The Centre for Social and Humanistic Research

SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Volume 10, Issue no. 1 (19), April 2016

"Vasile Goldi□ " University Press
Arad – 2016

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Society and Politics is evaluated by the National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education (CNCSIS) category B+, code 834, CNCS category B and indexed in the following international databases: Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL), Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EBSCO Host, Index Copernicus International Journals Master List, ProQuest, Scopus/Elsevier.

ISSN print: 1843-1348
ISSN – L 1843-1348
ISSN on line: 2067-7812

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SOCIAL RESENTMENT AND JUSTICE. CONSIDERATIONS ON HUME'S REALIST APPROACH TO PASSIONS

Alessio VACCARI*

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to show that Hume gives the passion of *resentment* a crucial role in explaining the origin of justice and society, and that this can be regarded as an important argument in favour of the recent attempts to include Hume in the canon of political realism.
In the first part of the article, I shall mention some general realist theses that are supported by Humean philosophy. As Andrew Sabl has recently reminded us, these include the idea that the human passions and their capacity to be civilized are a central factor in explaining the transition from tribal communities to political society. Following Sabl's general approach, I shall show that Hume thought that resentment played a fundamental role in the passions involved in this process.

Keywords: Hume, political realism, passions, resentment, justice

1. Some notes on political realism

Political realism is gradually acquiring credit in the present-day philosophical debate, offering itself as a plausible alternative to utilitarianism and social contractualism.[1] Although it has many different thematic lines, political realism is regarded by many as a homogeneous system whose structural unity is closely dependent on the way in which its various features contrast with the dominant currents of political philosophy in recent years.[2]

Bernard Williams, Raymond Guess and William Gaston have made significant contributions to illustrating the elements of disagreement between realists and the mainstream of contemporary thinking. Following their analysis, I shall indicate some characteristics of the realist movement that justify the possibility of including Hume's philosophy in this canon.

The relation between politics and morality is one of the themes on which the opposition between realism and its adversaries has been strongest. The realist claims that the utilitarians and the social contract theorists have always defended a perspective in which morals enjoy a kind of priority over politics. On the basis of this reconstruction, there is a hierarchical relation between these two areas of experience, by which ethics establishes the criteria of evaluation or the ends of political action, and politics simply identifies the most effective means for achieving them.

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According to Bernard Williams, this moralistic vision expresses an unequivocal misunderstanding of politics, as it implicitly thinks it can identify an external foundation for this area of our experience, ignoring the fact that politics is constituted by a series of practices that involve unique concepts, goods and styles of reflection.[3]

Before examining these aspects, it is worth defining the meaning the term "moralism" has in this debate. In distancing themselves from it, the realists are not trying to deny that there is some significant relation between ethics and politics. They do not mean to claim that politics is an amoral or immoral discipline. On the contrary, realists like Bernard Williams and Raymond Guess have often insisted on the absolute, non-negotiable value of human rights, and have condemned unconditionally the practice of torture. What the realist wants to dissociate himself from is, rather, a very specific perspective by which politics is a sphere founded on an abstract, impersonal conception of ethics, constructed, so to speak, quite apart from the questions that come into play in politics.

In his seminal work *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Raymond Guess has illustrated this aspect very effectively. His analysis starts from the affinities between utilitarianism and Kantian contractualism. Although they profess different conceptions of moral good, utilitarianism and Kantism shared a very important premise, which Guess calls «ideal theory».[4] According to this idea, ethics is an autonomous sphere of reflection and language that is intelligible only if kept radically separate from the «rest of human life».[5] Guess observes that this perspective is accompanied by a thin and impersonal conception of political agents, by which their practical goals are completely disconnected from the various elements of their biography and from the passions that characterize them as human beings. The political agent is excluded from what makes up his historical and contingently determined identity and is identified either as a rational being, whose only relevant quality is coherence of the will, or as a subject constantly seeking to maximize the satisfaction of his interests.[6]

According to «ideal theory», the task of philosophy is essentially that of formulating clearly the necessary, universal and «historically invariant» principles that define political subjects, examining their mutual relations, and deriving from them rules that bind the actions of human beings.[7] «Ideal theory», then, characteristically tends to create moral systems – strongly interconnected combinations of elements from which one might infer mechanical decision-making procedures able to generate precise answers to every possible ethical question. For those who believe in ideal theory, this conception of morality is and must be the only possible foundation of political evaluation.

By contrast, realists claim that this conception of politics is a form of moralism that we need to jettison. Interpreting this approach, Guess observes:

> The view I am rejecting assumes that one can complete the work of ethics first, attaining an ideal theory of how we should act, and then in a second step, one can apply that ideal theory to the action of political agents. As an observer of politics one can morally judge the actors by reference to what this theory dictates they ought to have

> done. Proponents of the view I am rejecting then often go on to make a final claim that a "good" political actor should guide his or her behaviour by applying the ideal theory. The empirical details of the given historical situation enter into consideration only at this point. «Pure» ethics as an ideal theory comes first, then applied ethics, and politics is a kind of applied ethics. [8]

Guess sets against ideal theory a realistic conception of politics that bases study of the constitution, organization and administration of the state and society, not on what people should, ideally or rationally, desire or how they should act, but on how individuals, or the social forms and institutions in which they operate, do actually act.[9] This general theoretical option is interpreted and developed in different directions, each of which constitutes one of its main differences with the currents of present-day political thought.

Firstly, realism offers itself as a perspective that William Galston has called «anti-utopian».[10] This means that the principles that are the basis of criteria for evaluating political life should be chosen, starting from their actual effectiveness, bearing in mind how much people's actions actually conform to their rules of conduct. By contrast, proposing political criteria that work only on the assumption of complete conformity means exposing the members of a community to the risk of seeing their expectations and political objectives frustrated, creating situations that can easily lead to distorted forms of politics and to «oppression» or «terror».[11]
For realists, the criteria for evaluating politics must, then, be chosen, starting from the more or less explicit assumption that in actual communities there can be no more than a partial observation of these rules of conduct. Galston writes:

> […] political theory must not assume that the motivation or capacity to act in a principled manner is pervasive among all members of a political community. Some individuals are impaired in their capacity for justice, others lack it outright, a reality that no policies, no institutions, however wise, can change.[12]

Recognizing the inescapable tendency of human beings to partiality is the basis of a second important aspect of realism. The idea that conflict, in the sense not just of the antagonistic relation between individual or collective subjects competing with each other for the possession, use or enjoyment of goods, but also as the opposition between sentiments, values and visions of the world, constitutes a permanent and irrepressible dimension of human sociability. For realists, this arrangement does not depend just on lack of homogeneity and on tensions between the various values professed in the community, but also on the fact that human beings themselves tend to prefer those with whom they have ties or affinities to those who are distant from them. This point is clearly expressed by Galston:

> Realists offer a number of accounts […] for the political centrality of disagreement. Many are value pluralists who believe that reason

> underdetermines, if not basic values themselves, at least their relative weight and priority when they come into conflict. And they will conflict: value pluralism defines an inharmonious moral universe. Even when rational closure is possible, it usually won't be reached, in part because of the various burdens of reason, but mainly because the separateness and self-preference of individuals and affinity groups militates against agreement.[13]

If conflict is a constituent dimension of political relations, the central nucleus of political action must consist in strategies that ensure "order" and "security" in society. Realists, however, believe that this cannot be achieved by elaborating rational procedures of deliberation that aim to reach agreement.[14] For realists, the only way is to create the favourable conditions by which forms of coordination between individuals can develop. Realists believe that one of the most important factors that can explain the possibility of cooperation is a new psychology that gives more room to human passions and sentiments. Political philosophy has been too often the hostage of a dualistic and excessively reductive vision that regarded reason and interests as the fundamental elements of political anthropology. In line with this approach, the theme of political passions has been simply ignored or regarded as having been replaced, since the advent of commercial societies, by that of "interests", which are less dangerous and not impermeable to the regulatory influence of reason.

In contrast with this approach, realists claim that passions like "pride", "hatred", "anger", "honour" or "avidity" can never be completely uprooted from human nature. They can, however, be channelled and modified, and this process is the real precondition for the birth and stability of a state. For realists, a fundamental part of the work of political philosophy is taking account of these processes and the ways in which they favour forms of coordination between all members of the community.[15]

Among the many theoretical questions raised by this approach, one topic that has recently appeared in the contemporary debate concerned the possibility of linking realism to the ethical-political thinking of modern philosophy. Somewhat like what happened for liberal contractualism, which looked to Kant not only as one of its precursors but as a figure with whom to remain in constant dialogue, political realism, too, has begun to question itself on its philosophical roots.
Bernard Williams, for example, on several occasions recalled how indebted this perspective was to the thought of Thomas Hobbes.

> I identify the "first" political question (in the manner of Thomas Hobbes) as the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation. It is the "first" political question because solving it is the condition of solving, indeed posing, any other political question. It is not (unhappily) first in the sense that once solved it never has to be solved again. Because a solution to the first political question is required *all the time* […].[16]

More recently, thanks above all to the work of Andrew Sabl, Humean philosophy has come to the centre of the stage in this debate. In *Hume's Politics*, Sabl brought out how the issues at the centre of realist political thought do not primarily concern the dilemmas of social justice and distribution, but more basic questions concerning the nature of governmental or constitutional authority, such as «who rightly holds governing power over whom», «what procedures define the exercise of that authority», or «what kind of questions that authority holds sway».[17] Sabl claims that these questions constitute problems of coordination: that is to say, problems in which all the actors involved seek to achieve a shared decision-making procedure, as each actor is aware that his own wellbeing is influenced by the decisions of the others, and that individual decision-making procedures carry the risk of a negative outcome for everyone. Traditionally, problems of coordination have been tackled through the formal instruments of the theory of rational choice. Sabl observes that though the psychological assumptions of rational choice theory, such as respecting means-ends rationality, complete information on the circumstances, stable preferences, or full transparency of motivation, are reasonable in the case of «buyers and sellers bargaining in the market»[18], they are less convincing when we move onto the terrain of problems of political order and authority. In these cases, not only might the agent's preferences not be stable in time and their lexical order less than fully transparent both from the agent's point of view and from that of those entering into contact with him, but means-ends rationality is often violated. Sabl therefore claims that any account of how human beings tackle the problems of coordination concerning political authority needs to use different tools from those provided by rational choice theory. For this kind of question, he believes we should return to and develop Hume's conventionalist model, which accounts for these processes through the human passions.

In relation to passions, Sabl has brought out an important point. He has underlined that not only does Hume provide a sentimentalist explanation of the conventions underpinning political authority, but that he also develops a «pre-history» of the human social passions.[19] It is a conjectural history that accounts for how passions that were initially partial and anti-social, in certain contingent historical circumstances, can be turned into factors that incline towards the search for shared decision-making processes, supporting the development of more and more extended and complex societies.[20]

Sabl has examined the dynamic of these processes, focusing on the *History of England*, claiming that in this work Hume provides a more elaborate account than that in the *Treatise of Human Nature* of how some human interests and passions that were initially anti-social can become factors favouring the birth of stable societies based on trade. The novelty of Hume's approach lies in the fact that not only are these processes of socialization – that involve, for example, honour, the longing for glory in battle, factional loyalty, or the desire to consolidate the prestige of belonging to a particular social class – not governed by rationality, but they are not even guided by impartial morality – a point that brings Hume strikingly close to a position of political realism. Anticipating realism, Hume, on this account, has shown that it is not so much morality that predisposes human beings to participating in political conventions by

subduing their partial interests, but the human passions that, starting from historical circumstances of a certain kind, discover new ways of satisfying themselves, gradually generating interests favourable to more inclusive forms of cooperation that sustain the formation of political authority.

In this article I intend to take Sabl's line further, concentrating in particular on the passion of resentment. I want to show how the trajectory of resentment is an important example of what Sabl calls the «pre-history» of the conventions underlying political authority. I intend to show how resentment can develop from being a passion that was initially anti-social, to become, in certain historical conditions, one that sustains respect for the institution of property, which is the foundation of complex societies.

Sabl claims that, to truly understand the pre-history of political conventions, we need to look beyond the *Treatise*, in which Hume describes this mechanism very briefly only in relation to «self-interest», and examine instead the processes of civilizing the passions described in the *Essays* and the *History of England*. Here I shall be taking a different view from Sabl. An examination of resentment shows that, already in the *Treatise*, not only as regards personal interest, but also in relation to a strongly anti-social passion like resentment, Hume was able to show how the passions, quite apart from the ordering influence of rationality and morality, could transform themselves to the point of bringing about practices and institutions that are fundamental for a stable society.

2. The passion of resentment

In Book 2 of the *Treatise*, Hume examines the passion of resentment in three different places. In its first occurrence, resentment appears in the group of the *non-hedonic direct passions*, which Hume identifies with the original impulses that produce pleasure or pain:

> Besides good and evil, or in other words, pain and pleasure, the *direct passions* frequently arise from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly unaccountable.
> Of this kind is the *desire* of *punishment to our enemies*, and *happiness to our friends*, hunger, lust, and a few other bodily appetites. These passions, properly speaking, produce good and evil, and proceed not from them, like the other affections (T 2.3.9.8, SBN 439, italics mine)[21]

In its second occurrence, resentment is identified with the desire to punish the person who has caused us an *injury*

> Beside these calm passions, which often determine the will, there are certain violent emotions of the same kind, which have likewise a great influence on that faculty. When I *receive any injury* from another, I often feel a violent passion of resentment, which makes me desire his evil and punishment, independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself (T 2.3.4.9, SBN 417-418, italics mine).

Finally, in its third occurrence, Hume includes resentment in the list of those passions that can be calm:

> Now 'tis certain, there are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, tho' they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. These desires are of two kinds, either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as *benevolence* and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, consider'd merely as such. When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are suppos'd to proceed from the same faculty, with that, which judges of truth and falshood (T 2.3.3.8, SBN 417, italics mine).

If read together, the three passages contain the general lines of a theory of resentment. I want to claim that there are elements in this theory that show how resentment has an important function in Hume's theory of justice. Let us examine, then, the general aspects of this theory.

First of all, though it is generally violent, resentment may become a calm passion «which produce little emotion in the mind» and «are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation» (T 2.3.4.8).

Secondly, as well as direct resentment towards those who have *harmed* us, Hume indicates a more specific form of resentment, towards those who have *injured* us. This term identifies a pain that depends on two different conditions.

In the first place, an injury requires not just that the pain is caused by a person, but that he does it with a «particular design and intention» (T 2.2.3.3)

> A man, who wounds and harms us by accident, becomes not our enemy upon that account, nor do we think ourselves bound by any ties of gratitude to one, who does us any service after the same manner. By the intention we judge of the actions, and according as that is good or bad, they become causes of love or hatred (T 2.2.3.3, SBN 348).

As Hume explicitly states as an aside in his examination of love and hate, the intention to hurt us is a fundamental element of injury. Without it, it would be difficult to explain either the peculiar mortification that is the basis of the resentment we feel when we are injured or the fact that that our resentment is directed at the person who has caused the injury and not at his harmful actions. On the contrary, the presence of intention allows us to explain these two phenomena. On the one hand, it accounts for the fact that the injury causes us a particular unpleasant sensation that is absent from an accidental injury. On the other, it allows the transition from the idea of harmful actions, which are by nature unstable, to the stable idea of their author, who is the object of our resentment.

In the second place, as emerges particularly, both in Book III of the *Treatise* and in the second *Enquiry*, by the term *injury* Hume refers to that kind of harm that is caused by actions that attacks those of our goods that are protected by the rules of justice.

If we start from these two conditions, then the link between resentment and injury indicates that Hume introduces a kind of social resentment that corresponds to the form that resentment can take when it is caused by intentional actions that we regard as morally *unjust*. Unlike natural resentment – which may also be caused by a person who physically wounds us accidentally – social resentment arises gradually in that stage of the process of civilization in which rules instituting property have been established. It is when this stage exists that people can describe themselves as subjects who are suffering injustice.

Hume's position becomes more complex when he examines – in the first passage I quoted - the link between resentment, on the one hand, and pleasure and pain, on the other. Hume claims that resentment, unlike other *direct* hedonic passions, is not caused by good and evil, that is, by pleasure or pain, but produces these sensations.

What exactly does Hume mean? Let us examine the two propositions separately, starting from the first, the non-hedonic one.

It is not clear how far Hume is attributing to this thesis an unconditional character. On the contrary, there are reasons for doubting it. Firstly, despite his claims, Hume – as I have just shown in discussing the case of injury - seems to be describing resentment as a passion that, unlike other non-hedonic bodily impulses, is aroused because someone has inflicted pain on us. Secondly, this hypothesis is implicitly confirmed in Book 2, when Hume claims that resentment is felt by sympathy:

> A cheerful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me. Hatred, *resentment*, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition. So remarkable a phenomenon merits our attention, and must be trac'd up to its first principles (T 2.1.11.2, SBN 316-317, italics mine)

Thirdly, when we examine benevolence, a passion that Hume pairs with resentment in the list of the non-hedonic passions, it is clear that the absolute character of the non-hedonic theory breaks down again. Hume, indeed, claims that benevolence can be an original instinct, and yet can still be caused by sympathetic pains (T 368-369).

In conclusion, despite his bold non-hedonic thesis, there are reasons for thinking that resentment can be caused by sensations of pain, whether our own or those transmitted to us by sympathy.

How, then, are we to interpret his second thesis – the one claiming that resentment produces hedonic sensations? On this point I believe Hume is simply claiming that although resentment is a painful passion – because, for example, it is

caused by the painful feeling of an injury – when resentment is satisfied, through the satisfaction of the desire to punish those who have acted unjustly, it produces pleasure. And that this is true quite apart from the further painful consequences connected with the satisfaction of resentment.

On the basis of Hume's indications in Book 2, resentment is a natural hard-wired passion that, though it is originally violent, can become progressively a sympathetic and socialized passion that is expressed through a social form of anger towards those who do not respect the rules of justice. This passion can become a stable inclination of the character. Like other «angry passions», though it is «disagreeable», it is not necessarily vicious (T 3.3.3.7; SBN 605). On the contrary, I claim that resentment can be a useful passion to oneself and to others, as it tends to protect some important sources of pride from the unjust actions of others, and it can become a motive that indirectly supports justice.[22]

In the following section I shall examine in greater detail the relation between social resentment and pride, while in the last section I shall return to the function of resentment in Hume's theory of justice.

3. Propriety, pride and resentment

In Section 10 Part 1 of Book 2, following the account of the indirect passions developed in the previous sections, Hume re-examines the double relation of impressions and ideas that produces pride and explains how property enters into this psychological mechanism. Property is defined as the «relation betwixt a person and an object as permits him, but forbids any other, the free use and the possession of it» (T 2.1.10.1). Hume consider it the «closest relation» we have with external objects, a species of causation that gives the proprietor the «liberty» «to operate as he please upon the object» (T 2.1.10.1).

In line with this argument, Hume claims that valuable properties possess a perfect relation of impressions and ideas with the passion of pride. On the one hand, the idea of the property naturally carries the imagination to that of the proprietor who is the object of the passion. On the other, being valuable, the possession arouses in the proprietor a pleasant impression that, in turn, is related by resemblance with the pleasant emotion of pride. Hume concludes that not only property, but also wealth, which Hume describe as «the power of acquiring … property» is able to produce pride in the rich person and arouses love or esteem among those who have social interactions with him.

Although Hume focuses on pride and esteem in being able to procure goods mainly in terms of wealth, rather than looking explicitly at the particular traits of character that allow the acquisition of this power, we can reconstruct and add some depth to his own account by drawing on other parts of the *Treatise* as well as some of EPM.

Hume deals at length with these traits in EPM and the *Treatise*. In the *Treatise* these qualities are part of the natural abilities. In EPM, these traits make up the main core of the *qualities useful to ourselves*. All these «natural talents» or «acquired abilities» – which include *discretion*, *industry*, *frugality* and even *strength of mind* – are qualities that are causally connected with «the prospect of elevation, advancement, figure in life,

prosperous success» (EPM 6.3, SBN 234). They are connected with «rank», which is in «great measure regulated» by «riches» (EPM 6.32, SBN 247). Importantly, Hume claims that these qualities arouse our moral sentiments (or «sentiments of humanity» EPM 6.5, SBN 2.35-236) as we can sympathize with «images of prosperity, happiness, ease, plenty, authority» (EPM 6.30, SBN 246), «social enjoyment» (EPM 6.12, SBN 238) and the agent's self-satisfaction and self-respect which is connected to the use of his wealth.

Following this line of thought, we can claim that, as in the case of wealth, these qualities too are esteemed and cause pride as they are causally connected with the possession of goods – that is with property. Unlike wealth, these powers constitute traits of our character; more precisely, *qualities useful to ourselves* that, considered from common points of view, are approved as virtuous; qualities that, unlike wealth, can arouse in the agent a moralized form of pride, as they are the sources of that self-esteem that is the result of the agent's reflective consideration of his character.

The possibility of cultivating these traits and of others recognizing them as parts of our character and appreciating us for this reason, and, last but not least, of their constituting sources of our pride, depend importantly on the stability of the possession – in other words, respect for what in Book 3 Part 2 Hume calls the rules of justice.

I believe this helps explain why – once the convention of justice has been established – the violation of property by someone is therefore a serious *injury* to socialized human beings. It not only frustrates our expectation of pleasure from the enjoyment of goods and impedes the possibility of satisfying those desires for commodities that are the social form of natural avidity, but, in an important sense, it constantly threatens the possibility of being appreciated by others for aspects of our character that are fundamental to our moralized pride and our social prestige.

On the basis of what I have argued in the previous section, I am claiming that Hume places social resentment as a guardian protecting these goods. Social resentment and the desire for revenge that we direct at those who injure us, violating our property and causing injustice, is simply a passion that protects the possibility of approving important parts of our personal worth that are causally connected with the stable possession of our property and wealth.

4. Resentment and moral disapprobation for injustice

I shall start from a long passage that has been strangely ignored by Hume scholarship. In Part 2 of Book 3 of the *Treatise*, after explaining «the *natural* obligation of justice» (T 3.2.2.23) through «the passion of self-interest» (T 3.2.2.13), Hume gives an account of its «moral obligation, or the sentiment of right and wrong» (T 3.2.2.23).

Although in T 3.2.2.24 Hume sums up this part of his argument with the ideas that «*a* sympathy *with public interest is the source of the* moral approbation» of justice. I shall claim that, actually, Hume in this section also attributes a significant role to the negative sentiment of social resentment. Both these sentiments have a role in explaining the strength of the individual virtue of justice as a motivation that consists in refraining from committing unjust actions. Hume claims:

> But tho' in our own actions we may frequently lose sight of that interest, which we have in maintaining order, and may follow a lesser and more present interest, we never fail to observe the prejudice we receive, either mediately or immediately, from the injustice of_others; as not being in that case either blinded by passion, or byass'd by any contrary temptation. Nay when the injustice is so distant from us, as no way to affect our interest, it_still displeases us; because we consider it as prejudicial to human society, and pernicious to_every one that approaches the person guilty of it. We partake of their uneasiness by *sympathy*; and as every thing, which gives uneasiness in human actions, upon the general survey, is call'd Vice, and whatever produces satisfaction, in the same manner, is denominated Virtue; this is the reason why the sense of moral good and evil follows upon justice and injustice. And tho' this sense, in the present case, be deriv'd only from_contemplating the actions of others, yet we fail not to extend it even to our own actions. The *general rule* reaches beyond those instances, from which it arose; while at the same time we naturally *sympathize* with others in the sentiments they entertain of us (T 3.2.2.24, SBN 498-499).

The explanation of the morality of justice starts, not from our regard for the general good, but from a reactive passion against the violation of a particular good. It is a reactive sentiment that can be felt either directly, when the actions that are the object of the sentiment conflict with our interests, or through sympathy, when the actions prejudice the interests of others. This reactive sentiment has also a special power. Hume claims that it is not just a weak form of disapprobation for unjust conduct, but a sentiment so strong that, though it is initially directed against the conduct of others, it ends up being directed at the conduct of the agent himself, counterbalancing desires that would drive him to behave unjustly.

I claim that this sentiment can be identified with the social resentment towards injustice. Although Hume does not explicitly describe it in this way, it possesses the same characteristics of social resentment towards injustice discussed in Book II of the *Treatise*.[23]

It is a reactive negative sentiment, or a special form of anger, which is aroused whenever someone suffers an injustice from other persons. This harm has – as I tried to show – an enormous effect on an individual's life: it not only frustrates the expectation of being able to enjoy goods, but threatens important sources of moral and social pride. Moreover, this form of resentment, in line with the realist approach to the passions discussed in the first section, can also become more stable and shared when the individual suffering caused by injustice is considered «from a general survey» – that is, apart from its effects on the interests of whoever is evaluating them. In this case the moral spectators share, through sympathy, the various forms of frustration and suffering felt by the person who suffers the injustice and progressively learn how to turn their anger on the author of the injustice.

This is just the first part of the explanation that Hume offers of the disapprobation of injustice. At the end of his excursus in T 3.2.2.24, Hume adds:

> The *self-interest* is the original motive to the *establishment* of justice: But a *sympathy* with *public* interest is the source of the *moral* approbation, which attends that virtue (*Ibidem*).

This passage summarizes the long discussion on the link between the system of just actions and the *public* interest a few paragraphs earlier. In T. 3.2.2.22 Hume had claimed that, though a single just action may not be against both individual and public interests, it nevertheless constitutes a moral obligation, as it is in any case necessary to sustain «the whole scheme of actions» that is «absolutely requisite, both to the support of society, and the well-being of every individual».

If we link these considerations to the question of the nature of the «abhorrence of injustice» we can identify in this passage the seeds of an additional form of aversion for injustice. The idea is that a single act of injustice, if discovered, would be a threat to our shared trust in the fact that all the members of society without exception respect the rules of justice – a trust that underlies the possibility of maintaining «the whole system of actions», a «scheme» that is necessary for the peace and stability of society. In this way sympathy with the imagined general suffering, connected with the collapse of the plan of actions that sustains justice cannot fail to arouse a sentiment of disapproval for the single unjust action.

If we read together the two parts of Hume's explanation of the morality of justice in T 3.2.2, we can trace a conception of the «universal blame which attends every act of injustice», which puts two types of sentiment at the centre: a form of sympathetic social resentment aroused by the suffering that injustice causes single individuals; and a form of moral disapproval depending on our capacity to sympathize with the general suffering connected with the downfall of the whole system of actions that sustains society. Though – as Hume explicitly states at the end of T 3.2.2.24 – the censure of injustice depends primarily on this second type of disapproval, I claim that in an important sense it is also dependent on our capacity to participate in the suffering of particular individuals and to feel resentment towards dishonest individuals. The latter is a strong sentiment, as it protects our individual capacity to enjoy fundamental human goods. Resentment, which condemns vicious conduct against particular goods, reinforces the general disapproval of injustice, explaining the particular strength that this sentiment can have.

Conclusion

I believe that examining the complex role social resentment plays in Hume's account of justice helps us to focus on an important neglected aspect of his realist explanation of the origin of political society.

The *Treatise* shows that the consolidation of justice – which is one of the most fundamental institution of society – does not depend just on positive general sentiments, but also requires the presence of negative sentiments, such as social resentment, directed towards individual unjust actions. In the first section I mentioned

that Sabl claims that this kind of explanations is important from the point of view of contemporary realism, as it accounts for how naturally partial human beings can restructure their emotions so as to make them suitable for seeking shared solutions, which are necessary for tackling problems of political cooperation. Social resentment has precisely this function, as it gradually changes from being a form of uncontrolled, unpredictable anger against any kind of offence into a kind of stable, shared disapprobation of conduct that threatens the stability of property, which is one of the most important sources of pride and honour in the members of complex societies.

In my view, Hume's strategy becomes still more interesting for realists to the extent that it explains – as I have tried to show in this article – that the drive towards adopting shared, more inclusive conventions is not only sustained by the positive passions, such as moral approbation or benevolence, but also by negative emotions that are *prima facie* anti-social, like resentment.

References

[1] See, for example, Galston, W. A., "Realism in Political Theory", *European Journal of Political Theory* 9/4 (2010): 385-411.

[2] On this point, see Guess, R., *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), chap. 1.

[3] Williams, B., *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[4] Guess, R., (2008), 6.

[5] Guess, R., (2008), 7.

[6] Guess, R., (2008), 7.

[7] Guess, R., (2008), 7.

[8] Guess, R., (2008), 8-9.

[9] Guess, R., (2008), 9.

[10] Galston, W. A., (2010): 394-395.

[11] Galston, W. A., (2010): 395.

[12] Galston, W. A., (2010): 395.

[13] Galston, W. A., (2010): 396.

[14] This topic is examined acutely by Galston, who has criticized the Rawlsian and Habermasian idea of reconstructing the democratic decision-making processes along the lines of rational deliberation. Referring to the realist stance, Galston writes: «they believe, with Aristotle, that real-world political deliberation is and will always be incompletely rational and that the theoretical presuppositions of deliberative democrats, whether inspired by Habermas or Rawls, are too demanding ever to meet in practice. "Under the pragmatic presupposition of an inclusive and non-coercive rational discourse among free and equal participants", says Habermas, "everyone is required to take the perspective of everyone else, and thus project herself into the understandings of self and world of all others". It is hard to imagine why we should take this requirement seriously, even as a regulative ideal. For this part Rawls speaks of the need to assume a "certain good faith" without which we cannot deliberate together. But should we assume anything of the sort? Put differently: rather than framing a conception of public reason around the assumption of mutual good faith, perhaps we should go the other way round, shaping deliberative theory and practice in light of the certainty that this presumption will not be equally true for all members of the community». Galston, W. A., (2010): 399.

[15] See Galston, W. A., (2010): 398. See also Williams, B., (2005), 1-3.

[16] Williams, W., (2005), 3.
[17] A. Sabl, *Hume's Politics. Coordination and Crisis in the "History of England"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 28.
[18] Sabl, A., (2012), 26.
[19] Sabl, A., (2012), 53.
[20] On this interpretation see also Harris, J., "A Compleat Chain of Reasoning: Hume's Project in A Treatise of Human Nature, Books One and Two", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 109 (2009): 129-148.
[21] References to Hume's works include the following abbreviations: Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* is cited with notations of the form T j.k.m.n / SBN pqr where the lower-case letters indicate arabic numerals. The numerals following "T" indicate book, part, section and paragraph in Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); numerals following "SBN" indicate page number in Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, second edition with text revised and variant readings by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). *Hume's Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* is quoted similarly. "EPM" followed by two numbers indicates the chapter and the paragraph in Hume, D., *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by T. L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). The numbers following "SBN" indicate the corresponding page in Hume, D., *Hume's Enquiries*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, third edition with text revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 1975).
[22] On the link between resentment and the pride in Hume, see also Baier, A., "Hume on Resentment", *Hume Studies* 6 (1980): 133-149.
[23] To some extent the link between resentment and justice has already been examined in some important recent studies which include, for example, Pritchard, M. S., "Justice and Resentment in Hume, Reid, and Smith", *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 6 (2008): 59-70; Baier, A., (1980); Hope, S., "The Circumstances of Justice, *Hume Studies*, 36 (2012): 125-148; Ridge, M., "David Hume Paternalist, *Hume Studies* 36 (2012): 149-170; Pollock, R., "Hume and the Extension of Justice: Making Resentments Felt Through Instability, paper presented at the *40th Hume Conference*, 2013. These studies, however, focus their analyses only to Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, where Hume's main interest is to use resentment to prevent some agents from taking part to the convention governed by justice. What has been lacking is an investigation into whether resentment has a broader role, one that explains our strong disapprobation of injustice.