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Nicholas Phillipson
School of History Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh

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University of Edinburgh

In the introduction to the *Treatise,* Hume makes the famous claim that he has laid the foundations of a science of man, based on the observation of human nature as it appears in common life. It is, he says, the only 'solid foundation' on which such a science can be built. It is a science which will rescue the study of humanity from *a priorists* and the clergy, and because "there is no question of importance whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and… none which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science" it will surely bring about a revolution in the understanding of politics, morals, religion and philosophy.

Hume's confident claim rested on the momentous demonstration that while reason might be instrumental in helping us to discover ways of gratifying our passions, it was incapable of providing us with incontrovertible knowledge about the natural and supernatural world or about the duties we owe to others, to ourselves and to any supposed deity. It made it possible for him too show that what he now calls the beliefs which regulate the passions, shape our understanding of the world and furnish us with our understanding of our duties have their roots in the imagination and our experience of life in the family, civil society and the state. In other words, this was a science which called for a analysis of the mind - the 'universe of the imagination' - and a study of the cognitive processes which make it possible for agents who are essentially selfish and capable of sympathy to acquire the arts of sociability and self-understanding on which their security and prosperity necessarily depends. It was an enterprise which would stress the importance of habit, custom, and education in shaping the human personality and the sheer historicity of human nature.

Put this way, it's not hard to understand the appeal of this Humean science of man for the modern social scientist, especially when we recall the brilliance with which Hume applied his principles to the analysis of the constitution and political culture of contemporary

Britain, and it's equally understandable that scholars like Norbert Waszek should have wanted to see Hume as one of the first modern theorists of civil society. I don't have much to say about this line of thinking that is useful except to say that as a historian I would probably want to express myself rather differently to some of my colleagues in the social sciences. I have three concerns in this paper, first, with Hume's claim that his enterprise constituted something that could legitimately described as a science, second, with the tacit challenge to this claim offered by Hume's close friend and disciple, Adam Smith, third, with the most curious and intriguing fact of all; the fact that having coined the phrase science of man in the *Treatise*, Hume promptly dropped it, leaving it to his readers to make up their own minds whether he was to be described as philosopher, historian or a man of letters, only insisting that his voluminous output was best regarded as literature.

Contextually and biographically one can see what Hume was doing in taking on a project of this sort and labelling it an exercise in developing a new science. As Duncan Forbes and others have remarked, the *Treatise* can best be regarded as a highly sophisticated contribution to a long-standing debate about the intellectual and challenges that natural jurisprudence presented to the modern world. So far as a young philosopher attempting to establish a position in the world was concerned, the challenge could hardly have been greater. By Hume's day natural jurisprudence was the dominant form of academic philosophy taught in the universities of northern Europe to prepare boys for public life and the church. The great architects of the project, Grotius, Hobbes and Pufendorf had set out to discover the laws, or principles, which rulers ought to observe if they were to restore and maintain political life in the factious, war-torn monarchies, principalities and republics of contemporary Europe, principles which hinged on the question of how to render factious peoples sociable. But what were the principles of sociability? How was one to explain how and why human beings were able to curb their natural partialities and passions and adopt those shared ideas of morality, justice, political obligation and natural religion on which peaceable life in organised societies necessarily depended? Grotius believed that the answer lay in reason and in our ability to recognise that our social duties were prescriptions which were to be regarded as the commands of the Deity – an explanation which could be criticised as being over-intellectualised and heretical in the eyes of most Calvinists, Lutherans and Catholics. Hobbes had replied that it was fear that made men willing to submit to the authority of a ruler and it was obedience to a ruler's commands that made him sociable – an explanation which was widely criticised by contemporaries for being egotistical and materialist. Pufendorf's elaborate attempt to reconcile these two extremes was generally regarded as incoherent and unacceptably

Lutheran in its view of monarchy and the Church. And all three theories were criticised in England, Scotland and elsewhere for displaying a deep distrust of Calvinist ideas about the relationships between the church and civil society and for advocating absolute monarchy. It was this that had led Pufendorf's great editor, Jean Barbeyrac to call for the development of a science of morals which would place the theory of sociability on secure foundations and serve as the basis on which on which the great project of discovering the laws on which the authority of governments rested and the prescriptions on which good governance ought to be based. Hume's decisive contribution to the debate was to show that none of this would be possible until the principles of knowledge themselves had been placed on empirical foundations. The science of morals in other words necessitated a science of man.

If Hume's science of man is seen as necessary to the hugely important problem of constructing a science of morals on which an understanding of politics and government could be built, it is worth noticing how careful he was to ensure that the parameters of the all important debate about the principles of sociability remained on his analytical radar. He takes careful note of recent French attempts – most notably Malebranche's – to develop a theory of the passions which would identify those aspects of human behaviour could be regulated by reason. He takes account of Shaftesbury's and Addison's attempts to show that human beings were endowed with passions which were benevolent and sociable as well as self-regarding, passions which had been repressed in the cynical, self-regarding culture of the modern world and could best be released by cultivating taste, manners and the arts of politeness. He deals briefly but seriously with Hutcheson's attempt to show that we have been endowed with a moral sense which regulates these passions and inclines us to a love of society and virtue, even though he doesn't believe such a sense could have been implanted in us by the deity. For apart from anything else, Bernard Mandeville, Hutcheson's *bête noir*, had taught him to think of all the passions, as self-regarding no matter how benevolent they might seem to be, and to think of sociability as something learned in the course of common life from parents, teachers and rulers; in Mandeville's witty argot, human beings were like horses, taught animals. That said, Hume, like Hutcheson had no time for Mandeville's famously cynical conclusion that our ability to learn these lessons was a function of our pride, gullibility and susceptibility to flattery. It was thinking of this sort that persuaded him of the need for a science of man which would be based on a careful analysis of the forms of experience which allows us to make sense of the world and discover how our appetites can be gratified.

But if Hume is seen as an ambitious young philosopher responding to a famous challenge to place the study of academic philosophy and the public culture of his own age on new and scientific foundations, he was notably imprecise and parsimonious in imparting his thoughts about the principles of this new science. He was clearly familiar with Hobbes' remarks about the difficulty of applying the experimental methodss of the natural philosophers to the study of one's own species and famously concluded

"We must glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures. Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension."

For Hume, these were the precepts of the natural historian. But even so, they still had to take account of Hobbes' comments on the difficulty of exploring the behaviour of ones own species. Hume says nothing about this fundamental problem in the *Treatise* but does return to it from time to time in later essays and enquiries in characteristically pregnant and allusive ways.

For example, the second volume of the *Essays Moral and Political* (1742) opens with a short programmatic, Addisonian essay 'Of Essay Writing' in which he speaks briefly of the relationship between the 'learned' and 'conversable' worlds that seemed to be developing in the salons of Paris and the coffee-houses and taverns of London and of the significance this symbiotic relationship had for philosophy and society. He thought there was now a 'commerce' between them which was fertilising the conversation and culture of the conversable world and was furnishing the learned with valuable data about our cognitive behaviour. He points out that this was a very different scene of life to that which the learned men of earlier generations had known. In their day, learning had been an all-male activity, one that had been confined to the college, the cell and the theologians and its literary output had been correspondingly pedantic and chimerical. "And indeed, what cou'd be expected from Men who never consulted Experience in any of their Reasonings, or who never search'd for that Experience, *where alone it is to be found, in common Life and Conversation*?"[my italics] In the modern world, in which there was a free commerce between the sexes, the polite conversation of intelligent men and women would provide the raw material out of which a science of man could be distilled. Observation and the conversational experiments the polite philosopher could perform on his new companions would provide him with data about which he could

generalise. For while "the Materials of this Commerce must chiefly be furnish'd by Conversation and common Life: The manufacturing of them alone belongs to Learning."

In this essay, Hume has begun to hint at what is involved in the study of common life. Language, conversation and discourse in which citizens engage with the opinions of the living and the dead will provide the philosopher with the only materials he needs to develop general theories of human nature. What is more, it is only in an age which is being transformed by commerce in the widest senses of the word, that such an investigation has become possible. In the first section of the first *Enquiry*, 'Of the Different Species of Philosophy' he admits that some aspects of the philosophy that will be generated by this sort of enquiry will probably be 'abstruse', in the sense that it will mean exploring the anatomy of the mind in a way which may 'disgust' the layman as much as the bloody business of his medical counterpart. However, as he was fond of pointing out, the job of the moral anatomist was to provide data which would be useful to moralists and to those who were anxious to refine their sentiments and manners because it would give them a more "exact" understanding of their sentiments and "a greater spirit of accuracy" in regulating their conduct and rendering it subservient to the interests of society. Above all, it will help to curb the spread of the ever-present cancer of superstition. He concludes

"Happy, if we can unite the boundaries of the different species of philosophy, by reconciling profound enquiry with clearness, and truth with novelty! And still more happy, if, reasoning in this easy manner, we can undermine the foundations of an abstruse philosophy, which seems to have hitherto served only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error!"

It's interesting to compare the language Hume used in the *Treatise* in 1739 to announce the arrival of his new science with the language he used to explain his methods a decade later. The former holds open the possibility of developing a science which will yield up general truths about the world which underwritten by observed facts systematically classified. To be sure Hobbes, who was always mindful of the problem of achieving certainty in the study of human nature by following the methods of the natural philosophers, had advocated following the 'mathematical' method of Euclid. This meant reasoning on the basis of axioms which could be developed and 'illustrated' in a way which would extend their reach, enhance their truth value and narrow the gap between the value of the initial axiom as opinion and 'knowledge'. The idea of science in either of these senses is entirely absent from Hume's later methodological remarks. In the first *Enquiry*

of 1748 he speaks of the principles of understanding rather than the principles of knowledge and when speaking about the value of observing the way in which opinions and sentiments are exchanged in polite society, tells us that the value of the enterprise is not so much to extend understanding as to encourage philosophers and laymen and women to refine their language and sentiments. Indeed, if we were to read further in Hume's writing from this period, we should discover that he has come to regard those who make general claims about the principles of human behaviour as dogmatists in the making and a potential menace to human understanding and social cohesion. For in these later writings, Hume seems to regard his anatomical experiments on the sentiments, disgusting or otherwise, as of ethical rather than scientific value in the sense that they are to be seen as means of refining our manners and enhancing our capacity for sociability. He gives us no sense at all their primary value is of laying the foundations of a science of man.

Now I have pursued this discussion of Hume's claims to have developed a science of man thus far in the uneasy knowledge that it would be perfectly proper for you to turn around and object that "it all depends what you mean by science." In eighteenth century terms, any view of science presupposed a unitary view of nature and one which presupposed nature's origins in an act of creation that could be conceived in Christian or non-christian – and probably epicurean – terms. What I find interesting about Hume is that by quietly abandoning the claim that he was laying the foundations of a science, he was also silently questioning whether it was possible for anyone – particularly himself – to do so and was asking whether there weren't more useful tasks for a philosophically-minded historian like himself to perform.

I want to sharpen this question up a bit by turning to Adam Smith's views of Hume's theory of human nature and to the question of whether or not that theory could be legitimately regarded as the basis of something contemporaries could regard as a science of man. And in doing so I am mindful of the fact that Smith was Hume's greatest disciple and one of his closest friends. Indeed, I have come to think of him as the most intelligent and best informed reader that Hume ever had. I want to suggest that he be considered as a Humean who really did believe that it was possible to construct a genuinely Humean science of man by pressing Hume's profound insights into the theory of human nature harder than their author had chosen to do. In Smith's view, I think, Hume's initial project was perfectly realisable. It was just that he had chosen not to do so.

Smith was born in 1723 and was thus twelve years younger than Hume. Like Hume he came from the middling ranks of Scottish

society and, like Hume was to remain at ease with the professional, clerical, landed and literary world and with those preoccupations with improvement which provided the Edinburgh enlightenment with its social and ideological foundations. Smith was a student at Glasgow when the *Treatise* was published in 1739-40 and while it is just possible that he read it there, it more likely that he did so while he was studying at Balliol College Oxford as a Snell Exhibitioner between 1740 and 1746 He returned to Scotland in the wake of the Jacobite rebellion and the slaughter at Culloden in 1746, was taken up by the Edinburgh *literati* and, rather unusually, was invited to deliver two series of public lectures on Rhetoric and Jurisprudence to the young lawyers, ministers and men of letters in the city. These lectures were delivered between 1748 and 1751 and it's clear that it was during this period – and probably in 1750-51 that he first met Hume. This was the period in Hume's life when he was working on the texts of the two *Enquiries,* writing his *Political Discourses* and, preparing to relaunch his career as a philosophical historian.

Smith was in his late twenties when he delivered these Edinburgh lectures and although we do not have texts of the courses given in Edinburgh is is pretty clear that the very full sets of student notes of the courses as they were given at Glasgow in 1762-3 can be used to throw light on the foundations of Smith's thinking in the 1740's. It cannot be stressed enough how deeply Humean the foundations of Smith's thinking are. Human beings are to be considered as self-regarding, necessitous agents whose minds are regulated by the imagination, by the habits, customs and education we acquire in the course of common life and above all by that capacity for sympathy which gives us access to the conventions in which the culture of the worlds to which we are exposed is embodied. His understanding of the principles of justice and political obligation are pure Hume. Justice is what Hume had called an artificial virtue made necessary by the invention of property. Government and political obligation become necessary to maintain the property of the rich from the envy of the poor, as Smith sardonically puts it. Morality and the sense of justice on which it ultimately depends is possible only in societies with regular forms of government.

Hume is of course aware than his principles of human nature presuppose what I have called a historised view of the human personality, one which attaches importance to the processes by which we are rendered sociable and come to rejoice in the business of perfecting our personalities. But it is Smith and not Hume who is the true theorist of the *process* of socialisation. Take for example Hume's thinking about language. As one would expect, Hume is well aware that language plays a crucial, even determining role in shaping our understanding and the culture of the worlds we wish to inhabit;

words like discourse and conversation are used freely in the *Treatise* and in later writing. But Hume has no developed theory of language, no account of the processes by which we acquire the capacity for language, no account of the evolution of language itself. Smith does, and it is of the first significance that his debut as a philosopher should have been devoted to developing a theory of language and a corresponding theory of rhetoric which will lay the foundations for a general theory of the principles of social interaction on which his own philosophy will come to depend. His conjectural account of the origins of language theorises the assumption that Hume and others had made, that human society and the civilising process are responses to the deep necessitousness of human nature and it offers a remarkable set of conjectures about the progress of language as an institution and as a skill we acquire in response to the necessitousness of our social existence. It is equally significant that Smith published a developed version of this theory in 1763 and attached it to every subsequent edition of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. For his ethics and the theory of sociability on which it rests, and indeed the project for developing a Humean science of man requires a developed theory of communication to sustain it.

Then take Smith's use of Hume's theory of justice. Hume is of course perfectly aware that the rules of justice will differ fundamentally in societies which have different systems of property and both in the *Treatise* and in the *Essays* and the *History of England* it is clear that he is thinking of the different situations that will obtain in pastoral, feudal and commercial societies. But at no point does he show any interest in taking the foundational step that Smith takes in the Lectures on Jurisprudence by positing or even hinting at the need for a formal, stadial theory of property which could be used to explore the principles on which Smith thought that the different systems of justice and government known to history had rested, principles which it was essential to understand if the axioms on which Smith's system depended were to be illustrated and validated.

But perhaps the most interesting comparison concerns Hume and Smith's respective views of the imagination, that most fundamental concept in both their philosophies. For both, it was the imagination which was ultimately responsible for furnishing us with the ideas on which our understanding of the world, and our understanding of our interests and duties depend. They also shared an enlightenment awareness of the ease with which the imagination can generate those illusions and superstitions which disturb the progress of civilisation and disgrace the human personality. In the *Treatise* Hume seldom misses an opportunity to emphasise the paradoxes to which the imagination gives rise and to emphasise its delusive properties. Smith, however, seems much more interested in the anatomy of the

imagination and its consequences for a general theory of sociability. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* he is able to show precisely how the imagination generates those ethically absurd and even contemptible delusions which lead us to admire and sympathise with the fortunes of the rich and powerful and the consequence of these delusions for maintaining the system of inequality and deference on which society depends for its existence. In his remarkable essay on the history of astronomy, he develops and illustrates a strikingly close-textured set of conjectures to explain how we deploy the imagination to develop or make use of philosophical systems to provide us with coherent and credible accounts of the principles which explain the workings of the world. In what is probably the most influential example of all, in the *Wealth of Nations*, he develops an extraordinary set of conjectures about the origins of modern superstitions about wealth and power and illustrates them with a densely and meticulously deployed erudition which is needed to make them persuasive.

For in the last resort Smith is writing as the architect of an essentially Humean science of man which will analyse and illustrate the general principles which explain the processes by which the members of an indigent, self-regarding, sympathetic species deploy their imaginative resources and the understanding of the world they have acquired in the course of everyday life to survive and prosper in the worlds in which they find themselves. It is an enterprise which demands the skills of the mathematically-minded philosopher and the philosophical historian if it is ever to claim the status of science. But as I think both Hume and Smith realised, it is a science that is and will always remain conjectural.

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