

# **Spirits for the Age: Hume, Rousseau and the quarrel concerning the progress of the arts and sciences**

## **Espíritos de uma era: Hume e Rousseau e a disputa sobre o progresso das artes e ciências**

Gabriel Guedes Rossatti<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Long before David Hume (1711-1776) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) personally met each other, with disastrous consequences for both, in late 1765-early 1766, they had developed quite different views regarding one of the most important questions present throughout different contexts in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, viz. the question concerning the progress of the arts and sciences. Indeed, the question was as broad as it was important for it had to do with the very foundations of modernity, and more particularly with the establishment of entrepreneurial values, a matter both Hume and Rousseau treated under the heading of 'commerce'. My aim, thus, is to (i) reconstruct both Hume's and Rousseau's arguments concerning the relationship between commerce, progress in the arts and sciences and morality, in order to (ii) propose an interpretation of their falling-out, in the sense that, according to their own arguments concerning such matters, the differences between them were too profound in order for them to be able to establish an amicable relationship. These two points lead me then to (iii) discuss their questions under the light of our contemporary world, which is the aim of a philosophy paper such as this. In other words, the aim of this article is to argue that the differences between Hume and Rousseau can be seen as latent already at the beginning of their careers, in the sense that it all had to do precisely with the dynamics that modernity was supposed to take: according to Hume, a liberal-progressist direction, whereas according to Rousseau such a direction would entail nothing but a moral breakdown.

**Key words:** progress, sciences, morals, commerce, Hume, Rousseau.

### **Resumo**

Muito antes de David Hume (1711-1776) e Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) se conhecerem pessoalmente com consequências desastrosas para ambos, no final de 1765 e início de 1766, eles tinham desenvolvido pontos de vista diferentes sobre uma das questões mais importantes presente em

---

<sup>1</sup> Pesquisador independente, Brasil. E-mail: jjrossatti@yahoo.com ou jjrossatti@terra.com.br.

diferentes contextos ao longo do século XVIII na Europa: a questão sobre o progresso das artes e das ciências. Na verdade, a questão era tão ampla quanto importante pois estava relacionada com os próprios fundamentos da modernidade e, mais particularmente, com o estabelecimento de valores empresariais, uma questão que Hume e Rousseau trataram sob o título de “comércio”. Meu propósito é, portanto, a (i) reconstruir os argumentos de Hume e Rousseau sobre a relação entre o comércio, o progresso da arte, da ciência e da moralidade com o objetivo de (ii) propor uma interpretação de seu desentendimento, no sentido de que, de acordo com os seus próprios argumentos sobre tais questões, as diferenças entre eles eram muito grandes para que fossem capaz de estabelecer uma relação amigável. Estes dois pontos levam-me, em seguida, a (iii) discutir as suas questões à luz do mundo contemporâneo. Em outras palavras, o objetivo deste trabalho é argumentar que as diferenças entre Hume e Rousseau podem ser vistas como latentes já no início de suas carreiras, no sentido de que tudo deveria estar relacionado com a dinâmica que a modernidade deveria tomar: de acordo com Hume, uma direção liberal-progressista, enquanto que, de acordo com Rousseau, tal direção implicaria nada além de um colapso moral.

**Palavras-chave:** progresso, ciências, moral, comércio, Hume, Rousseau.

## **The philosophers' quarrel in 1765-1766 and Hume's position as a modern partisan of the rise and progress of the arts and sciences (1742)**

In 1766 the philosophical world – Europe, in other words – was shaken by the news that Rousseau, who was fleeing both his native Geneva as well as France, had managed to have a falling-out even with someone who wanted to protect him, in that case David Hume. In any case, it is more than clear that such a separation happened on account of practical affairs rather than on account of philosophical differences (Zaretsky and Scott, 2009). Nevertheless, there already existed irreconcilable differences between them regarding the very direction modernity was supposed to take, and it is to these that I shall now turn to.

Already in 1742, that is, some eight years before Rousseau wrote his famous ‘first discourse’, which is the way scholars like to call the ‘Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts’, Hume had taken his position amidst the not less famous ‘Querelle des anciens et des modernes’, this on an essay titled ‘Of the rise and progress of the arts and sciences’ (Hume, 2006a). Indeed, Hume reckons from the beginning that such a question had to do with a rather broad set of matters, for, according to him,

The question [...] concerning the rise and progress of the arts and sciences, is not altogether a question concerning the taste, genius and spirit of a few, but concerning those of a whole people; and may, therefore, be accounted for, in some measure, by general causes and principles (Hume, 2006a, p. 60).

The ‘general principles’ Hume alludes to are those reasons which “[...] might be given, why such a nation is more polite and learned, at a particular time, than any of its neighbours” (Hume, 2006a, p. 61); in other words, Hume wanted to find of a pattern for comparison between nations which could be used to measure their general development, as well as their general shortcomings. It had to do, thus,

with a reckoning regarding the very *spirit of the age*,<sup>2</sup> an expression Hume would employ a couple of years later (1752) when discussing the related topic of 'luxury' (Hume, 2006c, p. 107).

Hume's first thesis regarding the spirit of the age, that is, the rise and progress of the arts and sciences, stipulates that there is an intimate connection between a society's political form and its more general improvement, or, in his own words, "[...] it is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise, at first, among any people unless that people enjoy the blessing of a free government" (Hume, 2006a, p. 61). As can be seen, from the start Hume's research can be described as a *political* one on morals,<sup>3</sup> for he ascribes a preeminent role to the importance of politics, and more particularly to the different forms of state, in the shaping of moral or collective values. Indeed, he sketches a brief genealogy of society, according to which 'men', as yet barbarous and ignorant, seek security under the protection of some rulers, 'few or many', who, in turn, do not yet feel obliged to offer protection from their own (abuses of) power to these 'men' who have sought for them; thus we have the seeds of monarchical forms of government, which, according to Hume's account, are despotic by nature (Hume, 2006a, p. 61-62).

Accordingly, the subjects of a monarchy

[...] are slaves in the full and proper sense of the word; and it is impossible they can ever aspire to any refinements of taste or reason. [...] To expect, therefore, that the arts and sciences should take their first rise in a monarchy, is to expect a contradiction (Hume, 2006a, p. 62).

Only free governments, also called *republics*, however, give rise to the most important social institution according to Hume, that is, 'LAW'<sup>4</sup> (Hume, 2006a, p. 63). From the latter "[...] arises security; from security curiosity: And from curiosity knowledge" (Hume, 2006a, p. 63). Hume actually goes on to confess that the latter steps of progress may be more accidental and consequently mere conjectures; nevertheless, he makes it quite explicit that "[...] the former are altogether necessary" (Hume, 2006a, p. 63). In any case, Hume is unequivocal when he states that "[...] the greater refinements and improvements of human reason [...] require curiosity, security and law. The *first* growth, therefore, of the arts and sciences can never be expected in despotic governments" (Hume, 2006a, p. 63).

From such presuppositions he adduces his next thesis, the one that says that "[...] nothing is more favourable to the rise of politeness and learning, than a number of neighbouring and independent states, connected together by commerce and policy" (Hume, 2006a, p. 64). The gist of the argument is that emulation, arising among *small* neighbouring states, is a source of moral improvement, but more particularly, that such a scenario is a warrant against the potential rise of

---

<sup>2</sup> As far as I know, this is the first use of such a concept, which would be later taken up by the Germans, such as Herder (1744-1803), for whom it is "Allerdings ein mächtiger Genius, ein gewaltiger Dämon. Wenn Averroës glaubte, daß das ganze Menschengeschlecht nur Eine Seele habe, an welcher jedes Individuum auf seine Weise, bald tätig, bald leidend teilnehme: so würde ich diese Dichtung eher auf den Geist der Zeit anwenden" (Herder, 1991, p. 85). From the Germans onwards, such a concept would be more and more assimilated as a key concept to discuss what later moderns, such as Baudelaire (1821-1867), for instance, would name 'modernity'.

<sup>3</sup> Hume's argument seems to imply the Aristotelian thesis according to which "A constitution is the organization of offices in a state, and determines what is to be the governing bodies, and what is the end of each community" (Aristotle, 2008, p. 92 [1289a]).

<sup>4</sup> Called elsewhere 'justice': "MAN, born in a family, is compelled to maintain society, from necessity, from natural inclination, and from habit. The same creature, in his farther progress, is engaged to establish political society, in order to administer justice; without which there can be no peace among them, nor safety, nor mutual intercourse" (Hume, 2006d, p. 20).

despotic powers, in the sense that each small state should work as a check upon the neighbouring ones.<sup>5</sup>

In the end, Hume is pledging for the relativization of values, for he considers favourable to the spread and progress of the arts and sciences the 'dethroning of tyrannical usurpers over human reason': "Consider the blind submission of the ancient philosophers to the several masters in each school, and you will be convinced, that little good could be expected from an hundred centuries of such a servile philosophy" (Hume, 2006a, p. 67).

Next, he proceeds to his third thesis, according to which though the only proper 'Nursery' of the arts and sciences – "[...] these noble plants [...]" (Hume, 2006a, p. 67) – is a free state, republics would be more inclined to foster the development of sciences, properly said, whereas 'civilized monarchies', a distinction he introduces rather cunningly, would be more inclined to foster the development of the 'polite arts', by which he basically means (polite, if not 'French') *conversation* (Hume, 2006a, p. 67). This difference arises from the very dynamics of power implicit in those two forms of state, in the former with "[...] power ris[ing] upwards from the people to the great [...]", meaning that each member is rendered independent of the others, and in the latter the other way around, which demands from "[...] every one an inclination to please his superiors, and to form himself upon those models, which are most acceptable to people of condition and education. Politeness of manners, therefore, arises most naturally in monarchies and courts [...]" (Hume, 2006a, p. 70). Such comparisons, in any case, can be interpreted as means which Hume employs in order to assess the more fundamental differences between the ancients and the moderns, according to which the former can be accused of *rusticity* (Hume, 2006a, p. 72); indeed, Hume states that "I shall [...] be bold to affirm that, among the ancients, there was not much delicacy of breeding, or that polite deference and respect, which civility obliges us either to express or counterfeit towards the persons with whom we converse" (Hume, 2006a, p. 71).

As a matter of fact, Hume reckons that nothing in the world is 'pure and unmixed' (Hume, 2006a, p. 72), an idea which leads him to the following statement:

In like manner, as modern politeness, which is naturally so ornamental, runs often 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 (Hume, 2006a, p. 72).

Hume then devotes some time to the analysis of a more particular form of *modern politeness*, that is, *gallantry*, which is considered by him to be as *gener-*

<sup>5</sup> Hume's argument is rather curious, if not downright erroneous, and would indeed be put into discredit by later thinkers such as Tocqueville (1805-1859); indeed, Hume believed that "[...] where a number of neighbouring states have a great intercourse of arts and commerce, their mutual jealousy keeps them from receiving too lightly the law from each other, in matters of taste and reasoning, and makes them examine every work of art with the greatest care and accuracy. The contagion of popular opinion spreads not so easily from one place to another. It readily receives a check in some state or other, where it concurs not with the prevailing prejudices. And nothing but nature and reason, or, at least, what bears them a strong resemblance, can force its way through all obstacles, and unite the most rival nations into an esteem and admiration of it" (Hume, 2006a, p. 65). He then gives some examples of the dynamics he has in mind, one of which is the following: "We have seen the advantage of this situation in several instances. What checked the progress of the CARTESIAN philosophy, to which the FRENCH nation showed such a strong propensity towards the end of the last century, but the opposition made to it by the other nations of EUROPE, who soon discovered the weak sides of that philosophy? The severest scrutiny, which NEWTON's theory has undergone, proceeded not from his own countrymen, but from foreigners [...]" (Hume, 2006a, p. 66). As can be seen, Hume has pretty much in mind the *modus operandi* of the 'Republic of Letters', which he extends to the intercourse between nations; the rise of mass democracy, though, would render his thesis doubtful, to say the least.

ous as it is *natural* (Hume, 2006a, p. 73); indeed, without it human intercourse becomes dull and, even worse, impracticable, for indeed “Where *that* is not attended to, in some degree, no human society can subsist” (Hume, 2006a, p. 73). Always a realist, Hume understands that without (at least some) hypocrisy human relationships would be simply unbearable, not to mention that gallantry, being not less consistent with wisdom and prudence than with nature and generosity (Hume, 2006a, p. 75), is a great means of bringing together men and women, that is, beings who feel not only bodily appetites, but intellectual ones as well<sup>6</sup> (Hume, 2006a, p. 73).

In sum, in his first writing on the rise and progress of the arts and sciences, Hume most clearly leans toward a position which can be called *modern*, for the *ancients’* ways are attacked on account of their intrinsic *rusticity*, a position which would be later taken up by his future ‘friend’ Rousseau.

## **Rousseau: *ancient rusticity* against *modern decadence* in the ‘Discours sur les sciences et les arts’ (1750)**

Rousseau’s point of departure presupposes already a different point of view, for he resumes the question asked by the Académie des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Dijon<sup>7</sup> with a light twist: “Le rétablissement des Sciences e des Arts a-t’il contribué à épurer *ou* à *corrompre* les Mœurs?” (Rousseau, 1964, p. 5, my emphasis).

Indeed, Rousseau’s text has become so famous that most of us know his answer in anticipation. Thus, the arts and sciences have for Rousseau a deep, intrinsic, if not *genetic* connection with human vices:

L’Astronomie est née de la superstition; l’Eloquence, de l’ambition, de la haine, de la flatterie, du mensonge; la Géometrie, de l’avarice; la Physique, d’une vaine curiosité; toutes, et la Morale même, de l’orgueil humain. Les Sciences et les Arts doivent donc leur naissance à nos vices [...] (Rousseau, 1964, p. 17).

In other words, they are tainted from birth and consequently cannot fare well in the world. And what about their use, or more correctly the end they have been created for? Simple: they have *ideological* implications or ends, nothing more, nothing less than that (see, for instance, Porter, 1995, p. 35).

For Rousseau makes it very clear that

L’esprit a ses besoins, ainsi que le corps. Ceux-ci font les fondemens de la société, les autres en font l’agrément. Tandis que le Gouvernement et les Loix pourvoient à la sûreté et au bien-être des hommes assemblés; les Sciences, les Lettres et les Arts, moins despotiques et plus puissans peut-être, étendent des guirlandes de fleurs sur les chaînes de fer dont ils sont chargés, étouffent en eux le sentiment de cette liberté originelle pour laquelle ils sembloient être nés, leur font aimer leur esclavage et en forment ce qu’on appelle des Peuples policés (Rousseau, 1964, p. 6-7).

<sup>6</sup> Hume more concretely chastises “[...] some of the most zealous partisans of the ancients [...]” (Hume, 2006a, p. 73) on the grounds that among them “[...] the character of the fair-sex was considered as altogether domestic; nor were they regarded as part of the polite world or of good company”, a point which leads him to formulate the following (modern) question: “What better school for manners, than the company of virtuous women [...]?” (Hume, 2006a, p. 75).

<sup>7</sup> The original announcement for the contest is to be found in Rousseau (1964, p. 1237-1238).

In other words, the products of the arts, letters (or literature) and sciences operate as veils, created by human beings themselves, with the intention of making, out of civilized peoples, 'Heureux esclaves' (Rousseau, 1964, p. 7). In short, they are a decisive factor in seducing human beings into overlooking the oppression they themselves suffer in their sociopolitical condition.

Against, therefore, the 'corruption of the soul' engendered by such developments (Rousseau, 1964, p. 9), Rousseau proposes "[...] mœurs [...] rustiques, mais naturelles [...]" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 8). In other words, against the increase of *commerce* between peoples, which only makes them more and more alike in a rather base, if not bestial way, for it transforms human beings into either 'troupeau' (Rousseau, 1964, p. 8), or "[...] des Esprits dégradés par une multitude de soins futiles [...]" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 20) who only have eyes for luxury and, as Pascal would put it, *divertissement*, Rousseau proposes "[...] la simplicité, l'innocence et les vertus" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 11). The virtues he speaks of are basically patriotism, moderation and "[...] l'heureuse ignorance [...]" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 15). In sum, Rousseau pledges for "[...] la simplicité des premiers temps" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 22), a simplicity which has its economical formulation in *agriculture* (Rousseau, 1964, p. 14).

In other terms, Rousseau places himself in the 'querelle' on the side of the ancients, for he understands that such a modern *culture des sciences* (Rousseau, 1964, p. 24) is based on capitalistic positivity. It is in this sense, then, that his critique of literature and philosophy, these two *forms* of sciences or arts most common in the context he was immersed in, is to be understood, for they only witness to the fact that as such they are nothing but 'commodités de la vie' (Rousseau, 1964, p. 22), that is, *accessories* which, as such, have nothing fundamental to say or to teach. The culture which emerges out of such a context is then one which is built around a void, for it hides its intrinsic inner emptiness through the sheer reproduction of its products in mass scale: "Tandis que les commodités de la vie se multiplient, que les arts se perfectionnent et que le luxe s'étend; le vrai courage s'énerve, les vertus militaires s'évanouissent [...]" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 22).

In this sense, indeed, Rousseau should be seen as one of – if not *the* most important – forerunners of what has come to be known as 'culture criticism', for his critique engages the field of cultural production, in its broadest aspects, from a perspective which has as its main concern sociopolitical aspects, as well as ethical and moral ones. His main lesson, in this sense, is the idea that "[...] tous les besoins que le Peuple se donne, sont autant de chaînes dont il se charge" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 7, note), which means that his main idea or value proposed in the 'first discourse' is to foster "[...] des hommes qui n'ont besoin de rien [...]" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 7, note). In sum, against modern 'superfluités' (Rousseau, 1964, p. 7, note), which presuppose an enormous apparatus or structure – precisely the arts, letters and sciences – to inculcate or, better said, to *create* desire, Rousseau proposes a life lived in accordance with the laws of nature. Rousseau's scathing critique of the arts, sciences and letters should be seen therefore as the first critique of modernity, for it presupposes a global comprehension of modern ways and manners<sup>8</sup> in terms of their being a culture of abundance; what interests Rousseau, or the counter-value he has to offer, though, is thus *rustic simplicity*, that is, a life lived according to the

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, if Hume was to use the expression 'the Spirit of the Age' when discussing the topic of 'luxury', Rousseau also had in mind as broad a dynamics as Hume's, for he uses pretty much the same expression when criticizing the dissolution of mores within modernity: "[...] la dissolution des mœurs, suite nécessaire du luxe, entraîne à son tour la corruption du goût. Que si par hazard entre les hommes extraordinaires par leurs talents, il s'en trouve quelqu'un qui ait de la fermeté dans l'âme et qui se refuse de se prêter au *génie* de son siècle et de s'avilir par des productions pueriles, malheur à lui" (Rousseau, 1964, p. 21, my emphasis).

laws of nature and dedicated to one's 'Patrie', the unfortunate and one's friends (see Rousseau, 1964, p. 17-18), a sort of Roman-Spartan view of life which can be put in more colloquial terms as 'less is more(s)'.

## **Hume's further defense of labour and a refined 'stock culture' against the 'martial spirit' proposed by 'severe moralists' (1752)**

In 1752 David Hume would reiterate his position in the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns by publishing a couple of essays whose topics were related to the question concerning the development of the arts and sciences. In this section, I shall discuss two of them, 'Of Commerce' and 'Of Luxury', later retitled 'Of Refinement in the Arts'.

In the first of the aforementioned essays Hume undertakes both a theory of 'labour', however briefly sketched, and a discussion regarding the relationship between agriculture and commerce, which he understood to be not rival but complementary sectors of the economy, a distinction which is not clearly developed in Rousseau's more Manicheistic or polarized 'first discourse'. Indeed, Hume's theory of economic development starts with both *husbandmen* and *manufacturers*, the former being employed in the culture of the land and the latter in the working up of materials furnished by the former (Hume, 2006b, p. 95). Hume does presuppose a previous 'state of nature', in which men either hunted or fished, but once they 'quit their savage stage', they necessarily fall into one or the other of these two categories (Hume, 2006b, p. 95). And although he does not seem to bother defining what 'labour' really is, he does pay attention to it, as when he considers that "Everything in the world is purchased by labour; and our passions are the only causes of labour. When a nation abounds in manufactures and mechanic arts, the proprietors of land, as well as the farmers, study agriculture as a science, and redouble their industry and attention. The superfluity, which arises from their labour, is not lost; but is exchanged with manufacturers for those commodities, which men's luxury now makes them covet. By this means, land furnishes a great deal more of the necessaries of life, than what suffices for those who cultivate it" (Hume, 2006b, p. 99).

Labour, fundamentally understood as human activity,<sup>9</sup> thus, is the source of superfluities, which becomes a decisive factor in terms of the development of a state, for, as Hume puts it, "The more labour [...] employed beyond mere necessities, the more powerful is any state [...]" (Hume, 2006b, p. 99). Consequently, not only production but also commerce, and more specifically foreign commerce, are highly valued by Hume, since the latter increases even more the 'stock of labour' in a nation:

[...] a kingdom, that has a large import and export, must abound more with industry, and that employed upon delicacies and luxuries, than a kingdom which rests contented with its native commodities. It is, therefore, more powerful, as well as richer and happier (Hume, 2006b, p. 101).

But foreign commerce, as the last word shows, besides having mere political-economic effects, also has, according to Hume, moral ones as well, for it not only

---

<sup>9</sup> Hume seems to follow the Lockean definition of labour, according to which "Whatsoever [...] he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left in it, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*" (Locke, 2005, p. 288, § 27).

arouses a dynamic environment that stimulates human beings out of indolence, but more particularly it is pictured as being able to foster *civilization* and, in the end, *happiness*; indeed, Hume reckons that

Thus men become acquainted with the *pleasures* of luxury and the *profits* of commerce; and their *delicacy* and *industry*, being once awaked, carry them on to farther improvements, in every branch of domestic as well as foreign trade. And this perhaps is the chief advantage which arises from a commerce with strangers. It rouses men from their indolence [...] and [...] raises in them a desire of a more splendid way of life than what their ancestors enjoyed (Hume, 2006b, p. 101).

As a matter of fact, this last point is emphasized even more in another essay, the one originally titled 'Of luxury'. Hume confesses there that 'perpetual occupation' leads the human mind not only to acquire new vigour, but also to enlarge its powers as well as its faculties (Hume, 2006c, p. 106). Action is thus equated with pleasure once

[t]he Spirit of the Age affects all the arts; and the minds of men, being once roused from their lethargy, and put into a fermentation, turn themselves on all sides, and carry improvements into every art and science. Profound ignorance is totally banished, and men enjoy the privilege of rational creatures, to think as well as to act, to cultivate the pleasures of the mind as well as those of the body. [...] Thus *industry*, *knowledge* and *humanity*, are linked together by an indissoluble chain [...] (Hume, 2006c, p. 107).

Such a conception of the dynamics of enlightenment, although tempered by other ideas,<sup>10</sup> turns Hume into one of the greatest champions of progress in the arts and sciences. His idea of modern society, thus, is that of a '*storehouse of labour*' (Hume, 2006c, p. 108) in which laws, order, police and discipline can be finally thought of as being capable of achievement or perfection (see Hume, 2006c, p. 109).

This attitude of militant modernism is also clearly felt when Hume undertakes to attack or criticize the 'ancients', those 'men of severe morals' (Hume, 2006c, p. 106) who, induced by the example of ancient Rome, declaim against refinement in the arts (Hume, 2006c, p. 110). While never mentioning Rousseau in any of these criticisms, Hume considers that if on the one hand "[t]o declaim against present times, and magnify the virtue of remote ancestors, is a propensity almost inherent in human nature [...]" (Hume, 2006c, p. 112), on the other such severe moralists get things wrong when they misunderstood the cause of the disorders in the Roman state by ascribing to luxury and the arts the faults which in fact arose out of an ill-modelled government; indeed, according to Hume, "[...] refinement on the pleasures and conveniencies of life has no natural tendency to beget venality and corruption" (Hume, 2006c, p. 111). In this sense, there is no need to fear, as Rousseau did, that men should lose their ferocity or become less vigorous in defence of their country or their liberty, for the arts have no such effects whatsoever in enervating either the mind or the body; on the contrary, they rather add new force to both (see Hume, 2006c, p. 109).

<sup>10</sup> As one Hume scholar puts it, "[...] Hume's tone is thoroughly optimistic in the sense that he saw economic change as resulting from a series of institutional changes whose net result is to give increasing scope to humanity's active disposition, and in particular to the pursuit of riches. This vision of the future is, however, qualified by the introduction of the classical thesis of growth and decay, a thesis that manifests itself in Hume's belief that mature economies will eventually and necessarily confront constraints to their further development" (Skinner, 2009, p. 244).

But even more emphatic is Hume's rejection of ancient morals on the grounds that they are both downright barbarous or violent and, according to modern or enlightened standards, impracticable:

[i]t is natural on this occasion to ask, whether sovereigns may not return to the maxims of ancient policy [...]? I answer, that it appears to me, almost impossible; and that because ancient policy was violent, and contrary to the more natural and usual course of things. [...] Sovereigns must take mankind as they find them, and cannot pretend to introduce any violent change in their principles and ways of thinking (Hume, 2006b, p. 97-98).

There is, therefore, no reason for turning back the clock, so to speak, for human beings no longer live in solitude or with their fellow-citizens in a distant manner (see Hume, 2006c, p. 107), while, on economic terms, agriculture, as the sole method of producing wealth, is equated by Hume with 'unpolished nations' (Hume, 2006c, p. 111); in sum, the past is past for Hume, whereas the future lies ahead with its promises of more wealth for everyone, for, according to Hume, "[...] where luxury nourishes commerce and industry, the peasants, by a proper cultivation of land, become rich and independent; while the tradesmen and merchants acquire a share of the property, and draw authority and consideration to that middling rank of men, who are the best and firmest basis of public liberty" (Hume, 2006c, p. 112).

## **Conclusion: Hume and Rousseau or two different Spirits for the Age**

As can be seen, there were fundamentally no philosophical reasons for these two men to become friends years later, for their understanding of the spirit of the age was completely divergent. Hume believed in a necessary link between material progress and either moral or intellectual development, whereas Rousseau could only see the negative side of both reason and material progress. There was, in sum, no middle term between them.

But leaving them aside, since they are gone for quite some time, one can safely affirm that these issues have not lost their relevance, for they remain as valid for us as they were for them. Indeed, as a Rousseau scholar has most correctly argued regarding the 'first discourse',

[l]e mouvement accéléré de l'histoire, les transformations survenues depuis deux siècles, depuis quelques années surtout, donnent à une question posée autrefois un aspect démodé, légèrement ridicule. Affaire de vocabulaire, peut-être. Il suffit de a traduire en d'autres mots pour se rendre compte qu'indépendante des circonstances, elle se rattacha à un fond d'inquiétude quasi permanente. A sciences, arts et mœurs [...] substituons culture et moralité, société et liberté, sociabilité et originalité, science technique et sagesse [...] L'homme n'a pas fini de dresser la liste de ces couples de mots (qui recouvrent des réalités), qui se contrarient mutuellement, et de chercher à faire tenir dans une coexistence sans heurts, mieux: à unir dans une harmonie heureuse, des activités qui sont autant d'exigences de la nature [...] (Bouchardy, 1964, p. XLI).

Thus, after a not very difficult operation of 'translation', such questions posed by Hume and Rousseau gain substance once one understands that they do nothing but regard the very culture, understood in its broadest sense, of modernity: Hume pointing to a scientific-technological model of civilization based on capital-

ist virtues, and Rousseau pointing the opposite way, towards antiquity – even though he himself would make it clear that it was not a matter of resurrecting some ancient form or model of government, but rather that it was a matter of “[...] ranimer l’amour de la vertu dans les cœurs des Citoyens [...]” (Rousseau, 1964, p. 26) within contemporaneity – and its *esprit de citoyenneté*, that is, an ethos based on self-denial and fraternity. In other words, Hume and Rousseau proposed two different alternatives which still remain valid for us: either *activity, industriousness, refinement, superfluity* and (life in the) *cities* (Hume), or *repose, moderation, simplicity, citizenship* and *nature* (Rousseau). It is more than clear that the ‘Humean’ model, reiterated in the writings of his personal friend Adam Smith (1723-1790), has gained the upper hand throughout the greatest part of the world, bringing with it both wealth and misery, progress as well as destruction, while the ‘Rousseauian’ one, if not put in practice the way he intended it to be put – which can also apply to Hume, although his model seems to me to be pretty much the one we have out there, known as ‘technical-liberal democracy’ (see, for instance, Ortega y Gasset, 2008, p. 183) –, has at least some resemblance to what came to be known as socialist or communist regimes as the 20<sup>th</sup> century has come to know them, with their emphasis on politics and citizenship *without* freedom. But leaving aside the more political aspects of such a dispute, I just want to highlight the ethos each system or model – and here I’m thinking about Hume and Rousseau – implies: one proposing activity and acceleration, or, in a word, *hubris*, and the other proposing simplicity and moderation, or also, in one word, what the Greeks used to call *metrion* (see Mattéi, 2009, *passim*).

Once again, though things are never that ‘unmixed’ in the human world, such a confrontation can help one to think about the ways the world and its inhabitants have come to be. In other words, it can serve as a means of orientation within ‘high-’ or ‘post-modernity’ (or however else one might call it), and a most helpful means at that. For the truth is that, maybe more than ever, we, each one of us, have got to think about what we are doing not only with the planet we inhabit, but also with ourselves. It is more than clear that ‘perpetual occupation’ and its inherent ‘fermentation’, such as Hume envisaged it some 260 years ago, is not really either the ‘healthiest’ or the ‘most sane’ way to go, and in that sense Rousseau could be used as an antidote. But neither is ‘ancient citizenship’ and so many other values proposed by Rousseau also long ago *the* (only) way to go. We, therefore, located at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are fortunate in that we may be able to combine them. But for that to happen we must first of all be able to hear them, to heed to them, and then stop to think about the things they said such a long time ago, which, is only a ‘yesterday’ in terms of human history. We are fortunate in that we have such great thinkers as Hume and Rousseau discussing and therefore enlightening the ways modernity should go some 260 years ago, and unfortunate regarding the way it has gone. But I still believe, however unrealistically that may work in practice, that each one of us can and ought to understand the alternatives placed before of us, and these have not substantially changed since Hume and Rousseau discussed, each one in his own context, the question concerning the rise and progress of the arts and sciences.

## References

- ARISTOTLE. 2008. The Politics. In: ARISTOTLE, *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 11-207.
- BOUCHARDY, F. 1964. Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts [Introduction]. In: J.-J. ROUSSEAU; B. GAGNEBIN; M. RAYMOND (dirs.), *Œuvres Complètes III*. Paris, Gallimard, p. xxvii-xli. (Coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade).

- HERDER, J.G. 1991. *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität*. Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1192 p.
- HUME, D. 2006a. Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences. In: D. HUME; K. HAAKONSSSEN (ed.), *Political Essays*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 58-77.
- HUME, D. 2006b. Of Commerce. In: D. HUME; K. HAAKONSSSEN (ed.), *Political Essays*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 93-104.
- HUME, D. 2006c. Of Refinement in the Arts. In: D. HUME; K. HAAKONSSSEN (ed.), *Political Essays*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 105-114.
- HUME, D. 2006d. Of the Origin of Government. In: D. HUME; K. HAAKONSSSEN (ed.), *Political Essays*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 20-23.
- LOCKE, J. 2005. Second Treatise. In: J. LOCKE; P. LASLETT (ed.), *Two Treatises of Government*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 265-428.
- MATTÉI, J-F. 2009. *Le sens de la démesure*. Cabris, Éditions Sulliver, 202 p.
- ORTEGA Y GASSET, J. 2008. *La rebelión de las masas*. Madrid, Editorial Tecnos, 443 p.
- PORTER, D. 1995. *Rousseau's Legacy: Emergence and Eclipse of the Writer in France*. New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 306 p.
- ROUSSEAU, J.-J. 1964. Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts. In: J.-J. ROUSSEAU; B. GAGNEBIN; M. RAYMOND (dirs.), *Œuvres Complètes III*. Paris, Gallimard, p. 3-30. (Coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade).
- SKINNER, A.S. 2009. Hume's Principles of Political Economy. In: D.F. NORTON; J. TAYLOR (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 381-413.
- ZARETSKY, R.; SCOTT, J. T. 2009. *The Philosophers' Quarrel: Rousseau, Hume and the Limits of Human Understanding*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 264 p.

Submitted on July 31, 2012  
Accepted on December 9, 2013