

Gilles Deleuze, "Artifice and Society in Hume's Works", RTF, 23 May 1956

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Hume is one of the most renowned philosophers of the eighteenth century. Philosophical tradition has preserved essentially two aspects of his work: on the one hand, the theory of the association of ideas—in which Hume demonstrates how one idea or sensation evokes another—and on the other hand, his famous analysis of causality. However, if one considers the entirety of his work and places it within the general context of the eighteenth century, it becomes evident that its scope is far broader—and, above all, of a different nature.

First, the very titles of his works— *A Treatise of Human Nature*, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, *Essays, Moral and Political [and Literary]*, and finally, works on the history of England as well as works on political economy (1:00), of which Hume must be considered one of the founders—demonstrate that his constant preoccupation does not lie within the perspective of knowledge. What matters most to him is neither the analysis of the association of ideas, nor even the analysis of causality. What matters most to him is undoubtedly history, law, institutions, and legislation, that is, the entire domain of human practice within society.

In modern philosophy, it has often happened that associationism—the theory of association—has been singled out as a victim and a favorite target. Yet this has invariably been done on the condition that the theory itself be mutilated. In the spirit of Hume and his entire body of work, the association of ideas constitutes the doctrine of knowledge; however, it remains merely a subordinate theme, one that finds its true significance only within history, law, legislation, and human practice. In this respect, Hume belongs squarely to the eighteenth century; for, according to him, human essence [2:00] does not reside in knowledge. Indeed, one of the primary points of rupture between Hume and the classical metaphysics of the seventeenth century lies precisely here: that human essence is no longer conceived—nor situated—within the dimension of knowledge itself, that is, within a theoretical dimension. And undoubtedly, there is a second position, closely linked to the first, that distinguishes Hume from classical metaphysics: namely, that for Hume, the essence of the human mind does not reside in specific ideas—whether these be deemed more important than others, or of a different nature than others—such as the idea of God, the idea of the Self, or the idea of the World. The essence of the human mind lies not in the content of ideas, whatever those ideas may be, but resides rather in an entirely different dimension, one that remains to be determined.

If we consider in this regard Hume's greatest work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, its subtitle [3:00] reads: *Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. So, what is clear from the outset is that if, for Hume, humans are the very object of a science, it is insofar as a human has a nature, insofar as a human nature exists. The idea of a

human nature grounds the possibility of a human science. And what must be called human nature is that which is invariable, constant, and uniform in humans, that which obeys laws.

But what is it that obeys laws? The human mind presents itself as a veritable *flow*, as a collection of sensations, images, impressions, and ideas, each of which someone might identify as his or her own experience. Nothing within this entire ensemble strikes me as uniform or constant; even when the very same word is uttered, neither I nor anyone else ever attaches exactly the same idea to it. Constancy, therefore, is to be found neither in the ideas I hold nor in the sensations I feel. Constancy, Hume tells us, lies solely in the manner in which one sensation or idea evokes another, in the way it triggers the emergence of a subsequent idea within the mind. One idea, Hume explains, gives rise to another, whether through resemblance, contiguity, or causality. This is what remains constant within the mind. This constitutes the aspect of human nature. As for the particular character of an idea, or its particular content, this is variable; it belongs to the realm of pure fancy. On this point, we find Hume's principal break with classical metaphysics. The constancy of human nature resides solely in the relations between ideas, and not in the internal character of any specific type of idea. Indeed, the only constant elements are these relations, and they are what define human nature.

In doing so, Hume laid the foundations of a theory of relations in an extremely profound manner [5:00], one that still presides over the development of modern logic. Relations are external to their terms—the terms between which they are established. The ideas they connect do not explain the relations themselves. In other words, the question Hume posed was this: How does the mind become a human nature, that is, how does a collection of impressions and ideas become an organized system? The answer was: this occurs insofar as principles—specifically, principles of human nature—operate within the mind, establishing connections and relations between ideas—connections and relations that do not depend upon the ideas themselves. In short, while relations must be grounded, still they cannot be grounded in their terms. They call for other principles and, by that very fact, constitute a nature.

If we select an example, we encounter Hume's theory of knowledge. Hume posits—and thereby overturns the preceding tradition (6:00)—that knowledge must be conceived in terms of action. To know is, essentially, to go beyond; it is going beyond what is given, that is, something more than what is given; it's to affirm more than one actually knows. Hume tells us: [to know] is to *believe*. If I say, "The sun will rise tomorrow," what is given to me consists solely of me having seen the sun rise thousands of times. But I am saying more in the true proposition "The sun will rise tomorrow", and, by definition, "tomorrow" is precisely that about which I have no experience; it is that which has not yet been given. And Hume never calls into question my right to formulate such a judgment—that the sun will rise tomorrow. He simply asks upon what principle such a judgment is grounded, given that the principle underlying any judgment concerning always, the necessary, or tomorrow cannot possibly derive from what is "given," since, on the contrary, it serves as the very condition for any affirmation regarding the given.

The problem of knowledge thus presented itself to Hume in the following form: what are the principles that ground the given's movement beyond? Knowledge thereby becomes a fact of human nature. The principles of knowledge are genuine tendencies; relations are tendencies of human nature that cannot be explained, nor do they find their basis in the ideas they connect. This is how knowledge was immediately framed in practice. Insofar as knowing entailed going beyond the given, knowledge's secret lay simultaneously in the principles of practice.

However, it is not these very principles of association—principles of knowledge—that fully account for or provide us with the final word on human nature. Recognizing that knowledge is a practice introduces us to a different domain. Hume would be one of the first philosophers to formulate a theory of probability and of the calculus of probabilities. Yet, the precise outcome of such a theory is to subordinate knowledge to something other than itself, and to place the causal relation—the cause-and-effect relation—at the service of a more complex, more definitive relation: the means-and-end relation. For, as Hume tells us, developing a truly subtle idea, the relations constituting knowledge itself remain inherently ambiguous because they can be read in both directions, because they are reversible. To say that one thing resembles another implies that the latter resembles the former.

Thus, relations do not, in and of themselves, possess their own meaning or direction. To endow relations with meaning, what's required is an irreversibility essential to action. Principles of human nature other than the pure principles of association are needed. These other principles are the pleasure principle—according to which humans seek their own pleasure—and the utility principle—according to which humans marshal means in the course of and for the sake of this pursuit. And it's on this new plane—once knowledge's subordination to it has been established—that human nature will reveal its true essence or secret. Knowledge will not be uncovered directly through an analysis of the cause-and-effect relationship, but rather through an analysis of the means-and-end relationship. What, precisely, is at stake in this means-and-end relationship? According to Hume, reason is a practical faculty in the sense that it is essentially the establishment of means, a faculty for marshalling means. But what practical problem does it have to solve?

Regarding human nature—insofar as it is subject to the pleasure principle or seeks pleasure—Hume explains that it does not manifest itself as egoism. In opposition to some of his contemporaries, Hume places great emphasis on the idea that humans are not essentially egoistic, but rather, are more fundamentally partial. Humans are not egoistic—that is, are not indifferent toward their fellow human beings—but possess a natural trope of sympathy. However, this natural sympathy is, at the same time, a naturally limited sympathy. Humans naturally sympathize with those close to them, one's kin and one's peers. And in relation to these close associates, kin, and peers, we once again encounter the operation of the three principles of association: resemblance, contiguity, and causality. As a result, human nature simultaneously posits a kind of moral imperative with sympathy, a kind of natural end. Yet, this [sympathy] is

incapable of satisfying this natural end and this imperative. Indeed, sympathy presents itself as an end since it is something distinct from mere egoism, since [sympathy] presents a kind of going beyond. At the same time, this end is incapable of fulfilling sympathy, because the sympathies of one individual contradict and thwart the sympathies of another. Consequently, the moral problem becomes a matter concerning the relations between nature and artifice.

The moral problem consists in the task of organizing, of artificially constructing, an objective world that enables natural sympathies to go beyond their own partialities. The moral problem lies in extending sympathy, in constructing an artificial world such that sympathy overcomes its own inherent partiality by establishing a world of legislation. This idea is at once common to many eighteenth-century authors and, simultaneously, marked by the originality of Hume. [The idea] is common to many eighteenth-century authors because, starting with that era, political philosophers tended to place less reliance on—or to make fewer appeals for—an internal transformation of humans; instead, they looked toward the establishment of a coherent world, the creation of an external order through which humans might transcend their own limitations. That is, this is less a matter of making humans less wicked or less violent, and rather of establishing a world in which such wickedness and violence would no longer have the opportunity or the possibility to manifest themselves. Such a world is thus defined as the artifice of the legislator, and what marks this concept as quintessentially eighteenth-century is that this era—even as it laid the foundations for political economy—placed its trust in pure legislation and the constitutional enterprise in establishing this objective world.

Hume's originality within this eighteenth-century intellectual context—which placed the figure of the legislator in the highest esteem—lies, however, in his opposition to many of his contemporaries who viewed the operation of legislation as being founded upon the *contract*. Hume takes strong exception to all those legal scholars and philosophers who perceive in the contract the true origin and the veritable baptismal act of society. In his view, framing the social problem and the problem of constructing an artificial world in contractual terms amounts to grasping only a negative aspect of society. Indeed, the contract is, above all, a form of limitation; it functions and presents itself as a kind of negation of egoism. The movement beyond achieved within society manifests itself here as the limitation of egoism itself. However, according to Hume, since the danger lies not in a supposed human egoism but in a deeper partiality, the task is no longer to curb forms of egoism; rather, it is to extend sympathies in such a way that they go beyond their inherent partiality. Consequently, for Hume, society's essence resides not in the contract but—strictly speaking—in the institution: that is, in a system of devised positive means that Hume terms the "general rule."

So, we see that the concept of human nature in Hume's work presents itself as possessing a threefold depth: on the one hand, a set or network of relations; on the other, a system of passions and sympathies; and finally, an entire domain of history and law, a domain defined as artificial. Yet, as Hume tells us, artifice itself remains a part of nature. Artifice consists in forging

systems of means designed to satisfy the ends of nature itself. These three strata—the network of relations, the system of passions, and the entire sphere of history and law—define, within Hume’s works, what we would today term a genuine psychosociology, something that renders Hume modern, presenting itself as a multi-layered psychosociology, with layers that collectively define the full depth of human nature.