

## II. HUMAN NATURE AND SOCIETY IN HUME

### INTRODUCTION

Against the background outlined in Part I, Hume's own thought will now be examined. This examination will be selective since it will focus on what Hume understands by human nature and how this understanding relates to his accounts of the make-up of society and of the differences that exist between societies. Within this focus special attention will be paid to the role that habit or custom plays in his thought; it provides a 'bridge' between his epistemology and his social philosophy and this application by Hume of his philosophical reasoning to society constitutes one of the dominant motifs in his endeavour to establish a 'science of man'.

What character Hume attributes to human nature – that above all it is constant and uniform – and what he holds to be constitutive of it, together with a sketch of the reasons why Hume should have upheld the view that he did, is discussed in Chapter 4. The consequences of his maintenance of this view is then considered in terms of what can be broadly called his conception of social cohesiveness, including as it does, *inter alia*, both his theory of justice and sympathy (Chapter 5). The extent to which Hume sees societies differing whilst abjuring relativism in any significant sense is discussed in Chapter 6. A concluding Chapter will draw together and develop the broad theme of the preceding Chapters by analysing in some detail particular passages to demonstrate that Hume does not subscribe to a contextualist theory of human nature.

Finally a stylistic point; due to the specificity of the focus the argument has an interwoven character. This requires the introduction of issues at one point and their postponement until they can be considered at length in their own right.

The following abbreviations are inserted in parentheses in the text throughout this Part.

- T *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739/40), ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge.  
 U *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), ed. C.W. Hendel.  
 A *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), in U.  
 M *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), ed. C.W. Hendel.  
 P *A Dissertation on the Passions* (1757), in *Works*, Vol. IV (1854).  
 N *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), in *Hume on Religion*, ed. R. Wollheim.  
 D *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (publ. 1779), in Wollheim.  
 H *The History of Great Britain: The Reigns of James I & Charles I* (1754), ed. D. Forbes.  
 HE *The History of England from the invasion of Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, in one volume (1824).  
 L *Letters*, 2 Volumes, ed. J.Y.T. Greig.  
 E *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* Individual Essays are abbreviated as follows:  
 BGMR *Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic* (1741).  
 LP *Of the Liberty of the Press* (1741).  
 PS *That Politics might be reduced to a Science* (1741).  
 FPG *Of the First Principles of Government* (1741).  
 SH *Of the Study of History* (1741).  
 IP *Of the Independency of Parliament* (1741).  
 PG *Of Parties in General* (1741).  
 PGB *Of the Parties of Great Britain* (1741).  
 SE *Of Superstition and Enthusiasm* (1741).  
 DMHN *Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature* (1741).  
 CL *Of Civil Liberty* (1741 – original title, *Of Liberty and Despotism*).  
 PD *Of Polygamy and Divorces* (1742).  
 Sc *The Sceptic* (1742).  
 El *Of Eloquence* (1742).  
 RPAS *Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences* (1742).  
 NC *Of National Characters* (1748).  
 OC *Of the Original Contract* (1748).  
 PAN *Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations* (1752).  
 RC *Of Some Remarkable Customs* (1752).  
 BP *Of the Balance of Power* (1752).  
 IPC *Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth* (1752).  
 PrS *Of the Protestant Succession* (1752).  
 Int *Of Interest* (1752).  
 Mon *Of Money* (1752).  
 RA *Of Refinement in Arts* (1752 – original title, *Of Luxury*).  
 Com *Of Commerce* (1752).  
 ST *Of the Standard of Taste* (1757).  
 OG *Of the Origin of Government* (1774 – published 1777).  
 Sui *Of Suicide* (publ. 1777).  
 MOL *My Own Life* (publ. 1777).