and sociable manner', and forming clubs and societies.

3. GOOD MORAL JUDGES, HISTORICAL AWARENESS, AND THE MODERN VANTAGE POINT

History was the bedrock of Hume's study of moral practices. It was also an essential aspect of the formation of a good moral and aesthetic taste: the limits of abstract philosophy, which had been a theme in Hume's thought at least since his mental breakdown in his early twenties, made historical awareness, not philosophical acuteness, the foundation of good judgment.

The conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise* brought to the fore the incapacity of metaphysical reasonings to interfere with the natural mental processes of belief formation. In the moral realm, Hume stated similar limitations in the second edition of the *Essays* (1742), which contained a set of four essays titled according to the major sects of ancient philosophy ('The Epicurean', 'The Stoic', 'The Platonist', and 'The Sceptic'). Each essay was presented as an oration defending a particular notion of happiness and the good life. Their aim was not to explain ancient philosophy but rather to 'deliver the sentiments of sects, that naturally form themselves in the world.'[91] As James Harris argues, instead of trying to identify which of the voices best represents Hume's own philosophical views, we should instead pay attention to how the essays, particular the 'Sceptic', reveal the limitations of philosophy as a 'medicine for the mind.'[92] In other words, the essays revealed the incapacity of philosophy to find the ultimate ends of human life. The conflicts between the sects and their persistence in ordinary life attest to this limitation. It fell to the sceptic to expose it: if you 'come to

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[91] *Essays* 138.

[92] James A. Harris, 'Hume's Four Essays on Happiness and Their Place in the Move from Morals to Politics', *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, 62 (2007), p. 233. For an exercise of identification of Hume's 'true' voice in the essays, see John Immerwahr, 'Hume's essays on happiness', *Hume Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 307–324. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Immewahr finds Hume's voice pretty much all over the four essays.

a philosopher to be instructed, how [you] shall chuse our ends', he says, 'I am sorry then, I have pretended to be a philosopher: For I find your questions very perplexing.'[93] Philosophy affords no such answer. Rather, the 'chief benefit, which results from philosophy, arises in an indirect manner:' the habit of study and familiarity with the liberal arts 'softens and humanizes the temper;' it 'suggests particular views, and considerations, and circumstances, which otherwise would have escaped us.'[94] Indeed, the sceptic concluded, 'to reduce life to an exact rule and method, is commonly a painful, oft a fruitless occupation: And is it not a proof that we overvalue the prize for which we contend?'[95]

The *Enquiry*'s comparative approach continued the Sceptic's refusal to find the ultimate moral rule. It could discern the moral sentiment that underpinned moral judgments in all their diversity, but it could not affirm *the* ultimate moral standard. That, however, did not mean all moral judgments were equal. The 'indirect benefits' of philosophy meant that some judges were more qualified than others. The *Enquiry* contained only a few resources to reconstruct what Hume considered a good moral judge. However, his 'Of the Standard of Taste', published in 1757, defined more explicitly what good aesthetic judgment is and provided explicit hints that the account could be carried into the moral realm.[96] The essay began with considerations that seem to have been lifted straight out of the *Enquiry*: there are terms in every language that import praise and blame, and everyone agrees that justice or humanity are praiseworthy qualities, even if they disagree about the precise meaning of those terms. Divergences in matters of sentiment (either of morals or taste) become apparent when we enter into

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[93] *Essays* 161.
[94] *Essays* 171-172.
[95] *Essays* 180.
[96] Recent commentaries that emphasise the strengthened role of history and historical knowledge in the *Enquiry* have turned to 'Of the Standard of Taste' to reconstruct Hume's account of the good moral judge. See, for instance Dario Perinetti, 'Moral Pluralism and the Historical Point of View - Reading "A Dialogue"', and Amy Schmitter, 'Negotiating Pluralism in Taste and Character: Reading the Second Enquiry with "Of the Standard of Taste"', both in Jacqueline Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, March 2020).

the particulars, that is, when we try to pin down particular instances of the general rules we all agree.[97]

'Of the Standard of Taste' followed the position set by Dubos in the *Refléxions Critiques*, making aesthetic judgment a sentimental matter and seeking to show the conditions in which appropriate judgment obtains.[98] As in morals, the 'rules of composition' and criticism are not a priori reasonings, but 'general observations concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages.'[99] Hume relied here on the assumption that 'some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease.'[100] Although all of us possess the capacity to be touched by works of art derived from the same 'internal fabric', judgments are neither identical nor of equal value. The essay thus seeks to determine what enters into the making of a good critic.

The first element that enters into the making of a good critic is delicacy of taste. As with physical taste, there are 'a sound, and a defective' state, and no one would take a feverish man's palate as a definitive standard in culinary matters. Hume defined delicacy of taste as the ability to 'perceive every ingredient in the composition,' connecting the variations of feeling to changes in the composition of the object.[101] Although delicacy of taste has a natural component, the chief cause of distinction is practice. The 'frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty' sharpens our ability to recognize the ingredients of a composition that please and those that do not.[102] As Dubos had done, Hume insisted that a single viewing of a work of art was insufficient to produce an adequate judgment. He also singled out the role of comparison in forming delicacy of taste: 'a peasant or Indian' is impressed by the 'coarsest daubing' because he or she lacks a comparative basis to know that it is not a good work

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[97] *Essays* 227.

[98] I am largely following Peter Jones' account of the good critic in 'Of the Standard of Taste', see *Hume's Sentiments*, pp. 106–123. See also his more recent statement of the same points Jones, 'Hume on the Arts and "The Standard of Taste": Texts and Contexts'.

[99] *Essays* 231.

[100] *Essays* 233.

[101] *Essays* 235.

[102] *Essays* 237.

of art.[103] Again repeating Dubos, Hume argued that we always consider the 'most finished object' we have experienced to be the highest excellence in the genre, so a judge that is unaccustomed to 'see, and examine, and weigh the several performances, admired in different ages and nations' is incapable of judging the relative merit of individual works.[104]

The second element that makes a good critic is what Hume defined as 'good sense'. He argued that 'every work of art, in order to produce its due effect on the mind, must be surveyed in a certain point of view, and cannot be fully relished by persons, whose situation, real or imaginary, is not conformable to that which is required by the performance.'[105] 'Good sense' is a check on two features of judgment that prevent a critic from judging from the perspective of that 'certain point of view.' First, critics must free themselves from prejudice. They must disregard their particular positions, interests, friendships, and enmities and consider themselves 'as a man in general.' A critic who 'obstinately maintains his natural position' fails to 'enlarge his comprehension' and judge as a man in general.[106]

Second, good sense means having a good sense of the historical context in which a work of art was produced. A good critic must consider the audience to whom a work was addressed and make allowance to 'their peculiar view and prejudices.' She must also consider the manners of the age and country in which the work was created.[107] Referring to the 'celebrated controversy concerning ancient and modern learning,' Hume tried to find a middle ground between the Ancients, who were willing to excuse all 'absurdities' of antiquity as the 'manners of the age', and the Moderns, who expressed shock at anything that was not similar to their own manners.[108] As Dubos had argued, Hume insisted that 'a man, who is shocked with them [ancient manners], gives an evident proof of false delicacy and refinement.'[109] However, he did draw a

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[103] *Essays* 238.
[104] *Ibid*.
[105] *Essays* 239.
[106] *Ibid*.
[107] Essays 240.
[108] *Essays* 245.
[109] *Essays* 245-246.

limit at the more extreme cases. Although the 'simplicity of ancient manners' must be excused and their representation in works of art must not be considered a fault, the 'want of humanity and of decency' depicted by Homer and the Greek tragedians were such that a modern reader would be unable to 'relish the composition'. Those actions often featured in the poems 'without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation,' which further prevented the reader from 'enter[ing] into [the] sentiments' of the characters and limited her capacity to be touched by the work of art.[110]

Knowledge of history thus played a role in aesthetic judgment similar to its role in moral judgment. Hume detailed the role of history in a 1741 essay titled 'Of the Study of History'. In the essay, Hume pointed to three advantages of studying history: it amuses the fancy, improves the understanding, and 'strengthens virtue'.[111] A person acquainted with history 'may, in some respect, be said to have lived from the beginning of the world, and to have been in continual additions to his stock of knowledge in every century.'[112] Further, the historian's perspective offers a unique vantage point for moral judgments: on the one hand, a man of business can only consider the characters of other persons 'as they have relation to his interest;' on the other hand, a philosopher 'contemplates characters and manners in his closet, so his objects are unable to touch him and he remains indifferent between vice and virtue'. In contrast to business and philosophy, 'History keeps in a just medium betwixt these extremes, and places the objects in their true point of view.' Writers and readers of history are brought close enough to their characters to be touched by their action and develop sentiments of praise and blame; yet, they are sufficiently distant to be free of interested considerations.[113] As such, historians 'have been, almost without exception, the true friends of virtue,' representing it in its proper colours. As Dario Perinetti points out, knowledge

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[110] *Ibid*.
[111] *Essays* 565.
[112] *Essays* 567. This argument was made by Fontenelle in the 'Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes', N 2.426.
[113] *Essays* 567-568.

of history thus enters into both the aesthetic and moral versions of Hume's 'point of view'.[114]

Hume's attention to the role of historical knowledge led to a more pluralistic account of the standard of taste than had been the case with Dubos. As we have seen, the latter insisted that the public could not err and that aesthetic judgments tended to converge towards the unfaltering judgment of posterity. If some critics belonging to that posterity seemed to disagree, that was because they were being led astray by misguided notions of a philosophical spirit. Hume did argue that it was unlikely that Homer or other classical poets would ever be entirely dismissed, for more than two millennia of favourable judgments would not be overturned so easily. Homer pleased judges from Athens to Paris, from the 400 BC to the eighteenth century, across all forms of government, climate and religion; that should tell us his works 'are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments.'[115] However, we must not seek a strict standard that does not admit any variation. In the same way taste varies according to age—we prefer Ovid at twenty, Horace at forty, Tacitus at fifty, Hume suggested—it also varies according to our time and place. Although a 'man of learning and reflection' can overcome such differences to an extent, 'a common audience can never divest themselves so far of their usual ideas and sentiments.'[116] A 'very violent effort' is required to excite sentiments of approbation or blame that differ starkly from those we are accustomed to, and thus 'we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments.'[117] As Amy Schmitter concludes, Hume's standard of taste took a negative form: 'refusing to blame the piece or its author is tantamount to recognizing that a good judge *might* well appreciate the beauty of the object.'[118] That is, I may not be able to overcome my attachment to the manners of my historical age (or the flame of my youthful passions) but, if I am a good judge, I will acknowledge that other

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[114] Perinetti, 'Moral Pluralism and the Historical Point of View - Reading "A Dialogue"', pp. 213–217.
[115] *Essays* 233.
[116] *Essays* 244-245.
[117] *Essays* 244 and 247.
[118] Schmitter, 'Negotiating Pluralism in Taste and Character: Reading the Second Enquiry with "Of the Standard of Taste"', p. 227.

equally good judges can enjoy those works I cannot bring myself to enjoy. My delicacy of taste may even capture the 'ingredients' of the composition that provoke such pleasure in them. My knowledge of history may explain why such ingredients pleased them. Indeed, good critics can be distinguished from pretenders and bad critics by their ability to extend their reasonings to new experiences: due to lack of delicacy, comparative knowledge, or good sense, pretenders and bad critics are exposed when they are confronted with new works. They will either fail to distinguish the ingredients of the composition or be unable to apply known general principles to that particular case (if they are only parroting accepted opinions).

Thus, history enters into Hume's account of the standards of taste and morals through its other end. Historical awareness is essential to the philosopher, who studies the formation of moral practices, their languages and standards. It is also essential in the lived experience of each agent as a participant of moral practices. Again, the essays' emphasis on the use of good sense and historical knowledge went hand in hand with the *Enquiry*'s emphasis on conversation and the lived experience of moral practices. 'Of the Standard of Taste' and the second *Enquiry* contrast together with the *Treatise*'s emphasis on the process of mental corrections.

Hume's account of good judges as historically informed agents capable of 'agreeing to disagree' directs us to a *historical* (though not a philosophical) solution to the conflict between ancient sublime moral practices and modern humane moral practices. From the perspective of Hume and his modern reader, the ancient's sublime virtues were perfectly comprehensible elements of a society engulfed in chaotic politics and constantly fighting wars in close quarters. Observing from a safe historical distance, moderns were still struck by the peculiar lustre of the virtues depicted by poets, historians, and artists. However, the modern world was a world in which trade had become an affair of state, luxury had spread commerce, refinement, and humanity, and wars were fought by manoeuvring lines of soldiers in a field or dispatching ships to a different continent. Moderns had discovered that the world which produced the sublime virtues was an unnatural state violent to human nature that only flourished due to a highly improbable combination of social, political, geopolitical, and geographical

factors. In the previous chapter, we concluded that even the refined Athenians were in many ways closer to the general barbarism of the ancient age than to the civilized modern age. That Sparta existed and somehow became a flourishing and powerful society was about as close as one could get to an attested miracle. Moderns could—indeed, Hume would suggest they ought to—agree to disagree. The experience of the humane social virtues, attained by the 'administration of government', had given them an edge in their 'comparative moral taste'—the same kind of edge they lacked in rhetoric. The ancient world of exceptional, sublime barbarism could not be recreated, and there were excellent reasons for not wanting to recreate it even if it were possible.

I must stress that this is not a simplistic argument based on an inevitable march of progress based on the accumulation of new experience. On the side of the moral philosopher, it is a matter of understanding the embeddedness of moral practices, their connections to social, economic, political, and religious practices and institutions. On the side of moral judges, it is a matter of judging character with historical awareness. The second *Enquiry*'s comments on luxury are a case in point. Although luxury had long been considered a moral vice and source of 'corruption in government' and so many other evils, Hume insisted in section two that

> Those, who prove, or attempt to prove, that such refinements rather tend to the increase of industry, civility, and the arts, regulate anew our *moral* as well as *political* sentiments, and represent, as laudable and innocent, what had formerly been regarded as pernicious or blameable.[119]

The *Treatise* described the correction of moral sentiments as a mental process. The second *Enquiry* shifted the emphasis towards conversation and social interaction, as we learned above. However, it also identified a broader historical process of correction of sentiments taking place at the societal level.[120] Hume himself was one of those who were overturning the moral and political sentiments of his own age, as we have learned in this and the previous chapter. However, that change in moral sentiments about luxury was not a universal and irreversible discovery of a better standard. As Hume remarked in the 'Dialogue', 'a degree of luxury may be ruinous and pernicious in a native

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[119] *EPM* 2.21.
[120] Watkins, 'Virtues Sublime and Suspect', p. 149, makes a similar point.

of SWITZERLAND, which only fosters the arts, and encourages industry in a FRENCH-MAN or ENGLISHMAN.'[121] Therefore, we must expect different sentiments and laws concerning luxury there, Hume followed. Switzerland, we will recall, was the modern example of agriculture flourishing without manufacturing Hume adduced in 'Populousness'. Thus, even good *modern* moral judges would agree to disagree and praise or blame luxury depending on where it was found within the modern world. Still, they would all agree that the era of heroic virtues was gone not because they learned heroic virtues are not virtues, but because the society, economy, and the polities that sustained them were gone and had been replaced by new forms.

In the conclusion of Book III of the *Treatise*, Hume presented himself as an 'anatomist' of morals, who 'ought never to emulate the painter.' The anatomist represents human nature in all its minute details, regardless of the hideousness of the objects she dissects. The painter, in contrast, tries to represent her subject in the most 'graceful and engaging attitude.'[122] Although the work of the anatomist is essential to the painter, Hume insisted in a letter to Hutcheson that it was impossible to conjoin the two in a single work.[123] Twentieth-century interpretations of Hume's moral philosophy often appealed to the metaphor to make sense of the transition from the *Treatise* to the *Enquiry*.[124] More recent commentators tended to avoid framing the evolution of Hume's moral philosophy in terms of the metaphor.[125] If the author of the second *Enquiry* was anything other than an anatomist of morals, he was a historian of morals. The second *Enquiry* had the same impetus of scrutinizing the minute details of moral

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[121] *EPM* D.41.

[122] *Treatise* 3.3.6.6.

[123] Hume to Francis Hutcheson, 17 September 1739, in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 32.

[124] Abramson, 'Sympathy and the Project of Hume's Second Enquiry', p. 45, footnote 1, provides a useful list of commentaries that considered the second *Enquiry* to be the painter's version of the philosophically more rigorous and relevant work of the anatomist of Book III of the *Treatise*. Abramson herself tries to interpret the *Enquiry* as an attempt to overcome the painter-anatomist split, see pp. 66-71 especially.

[125] The literature mentioned in this chapter mostly avoids the metaphor. Kroeker and Lemmens, eds., *Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, p. 2. are an exception, but they accept the Abramson's view and argue in favour of emphasising the differences between the second *Enquiry* and the *Treatise*, following the contributions to the volume.

practices, but that scrutiny had a different scope: instead of looking at the minute springs of the human mind considered abstractly, as the moral philosophy of the *Treatise* had done, the second *Enquiry* observed moral practices as historical practices.[126] Saying that the second *Enquiry* was the work of a 'painter' of morals, thereby suggesting that only the *Treatise* was a serious work of the experimental science of human nature, downplays the encounter between the 'experimental method' and history. We have been exploring the different varieties of that encounter since Dubos' sentimental theory of taste and history of the arts and sciences and the academicians' historical criticism guided by 'experience', both of Lockean inspiration.

This chapter has shown how Hume's moral philosophy, while keeping the main tenets of the moral philosophy of the *Treatise* (justice is still the product of social interaction, moral judgment is still sentiment-based and founded on sympathy), was transformed along the same line of his narrative of the modern. Hume's moral philosophy became a study of moral practices as they appear in history. That meant, first, that moral practices had to be understood as one practice among other social, economic, and political practices and institutions. Those other practices and institutions shaped moral sentiments and the moral language used to express them. However, the second *Enquiry* itself only pointed to how, say, the different forms of justice and the government enforcing it could be analysed in comparative terms. The reader herself would have to make the connection between the second *Enquiry*'s account of justice and the fact that 'a government will be well-modelled' only by a people who know how 'to employ a loom to advantage', stated in the *Political Discourses* only a couple of months later.[127] Second, a study of moral practices as they appeared in history meant that, to a significant extent, the main historical structure organising the study of moral practices was the division between ancients and moderns. That division guided

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[126] Harris, *Hume*, p. 262, also argues that Hume was still an anatomist but looking at a different object. In the words of Kroeker and Lemmens, eds., *Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, p. 2, immediately above the mention of the anatomist/painter reference, the second *Enquiry* offered a 'descriptive and explanatory analysis of human morality as a social reality, embedded in practices, language use, history, and common experience.'

[127] *Essays* 273.

Hume's study of the most radical kind of moral diversity, as we learned. Finally, a moral philosophy that takes moral practice as they appear in history teaches readers to place their own sentiments in historical perspective. They no longer seek philosophical doctrine to learn atemporal truths but to understand the (historical) reason why they feel what they feel, preferring the humane over the heroic or the cleanliness of the salon goer over the greatness of the warrior with his enemies' scalps on the shoulder, even if they could understand why someone else might be attracted to all those qualities.

CONCLUSION

In 1803, the Scottish theorist of ranks and historian John Millar described Hume as 'the great historian of England, to whom the reader is indebted for the complete union of history with philosophy.'[1] Although the reference occurs in Millar's rebuke of Hume's account of the Elizabethan era in the third instalment of the *History of England*, this thesis has shown that the complete union of history with philosophy had happened earlier. The *History* may have been the place where traditional narrative history met philosophy, but historical and philosophical arguments were intertwined since the beginning of Hume's intellectual career. By 1752, when Hume accepted the position as keeper of the Faculty of Advocates' library, he had already developed his historical method and the historical structure of his narrative of the modern.

Hume's historical method was, at the epistemological level, a shift towards the 'internal' assessment of testimony. In that regard, Hume was following the lead of the *Académie des Inscriptions*, which had turned towards historical criticism based on whether the causal relations depicted by historical evidence were similar to those we experience in common life. That represented a shift from Bayle's emphasis on the external side of testimony. However, the historian's task was more complex than merely opposing 'men do not often come back from the dead' to testimony of a resurrection. The historian had to reconstitute a background of 'general causes' against which individual evidence could be assessed: against de Pouilly's criticism of Machiavelli, Hume accepted that sound philosophy was necessary to make sense of the facts and judge them. Throughout the 1740s and early 1750s, Hume gradually defined what that background of general causes was and in what occasions it could be used. My

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[1] John Millar, *An Historical View of the English Government: from the Settlement of the Saxons in Britain to the Revolution in 1688*, eds. Dale R. Smith and Mark Phillips (Indianapolis, 2006), book 2, p. 418. The original 1787 edition refers to 'the great historian of England, to whom the reader is indebted for the complete union of *law* and philosophy', see John Millar, *An Historical View of the English Government, from the Settlement of the Saxons in Britain to the Accession of the House of Stewart. By John Millar, Esq. Professor of Law In The University Of Glasgow* (London, 1787), p. 546, emphasis mine.

interpretation of 'Of the Populousness of the Ancient Nations' showed how Hume read sources against the grain to obtain general information about the subject *so that* he could then assess the particulars. Unlike Bayle, who emphasised how the messenger could corrupt the message, Hume emphasised the things the messenger *could not* hide, even if she wanted to. In that approach, Hume was furthering the emphasis on the connections between pieces of evidence that had guided Fréret towards his comparative method of mythological studies.

If the academicians used the background of general causes—the *fond de l'histoire*, as they called it—as the foundation of erudite historical criticism, Hume made it the object of history. There could be such a thing as a history *of* general causes. In this thesis, I have sought to avoid the clear-cut opposition between 'philosophy' (or the science of human nature) and 'history'. Obviously, that distinction exists: the *Treatise* is philosophy, and so are most essays (albeit philosophy of the 'easy', not the abstruse kind); the *History of England* is history. However, many of Hume's 'philosophical' texts made historical arguments: using our example from chapter three, 'Of Commerce' proposes both a causal conjunction between the greatness of the state and the happiness of the subject with regard to commerce *and* a historical argument about when and where that conjunction held or did not hold and why. Because of that conjunction, this thesis argues the essays were not just political or economic arguments but fragments of a history.

The thrust of that fragmentary history of the *Essays* was to present a narrative of the modern. The outline of that narrative had appeared as the conjectural history of morals in Book III of the *Treatise*. That conjectural history presented the transition from the rude to the civilized states of society as the invention of property rules and stable moral judgments. In intervening in a variety of different debates, the *Essays* articulated the properly historical version of what had been presented in the *Treatise* as a merely temporal or developmental account. The main challenge concerned the place of the classical societies that populated European imaginaries (and social, economic, and political theories) in that narrative: were they closer to the 'rude' state or

were they civilized like 'us'? That question about the fundamental relationship between classical antiquity and modern Europe had been at the centre of the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. The *querelle* was a moment of effervescence of narratives of the modern. It was not an opposition between modern freethinkers and defenders of the authority of the ancients. Even those like Dubos who sought to defend the merit of classical art had to do so with theories of why modern people, enlightened by the philosophical spirit of the age, must acknowledge that merit. They also debated the foundation of the narratives of the modern: the unfolding of Reason? Physical causes? Moral causes? Hume's *Essays* can be read as a continuation of those arguments, even if it was a continuation shaped by the Scottish landscape of languages of social, economic, and political discourse. Protestant natural jurisprudence, theories of sociability, and (the reaction to) civic humanism met the question about ancients and moderns. The resulting historical structure centred on commerce and polite manners as the crucial elements distinguishing the modern: both clearly distinguished the modern from the ancient and had post-ancient origins. This thesis placed particular emphasis on the gradual composition of that historical structure: although there has been some attention to the evolution of Hume's positions in the 1760s and 1770s, scholarly literature often ignores how conceptually complex was the task of 'dislocating antiquity' towards the rude pole in the 1740s.[2] Basic concepts of political theory such as 'monarchy' or 'republic' had to be reappraised. Hume only completed the process in 1752. Essays such as 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' still presented a history in which the modern was partly a revival of the ancient. 'Of Liberty and Despotism' was a much more cautious embrace of the notion of civilized monarchies than the *Political Discourses*.

The *Political Discourses* and the second *Enquiry* completed the translation of the temporalized account of the *Treatise* into a historical narrative of the modern. In

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[2] I noticed Hume's reactions to the Wilkes affair in footnote 88 of section 3.2 above. The debate between Istvant Hont and John Pocock about Hume's conservative turn concerning public the after the Seven Years War was mentioned in footnote 238 of section 4.4 above. Section 4.2 followed the revisions in 'Of Liberty and Despotism' and 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' tracked by Duncan Forbes.

the *Political Discourses*, what had been a conjectural history of the interested affection in the *Treatise* became a complex account of how laws, commerce, and manners interact with each other. In 'Populousness'—not coincidentally the same essay in which Hume's historical method featured in its full form—Hume firmly depicted classical antiquity as barbarism: a society of rude, bloodthirsty, and unruly slaveowners, too proud of their freedom to achieve any political stability. It was an exceptional barbarism: the geography and geopolitics of the Greco-Roman world had made it possible for the greatness of the state and the happiness of the subject to be dissociated.

The second *Enquiry* dropped the conjectural history of morals and referred instead to that ancient-modern historical structure Hume had been developing. It emphasised the anatomy of moral language as it was used rather than abstract moral psychology. It also furthered the ancient-modern historical structure: the exceptional barbarism of the ancients had the sublime heroic virtues as its moral counterpart—strikingly beautiful to contemplate, perhaps not so pleasant to live with. Thus, Hume could agree with Dubos that the striking beauty of classical antiquity would not disappear. However, he hoped his historically minded readers would understand that that beauty was tied to the spirit of an age (and to its social, political, and economic institutions) that had passed. Hume's 'public', unlike Dubos', would always find some difficulty in transporting themselves to the world of Homer or Sophocles.

On a broader horizon, the interpretation of Hume's historical thought offered in this thesis changes the place of history within Hume's intellectual development and, consequently, the history of eighteenth-century philosophical history and its place in the Enlightenment. The thesis pushes the development of Hume's historical thought to the early 1740s. While it is no novelty to say Hume was making historical claims in the *Essays*, this thesis demonstrates that those historical claims were building a coherent, if fragmentary, historical structure and an accompanying historical method. The coherence of both method and structure has been underplayed. The essays were not a systematic project, but they did establish an evolving coherence. They guided the 'history of civilization in England' Hume began to write in 1752.

More importantly, in pushing Hume's development as a historical thinker before 1748—and therefore before the *Spirit of the Laws*—the thesis greatly expands the very role of the 'French context' in understanding Hume's ideas beyond metaphysics and epistemology. Efforts to show that presence in Hume's biography have not been matched by efforts to show that presence in Hume's historical, social and political thought. Hume's interest in the *querelle* went well beyond the authors and problematics discussed here. That influence is yet to be systematized. Beyond the questions about historical methods and narratives of the modern discussed here, that French context is also central in a variety of other themes I did not or could not explore. To suggest only two: first, the mythological studies in and around the *Académie des Inscriptions*. Besides being the cradle of the eighteenth-century philosophical-historical method, they were probably important to Hume's arguments in the *Natural History of Religion*. One of the conclusions of Fréret's comparative method was that polytheism preceded monotheism, which was also Hume's conclusion.[3] Another element of the French historical-philosophical context that might have a hitherto unexplored importance were the debates about the nature and history of the French monarchy. There are many suggestions pointong to that direction: Hume's early interest in Dubos (and in almost all his published works); his positive view of the French monarchy in 'Of Liberty and Despotism' and elsewhere; the presence of a variety of French historians in the Hume library; and his response to Montesquieu (focusing much more on erudite questions concerning the French and Scottish monarchies than the views about the English Constitution that made Montesquieu a celebrated writer in Britain). That context shaped Montesquieu's own historical thought. Once we come to see Hume as a contemporary of Montesquieu—a contemporary who discovered in the *Spirit of the Laws* a system so similar to his own in results and yet so distant in its foundations—we need to ask whether the French context shaped Hume as much as the British context shaped Montesquieu.

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[3] Compare Nicolas Fréret, 'Observations sur la religion des Gaulois et sur celle des Germains', MAI 24.389-431 (1747), esp pp. 394-395, and David Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions; The Natural History of Religion*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 2007), pp. 34–43.

Indeed, the world of the French academies attracted Hume's attention from very early on: we have met his early interest in Dubos, but he was also interested in the history of the *Académie Française* since the early 1730s.[4] After that, Hume was steeped in French history, literature, criticism, and philosophy. For someone so deeply dissatisfied with English party politics based on abstract philosophical principles, it is no surprise Hume seemed attracted to that kind of polite debate. There, political positions deferred to (or perhaps disguised themselves as) matters of taste to be judged by the 'public', and everyone agreed they were moderns inspired by the philosophical spirit despite their bitter opposition in other matters. The extent to which the academies embodied Hume's own narrative of the modern in which luxury, not parliaments, made Europeans civilized is yet to be considered.

Once the early eighteenth-century French world of the academies is acknowledged as central to the development of Hume's historical (and social, political, and economic) thought, a new picture of philosophical history begins to emerge. First, the centrality of the 'modern vantage point', as I have called it, in both historical method (by making eighteenth-century historians 'audacious' enough to build their own histories) and in their new narratives, makes it (even more) essential to ask how the eighteenth century incorporated seventeenth-century ideas. The way I have positioned Bayle here was not meant to deny that he was crucial in shaping Hume's intellectual career, including the sceptical *ethos*, if not the method, of his historical investigations. It was meant to show that Hume's (and the academicians') use of seventeenth-century ideas was always filtered through the self-confidence of the 'philosophical spirit'.

More importantly, philosophical history, particularly the Scottish brand of philosophical history, becomes the product of an encounter of multiple forms of historical discourse. John Millar himself, along with Dugald Stewart, contributed to the view in which Scottish philosophical history (and conjectural history, its most unique genre)

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[4] Hume requested a copy of Paul Pelisson-Fontanier's *Histoire de l'Académie Françoise* (1653) to Michael Ramsay in an undated letter, see Hume to Michael Ramsay, undated (Mossner dates the letter to 1730), in Hume, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 337. The letter is written in the same paper Hume was using in the early 1730s, see Stewart, 'Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711-1752', p. 32, footnote 63.

was a genuinely Scottish product: speaking of Adam Smith and his 'lectures on the History of Civil Society', he said that 'the great Montesquieu pointed out the road. He was the Lord Bacon in this branch of philosophy. Dr Smith is the Newton.'[5] Millar followed with a summary of Smith's historical account of the civilization of Europe in Book III of the *Wealth of Nations*. However, Smith himself had acknowledged his debt to Hume, not to Montesquieu.[6] As I have sought to show here, Hume's narrative of the modern was the product of meeting the challenge of translating a conjectural history into real history, influenced by the French context in which Montesquieu was also immersed. Book III of the *Wealth of Nations* can also be interpreted as an uneasy co-habitation of the conjectural history of modes of subsistence and a concrete, Humean history of Europe. In any case, the point is that the history of philosophical history is much more complicated than Montesquieu pointing to the connection between modes of subsistence and forms of government and the Scots developing that into philosoph-ical history.[7] The history of philosophical history can be rewritten as a series of at-tempts to combine a variety of modes of historical (and developmental) arguments available in the first half of the eighteenth century: natural jurisprudential conjectural histories, Harringtonian theories of the evolution of the balance of property, neo-Epi-curean theories of sociability, *histoires raisonées* of the French monarchy, compara-tive historical erudition, histories of the human spirit and the progress of Reason, his-tories of the arts and sciences, sacred histories, histories of religion, comparative my-thologies, natural histories of man. Before the 'Lord Bacon' and the Newton of philo-sophical history came around, the first half of the eighteenth century was a primordial soup of forms of historical argument, emphasising different phenomena and employ-ing different methodological and rhetorical techniques. Philosophical history was not

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[5] Millar, *An historical view of the English government* Book II, p. 404, footnote. Moore, 'Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment', pp. 191–192, argues Millar's recollection prompted Dugald Stewart to make the remarks on conjectural history with which I opened chapter four.

[6] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. Andrew S. Skinner, R. H. Campbell, and W. B. Todd (Indianapolis, 1981) vol. 1, p. 412.

[7] I listed accounts of philosophical history centred around Montesquieu in footnote 86 of the introduc-tion.

any one of those modes (or any single combination of them). The account of the development of Hume's historical thought presented here defined philosophical history as precisely the attempt to *combine* and *reframe* different modes of historical argument. My account emphasised the conceptual, structural, and methodological tensions produced by those encounters. Other philosophical historians attempted different combinations but also ended up producing historical arguments we recognize as philosophical history. It should be possible to write a history of philosophical history as the evolution (and consolidation) of the many combinations of modes of historical arguments employed by eighteenth-century thinkers to make sense of their (and their societies') place in history. For now, I have limited myself to Hume's part in that process.

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