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EXPOSING THE CHILDREN:
MONTESQUIEU, HUME AND SOMETHING
«PRETTY UNUSUAL»*

Abstract. To expose or to kill the children is an ancient Greek and a modern Chinese practice, which is caused by poverty and the terror of too numerous a family. Is it more barbarous than the modern French custom of closing children into convents? Is it more unfavourable to the population? In the name of an «odd connexion of causes» and the «force of natural affection», Hume argues that the practice of the ancient Greeks is «almost as innocent and more effectual» than that of the French, and «might rather render those times more populous». A short account of the interpretations of the practice in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, and a survey of Hume's sources in *A Dialogue* and *Of the Populousness of Antient Nations*, show the singularity of Hume's view, which was, as he politely puts it, «not altogether in opposition» to Montesquieu.

Keywords. Infanticide, Eighteenth-Century Philosophy, Relativism, Hume, Montesquieu.

«Esaminare un testo, un documento, una traccia che viene da lontano significa cogliere le numerose mediazioni che ne hanno progressivamente segnato la natura, arricchito il contenuto, e spesso creato anche proficue deformazioni/fraintendimenti».

(P. ZANARDI, *Alcune buone ragioni per insegnare la storia della filosofia*, 2015)

I. Prologue (*Rousseau's children*).

«Celui qui ne peut remplir les devoirs de pere, n'a point droit de le devenir», Rousseau proclaims in his treatise *De l'Education*: «Il n'y a ni pauvreté, ni travaux, ni respect humain qui le dispensent de nourrir ses enfans, & de les élever lui-même»¹. In the *Confessions* Rousseau will acknowledge:

Le parti que j'avois pris à l'égard de mes enfans, quelque bien raisonné qu'il m'eut paru, ne m'avoit pas laissé le cœur tranquille. En méditant mon traité de l'éducation je sentis que j'avois négligé des devoirs dont rien ne pouvoit me dispenser. Le remords enfin devint si vif, qu'il m'arracha presque l'aveu public de ma faute au commencement de l'Emile, & le trait même est si clair, qu'après un tel passage il est surprenant qu'on ait eu le courage de me la reprocher².

Formerly he had declared:

Mon troisieme enfant fut donc mis aux Enfans-trouvés, ainsi que les premiers, et il en fut de même des deux suivans; car j'en ai eu cinq en tout. Cet arrangement me parut si bon, si sensé, si légitime, que si je ne m'en vantai pas ouvertement, ce fut uniquement par égard pour la mere [...]. En un mot, je ne mis aucun mystere à ma conduite [...] parce qu'en effet je n'y voyois aucun mal. Tout pesé, je choisis pour mes en-

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¹ J.J. ROUSSEAU, *Emile, ou de l'Education* I, Amsterdam, J. Néaulme, 1762, vol. I, p. 46.

² ROUSSEAU, *Les Confessions* XII, in *Seconde Partie des Confessions de J.J. Rousseau*, Genève, 1789, vol. IV, pp. 355-6.

fans le mieux, ou ce que je crus l'être. J'aurois voulu, je voudrois encore avoir été élevé et nourri comme ils l'ont été³.

And in the *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* he adds:

J'avois mis mes enfans aux enfans trouvés. C'en étoit assez pour m'avoir travesti en pere dénaturé. [...] Je comprends que le reproche d'avoir mis mes enfans aux enfans trouvés a facilement dégénéré, avec un peu de tournure, en celui d'être un pere dénaturé & de haïr les enfans. Cependant il est sûr que c'est la crainte d'une destinée pour eux mille fois pire, & presque inévitable par toute autre voie, qui m'a le plus déterminé dans cette démarche. [...] je savois que l'éducation pour eux la moins périlleuse étoit celle des enfans trouvés; & je les y mis. Je le ferois encore, avec bien moins de doute aussi, si la chose étoit à faire⁴.

Rousseau's treatise *de l'Éducation*, Hume remarks, «as it possesses much of the merit, seems also exposed to the faults of his other performances»: the author «chooses his topics less from persuasion, than from the pleasure of showing his invention, and surprizing the reader by his paradoxes»⁵. Hume had no children, and thought that a wife was «none of the indispensable requisites of life»⁶.

II. *The memoranda, the dialogue and the essay.*

«It is Murder, – *The Institutes of the Law of Scotland* proclaim in 1730 – [...] even to expose⁷ a helpless Infant, and leave it in a Desert

³ ROUSSEAU, *Les Confessions* VIII, in *Seconde Partie des Confessions*, cit., vol. III, pp. 164-5.

⁴ ROUSSEAU, *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* IX, in *Confessions de J.J. Rousseau, Suivies de Des Rêveries Du Promeneur Solitaire*, Genève, 1782, vol. II, pp. 263-5.

⁵ D. HUME to Madame de Boufflers, 22 January 1763, *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols., ed. by J.Y.T. Greig, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1932, vol. I, p. 373.

⁶ HUME to J. Clephane, 5 January 1753, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 170.

⁷ According to John Boswell, the Greek *ekthesis*, or *apothesis*, and the Latin *expositio* mean “exposition” or “putting out”, with no associated idea of risk, danger, injury and harm. Exposing children is placing them outside the home, usually in a public place, where they would be noticed. “Exposing” means abandonment. The death of the exposed or abandoned children is but a (probable) consequence, especially in the case of the newborn children, where exposing is very close to infanticide, even though it can also be an alternative to it (J. BOSWELL, *The Kindness of Strangers. The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Chicago, The Univ. of

or unfrequented Place, where it dies for Hunger»⁸. «Perhaps – Hume cautiously remarks – the Custom of allowing Parents to murder their Infant Children, tho barbarous, tends to render a State more populous, as in China. Many marry by that Inducement; & such is the force of natural Affection, that none make Use of the Privilege but in extreme Necessity»⁹. «A ninth of the Children born in Paris – he adds – sent to the *Enfans Trouvés*»¹⁰. These are the *Early Memoranda*. Infanticide (in China) and reclusion (in France): what's that for about?

A *Dialogue*, which is appended to the moral *Enquiry* as an uncommon final essay rather than a mere appendix, is printed in July 1751¹¹. At the end of December 1750, with precise instructions for its reading (it has a «Reference» to the *Enquiry* and is not «complete» in itself), Hume submits it to Elliot's «Criticism & Examination»: «I have scarcely wrote any thing more whimsical, or whose Merit I am more diffident of»¹², Hume confesses. And Elliot declares his complete «satisfaction»: «why can't you always write in this manner?»¹³. *Of the Populousness of the antient Nations*¹⁴ is printed

Chicago Pr., 1988, pp. 24-26, 43-44). For Hume's meaning, vd. *infra*, notes 53, 85, 97, 165.

⁸ W. FORBES, *The Institutes of the Law of Scotland*, 2 vols., Glasgow, J. Mosman, 1730, vol. II, p. 99; vd. *ivi*, p. 108.

⁹ Edinburgh, NLS MS 23159, item 14, f. 9; vd. E.C. MOSSNER, *Hume's «Early Memoranda», 1729-1740: The Complete Text III 1*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», 9.4, 1948, p. 503. Hume does not indicate any source for the note, which is entirely crossed out.

¹⁰ Edinburgh, NLS MS 23159, item 14, f. 14; vd. MOSSNER, *Hume's «Early Memoranda» III 61*, *cit.*, p. 506. Again, Hume does not indicate any source for the note.

¹¹ D.T. BEAUCHAMP, «Introduction» to D. HUME, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. by T. Beauchamp, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1988, pp. XXIV, XLIV.

¹² HUME to G. Elliot, 10 February 1751, *Letters*, *cit.*, vol. I, p. 145.

¹³ G. ELLIOT to D. Hume, February 1751, in J.H. BURTON, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, 2 vols., Edinburgh, W. Tait, 1846, vol. I, pp. 323-4.

¹⁴ This, Hume says, is the «most curious and important of all questions of erudition» (D. HUME, *Of the Populousness of antient Nations*, in *Political Discourses*, Edinburgh, R. Fleming for A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1752, p. 155 n.). After the publication of Robert Wallace's *Dissertation*, Hume acknowledges that Wallace «has detected many mistakes both in his authorities and reasonings» and that «the Essay has been rendered less imperfect than formerly» (D. HUME, *Of the Populousness of antient Nations*, in *Essays and Treatises on Sev-*

at the end of 1751 and published in January 1752. In April 1750 Hume announces it to Clephane¹⁵. Again, in February 1751, while he acknowledges his «Greek Doubts» concerning some topics of the *Dialogue*, Hume discusses the essay with Elliot: «I have amus'd myself lately with an Essay [...] on the Populousness of Antiquity, which led me into many Disquisitions concerning both the public & domestic Life of the Antients»¹⁶. «Having read over – Hume goes on with a moderate exaggeration – almost all the Classics, since I form'd that Plan, I have extracted what serv'd most to my Purpose»¹⁷. What comes first, the essay *Of the Populousness or A Dialogue*, which is printed five months before it¹⁸?

eral Subjects, 4 vols., Edinburgh, A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1753², vol. IV, p. 135 n.).

¹⁵ «The last thing I took my hand from was a very learned, elaborate discourse, concerning the populousness of antiquity; not altogether in opposition to *Vossius* and *Montesquieu*, who exaggerate that affair infinitely; but, starting some doubts, and scruples, and difficulties, sufficient to make us suspend our judgment on that head» (HUME to J. Clephane, 18 April 1750, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 139).

¹⁶ HUME to G. Elliot, 18 February 1751, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 152. At the time of this letter the *Dialogue* seems to be accomplished, since Hume writes: «Tho' this Question be foreign to my Subject in the Dialogue, I know not but *I had better* add a Note containing these Arguments» (*ibidem*; italics mine). Hume will never add this note.

¹⁷ HUME to G. Elliot, 18 February 1751, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 152 (italics mine).

¹⁸ *A Dialogue* is printed in July and published at the end of 1751 (BEAUCHAMP, «Introduction», cit., pp. XXIV, XLIV), *Of the Populousness* is printed at the end of 1751 and published in January 1752 (*Caledonian Mercury*, 13 January 1752). *A Dialogue* was probably ready at the end of December 1750 (HUME to G. Elliot, 10 February 1751, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 145); *Of the Populousness* could have been partly ready in April 1750 (HUME to J. Clephane, 18 April 1750, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 139) and completely ready in September 1751 (HUME to R. Wallace, 29 September 1751, in *New Letters of David Hume*, ed. by R. Klibansky and E.C. Mossner, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1954, p. 30). Apparently, in March 1751 Hume is still working on the essay on population (HUME to Mrs. Dysart of Eccles, 19 March 1751, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 159; M.A. BOX, M. SILVERTHORNE, *The «most curious & important of all questions of erudition»: Hume's assessment of the populousness of ancient nations*, in *David Hume. Historical thinker, historical writer*, ed. by M.G. Spencer, Univ. Park, The Pennsylvania State Univ. Pr., 2013, p. 251 n. 8), and in September he announces to Wallace the footnote on the origin of the essay (HUME to R. Wallace, 22 September 1751, *New Letters*, cit., p. 29: vd. HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, p. 155 n.). After the publication of Wallace's *Dissertation*, Hume changes the footnote, which was to be

It has been asserted that Hume properly condemns modern convents and upbraids classical authors for not speaking of infanticide with the horror it deserves¹⁹. What does Hume exactly say about it?

III. *The dialogue: exposing and morals.*

The sceptical²⁰ «Rambler» Palamedes tells the narrator, his antagonist friend, something about «an extremely civiliz'd, intelligent People»²¹. Their ways of thinking, he says, are «extraordinary» and «diametrically opposite» to ours, particularly with regard to morals and good-manners²². Palamedes is arguing like Cornelius Nepos in the

deleted in 1770 (HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1753², cit., p. 135 n.; vd. BOX, SILVERTHORNE, *The «most curious & important of all questions of erudition»*, cit., pp. 227, 250 n. 4, 251 n. 9).

¹⁹ C.J. BERRY, *David Hume*, New York – London, Bloomsbury, 2009, p. 71.

²⁰ Hume calls Palamedes «the Sceptic in the Dialogue» (HUME to J. Balfour, 15 March 1753, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 173) in a not so private letter (Hume is said to have left it with the publisher) to James Balfour, who had ascribed Palamedes's view to Hume ([J. BALFOUR], *A Delineation of the Nature and Obligation of Morality*, Edinburgh, Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, 1753, p. 127). In the *Dialogue* Palamedes is never called a sceptic: he is «as great a Rambler in his Principles as in his Person [...] who has run over, by Study and Travel, almost every Region of the intellectual and material World» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, in *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, London, A. Millar, 1751, p. 223). Palamedes intends «to represent the Uncertainty of all these Judgments concerning Characters» (ivi, p. 237), and «to convince [the antagonist], that Fashion, Vogue, Custom, and Law were the chief Foundation of all moral Determinations» (ivi, p. 237). He denies a «universal Standard of Morals», or a «Rule» for the «many different, nay contrary Sentiments of Mankind», with regard to common (ivi, p. 238) and artificial (ivi, p. 253) lives and manners. In the *Enquiry* the sceptics are those who «refuse [...] the Reality of moral Distinctions» (HUME, *An Enquiry*, cit., p. 2; vd. ivi, p. 130), maintain that *all* moral distinctions arise from «Education», and were at first invented, and afterwards encouraged, by the «Arts of Politicians» (ivi, pp. 76-7). Hume officially declares that «nothing can be more superficial than this Paradox of the Sceptics» (ivi, p. 76), that in morals we can «easily get rid» of their «Cavils» (ivi, p. 77), «wanton Sallies and sportive Assaults» (ivi, p. 78).

²¹ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 223; vd. E. MAZZA, «Cannibals in *A Dialogue* (in search of a standard for morals)», in *«Instruction and Amusement»: le ragioni dell'Illuminismo britannico*, a c. di E. Mazza, E. Ronchetti, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2005, pp. 45-66.

²² HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., pp. 223, 228.

preface to his *Vitæ*²³, which is quoted by Montesquieu²⁴. Their man of merit could «put to death an innocent Person, the most nearly

²³ Nepos looks at the Greeks from the Roman point of view, Hume looks at the ancient Greeks (and Romans) from a modern French (and British) point of view. There are those who, «not acquainted with Greek literature», are convinced that «there is nothing right but what is convenient with their manners», and those who acknowledge that «the same things are not considered by everyone as honourable and disgraceful» and «everything is judged by the usages of the forefathers» (CORNELIUS NEPOS, «Auctoris Præfatio» to *Cornelii Nepotis Vitæ Excellentium Imperatorum*, Edinburgh, T.W. and T. Ruddiman, 1744, pp. 1-2). Only the former will wonder that the Roman Nepos «displays the virtues of the Greeks following their manners» and taking into consideration the usage, which is followed among them and which, «according to our manners», is deemed «abominable» (*ibidem*). The Greeks deem honourable many things that – among the Romans – are deemed «partly infamous, partly mean, and far from being honourable»; on the contrary, the Greeks deem «disgraceful» many things, which – according to the Roman manners – are deemed «decent» (ivi, p. 3). With regard to Epaminondas's life, Nepos repeats his admonishment: the readers should not «refer foreign manners to their own», nor «think that those things, which are frivolous for them, to have been judged in the same way with others» (ivi XV I, p. 116). Hume's Fourlians or ancients also recall Chardin's barbarous and inhuman Mingrelians: «L'assassinat, le meurtre, le mensonge, c'est ce qu'ils appellent les belles actions. Le concubinage, l'adultère, la bigamie, l'inceste, & semblables vices sont des vertus en Mingrelie» (J. CHARDIN, *Journal du Voyage ... en Perse & aux Indes Orientales* I, Londres, M. Pitt, 1686, p. 78); Palamedes echoes: «I think I have fairly made it appear, that an *Athenian* Man of Merit might be such a one as with us would pass for incestuous, a Parricide, an Assassin, an ungrateful, perjurd Traitor, and something else too abominable to be nam'd; not to mention his Rusticity and Ill-manners» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 231; vd. F. HUTCHESON, *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* IV 2, in *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises*, ed. by W. Leidhold, Indianapolis, Liberty, 2004, p. 137); and the narrator observes: «such barbarous and savage Manners [...] exceed all we ever read of, amongst the *Mingrelians* and *Topinamboues*» (ivi, p. 229). The same passages from Chardin are reported by Bayle (P. BAYLE, *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres*, Amsterdam, H. Desbordes, 1686, art. VII, pp. 1068-9). According to Bayle, exposition is «sans doute l'excès le plus effroiable de la corruption» (*ibidem*).

²⁴ Montesquieu informs us: «Il y avoit à Athènes une Loi dont je ne sçache pas que personne ait connu l'esprit. Il étoit permis d'épouser sa sœur consanguine, & non pas sa sœur utérine»; then he remarks: «*Cornelius-Nepos in præfat*. Cet usage étoit des premiers tems. Aussi Abraham, dit-il, de Sara, elle est ma Sœur, fille de mon pere & non pas de ma mere. Les mêmes raisons avoient fait établir une même Loi chez différens Peuple» (MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des Loix* V 5, 2 vols., Geneve, Barillot, 1748, vol. I, p. 70 and n.). In the *Dialogue* Palamedes remarks that Alcheic's wife «by-the-by happen'd also to

connected with him, and whom he was oblig'd to protect and defend by all the Ties of Nature and Humanity», and he could justify himself by saying that «he was not then so much at his Ease» and «he has acted, in that Particular, by the Advice of all his Friends»²⁵.

«Such barbarous and savage Manners – the narrator replies – are not only incompatible with a civiliz'd, intelligent People [...]; but are scarce compatible with human Nature. They exceed all we ever read of, amongst the *Mingrelians* and *Topinamboues*»²⁶. There are echoes of Locke's *Essay* in this comparison²⁷. Palamedes enjoys the

be his Sister» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 225), therefore he is «such a one as with us would pass for Incestuous» (ivi, p. 231), and the «Greek [...] Marriages [...] cannot but strike you immediately» (ivi, p. 230): «The Laws of *Athens* allow'd a Man to marry his Sister by the Father» (ivi, p. 230 n.), says Palamedes appealing to the Athenian laws and probably to Nepos (NEPOS, «Auctoris Præfatio», cit., p. 2; «Cimon» I 2, ivi, p. 42; vd. ARISTOTLE, *Politics* VII 14 10 1335b19, London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1959, pp. 622-3), and replying to Montesquieu. The narrator, in his turn, appeals to the *Enquiry* (HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 239 n.), where the reason of the Greek practice is that they were «so reserv'd» (HUME, *Enquiry*, cit., p. 67-8), and maintains that «the Marriage of Half-brothers and Sisters seems no great Difficulty»: «Love betwixt the nearer Relations is contrary to Reason and public Utility; but the precise Point, where we are to stop, can scarcely be determin'd by natural Reason; and is therefore a very proper Subject of municipal Law or Custom. If the *Athenians* went a little too far on the one Side...» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 239). Did Hume first read Nepos (he never quotes him before the *Political Discourses*) following Montesquieu? In the *History* Hume maintains that «the moral precept, varying with its cause, is susceptible, without any inconvenience, of very different latitude in the several ages and nations of the world» (HUME, *The History of England under the House of Tudor*, London, A. Millar, 1759, vol. I, p. 167); then, recalling the *Enquiry*, he explains incest by the «extreme delicacy» of the Greeks: «in that nation it was lawful for a man to marry, not only his niece, but his half-sister by the father: A liberty unknown to the Romans, and other nations, where a more open intercourse was authorised between the sexes» (*ibidem*). Vd. HUTCHESON, *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* IV 2-3 6, cit., pp. 136-140, 144; B. MANDEVILLE, *A Search into the Nature of Society*, in *Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, 2 vols., ed. by F.B. Kaye, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1924, vol. I, pp. 330-331; L. TURCO, «Introduzione» a F. HUTCHESON, *Saggio sulla natura e condotta delle passioni*, a c. di L. Turco, Bologna, CLUEB, 1997, pp. XLVI-XLIX.

²⁵ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 226.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 230.

²⁷ «It is familiar amongst the *Mengrelians*, a People professing Christianity, to bury their Children alive without scruple. [...] The Vertues, whereby the *Tououpinambos* believed they merited Paradise, were Revenge, and eating

reply. The narrator is «abusing [his] Favourites»²⁸, the Athenians: the Greek pederastic loves, their incestuous marriages, and «the exposing of their Children» should immediately strike the «good [...] scholar»²⁹ (someone «acquainted with Greek literature», would say Nepos)³⁰. Palamedes has «fairly made appear that an *Athenian Man of Merit* might be such a one as with us would pass for» the most vicious man³¹.

The narrator reacts: Palamedes is the only one who seems «to impeach» the morals of the ancients. He has «no Indulgence for the Manners of different Ages»³². We should not «try a *Greek or Roman* by the Common-law of *England*»; we should first «hear him defend himself by his own Maxims; and then pronounce»³³, the narrator adds echoing Montesquieu («Quand j'ai été rappelé à l'Antiquité, j'ai cherché à en prendre l'esprit»)³⁴. All manners may be rendered «odious, if measur'd by a Standard unknown to the Persons»³⁵ (Hume will repeat it in the *History*)³⁶. Palamedes's artifice may be retorted on him. If we inform the ancient Athenians that there is a people, the modern French, where it is «very usual [...] to shut up several of their Children in a perpetual Prison (where every Art of

abundance of their Enemies» (J. LOCKE, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* I 3 9, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1985, p. 71).

²⁸ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 229.

²⁹ Ivi, pp. 230-1.

³⁰ NEPOS, «Auctoris Præfatio», cit., p. 1 (see *supra*, n. 23).

³¹ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 231. On the accusation of incest, infanticide and atheism against the Christians, vd. R. TURNER, *The Calumnies upon the Primitive Christians Accounted for. Or, An Enquiry Into the Grounds, and Causes of the Charge of Incest, Infanticide, Atheism, Onolatry, or Ass-Worship, Sedition, &c. laid against the Christians, in the three first Centuries*, London, M.J. for J. and J. Bonwicke, 1727. The Vicar of St. Peter's reminds us that «the heathens made no scruple to drown, or strangle their infants: to expose them to birds, and beasts of prey: or to suffer them to perish by hunger, and cold» (ivi, p. 81). He also observes that the «devilish custom of sacrificing the human race, was not peculiar to those people who were accounted rude, and barbarous; but it was to be met with amongst those, who had made considerable improvements in all the politer arts» (ivi, p. 62).

³² HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, p. 232.

³³ Ivi, p. 233.

³⁴ MONTESQUIEU, «Preface» to *De l'Esprit des Loix*, vol. I.

³⁵ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, p. 233.

³⁶ See HUME, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I*, Edinburgh, Hamilton, Balfour and Neill, 1754, p. 213.

tormenting them is carefully practis'd) in order that another Child [...] may enjoy their whole Fortune», and that «Nothing [is] so virtuous in their Opinion as this barbarous Partiality»³⁷, the Athenians would probably ask us whether we speak of «a human Society, or of some inferior servile Species»³⁸. Palamedes stops him. He only meant «to represent the Uncertainty of all these Judgments concerning Characters»: «Fashion, Vogue, Custom, and Law are the chief Foundation of all moral Determinations»³⁹. The ancient Athenians (surely) were a «civiliz'd intelligent» people, but their man of merit «might, in this Age, be held in Horror»; the modern French are a «very civiliz'd intelligent» people, but their man of merit «might, with the Athenians, be an Object of the highest Contempt»⁴⁰. Palamedes asks his Lockean questions: when we consider these «wide» differences, «How shall we pretend to fix a Standard for Judgments of this Nature?»⁴¹, «Where is the universal Standard of Morals which you talk of?»⁴².

³⁷ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, p. 235. In 1758 Hume slightly modifies the passage: «to erect jails, where every art of plaguing and tormenting the unhappy prisoners is carefully studied and practised: And in these jails it is usual for a parent voluntarily to shut up several of his children; in order, that...» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, A New Edition, London, A. Millar, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid, A. Donaldson, 1758, p. 482).

³⁸ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 234.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 237. In Hume's «Fashion, Vogue, Custom, and Law» there is an echo of Shaftesbury's «*Interest, Policy, Fashion, Vogue*» (A.A. Cooper, Earl of SHAFTESBURY, *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody* II 4, London, J. Wyat, 1709, p. 109).

⁴⁰ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 237. The national characters of the ancient Greeks and modern French, Palamedes observes, «are suppos'd to be the most similar of any in antient or modern Times» (ivi, p. 237): the French «draw Parallel betwixt themselves and these polite *Greeks*», while the English «flatter themselves that they resemble the *Romans*» (ivi, p. 237). Montesquieu refers the opinion of a probable French «Gentilhomme» (Montesquieu himself?) (MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des Loix* XIX 6, vol. I, p. 485): «Les Athéniens [...] étoient un peuple qui avoit quelque rapport avec le nôtre» (ivi XIX 7, vol. I, p. 486). In the *Philosophical Essays* Hume asks: «Would you know the Sentiments, Inclinations, and Course of Life of the *Greeks* and *Romans*? Study well the Temper and Actions of the *French* and *English*. You cannot be much mistaken in transferring to the former *most* of the Observations you have made with regard to the latter» (HUME, *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, London, A. Millar, 1748, p. 134).

⁴¹ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 238 (with regard to common lives and manners). Locke first maintains: «I cannot see how any *Men*, should ever

The narrator disagrees. We can fix this standard by examining the «first» principles of blame which each nation establishes⁴³. Against Palamedes's fourfold foundation («Fashion, Vogue, Custom, and Law»), he opposes his four sources of moral sentiment: «the useful or the agreeable Qualities; those, which regard Self, or those, which extend to Society»⁴⁴. It's the (Ciceronian) triumph of four⁴⁵. There never was any quality recommended as a virtue but on account of its being «*useful, or agreeable, to a Man himself, or to others*»⁴⁶. All the differences in morals «may be accounted for by the different Views, which People take of these Circumstances»⁴⁷.

Since Palamedes insists on the accidental differences, the narrator accounts for them «from the most universal, establish'd Principles of Morals»⁴⁸. He follows Palamedes's order: the Greek (pederastic) loves, their incestuous marriages, and «the exposing of their Children»⁴⁹. He wants to hear the Greeks defend themselves by their own maxims. «Had you ask'd a Parent at *Athens*, why he be-

transgress those Moral Rules, with Confidence, and Serenity, were they innate, and stamped upon their Minds» (LOCKE, *An Essay* I 3 9, cit., p. 70); then he asks: «Where then are those innate Principles, of Justice, Piety, Gratitude, Equity, Chastity? Or, where is that universal Consent, that assures us there are such inbred Rules?» (ivi I 3 10, p. 72).

⁴² HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 253 (with regard to artificial lives and manners).

⁴³ Ivi, p. 238.

⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. 244-5.

⁴⁵ In the *Dialogue*, four are the sources of moral sentiments (useful and agreeable to the person himself and to others) according to the narrator; four the foundations of moral determinations (fashion, vogue, custom, and law) according to Palamedes. In the *Enquiry*, four are the qualities of personal merit (useful and agreeable to ourselves and to others), four the gentlemen delineating Cleanthes's image, and four his virtues; four the reflections on virtues and talents, and four the appendices in the last edition of the work. Cicero distinguishes four parts or sources (places or kinds) of the *honestum* (CICERO, *De Officiis* V 15, VI 18-19, VII 20, XLIII 152, London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1928, pp. 16, 18, 20, 154): *cognitio, communitas, magnanimitas* and *moderatio* (ivi XLIII 152, p. 154).

⁴⁶ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 242.

⁴⁷ Ivi, pp. 242-3; vd. ivi, p. 245.

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 238.

⁴⁹ Palamedes sums up: «The *Greek Love*, their *Marriages*, and the exposing of their *Children*» (ivi, p. 230); and the narrator follows him: «The *Greek Loves* [...] The *Marriage of Half-brothers* and *Sisters* seems no great *Difficulty* [...] Had you ask'd a Parent at *Athens*, why...» (ivi, pp. 238-9).

reav'd his Child of that Life, which he had so lately given it», he would have replied (against Hutcheson)⁵⁰: «'Tis because I love it; and regard the Poverty it must inherit from me, as a greater Evil than a Death, which it is not capable of dreading, feeling, or resenting»⁵¹. The Athenian parent's reply is openly drawn from Plutarch's *On love for offspring* (revisited)⁵². Here exposing undoubtedly means killing⁵³. The problem is poverty, the motivation is love, the solution is death. Unhappily the narrator does not account for the very «usual» and «barbarous» practice of the modern French⁵⁴. It would not be so easy to account for reclusion by appealing to wealth and love.

In the *Dialogue* the most noble action of Alcheic, the ancient man of merit and Palamedes's friend, was the assassination of Usbek⁵⁵. A friend of Hume's alter-ego kills Montesquieu's alter-ego.

⁵⁰ «As for killing of their Children, when Parents are sufficiently stock'd, it is perhaps practis'd, and allow'd from Self-love; but I can scarce think it passes for a good Action any where» (HUTCHESON, *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* IV 2-3, cit., p. 140).

⁵¹ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 239.

⁵² Hume adds a footnote to the narrator's explanation, which is not a quotation. The footnote refers to «Plutarch. De amore prolis, sub fine» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 239 n.). According to Plutarch «poor men do not rear their children», because «they consider poverty the worst of evils» and «they cannot endure to let their children share it with them, as though it were a kind of disease serious and grievous» (PLUTARCH, *On Affection for Offspring* 5 497e, in *Moralia*, London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1962, vol. VI, pp. 355-7). The *Lettres Edifiantes* may recall what Hume ascribes to Plutarch's *De amore prolis*: «Quand on jette sans pitié, dans les flots un fruit tendre qu'on vient de produire, peut-on dire qu'on luy a donné & qu'il a reçu la vie, puisqu'il la perd aussitôt qu'il commence d'en jouïr? La pauvreté des parens est la cause de ce désordre» (*Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses ... XV. Recueil*, Paris, N. le Clerc, 1722, p. 123).

⁵³ The narrator turns Palamedes's phrase «the exposing of their Children» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 230) into «bereav[ing] his Child of that Life» (ivi, p. 239): the necessary result of exposing is «Death» (*ibidem*).

⁵⁴ Vd. ivi, p. 235.

⁵⁵ Vd. ivi, pp. 226-7. «Usbek» is a character of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*; «Alcheic» recalls «Al cheik» or «Al-scheikh»; «Vitzli», i.e. «Vitzliputzli», is a Mexican war-God (vd. B. MANDEVILLE, *The Fable of the Bees. Part II*, London, J. Roberts, 1729, p. 326; *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour, and the Usefulness of Christianity in War*, London, J. Brotherton, 1732, p. 155); «Calish» is a Posnanian town (vd. VOLTAIRE, *Histoire de Charles XII. Roi de Suede* III, 2 vols., Basle [London?], C. Revis, 1731, vol. I, p. 120); «Changuis» is a Tartarian King

In the *Lettres Persanes*, Usbek attacks monasticism and modern celibacy as a cause of depopulation in Christian catholic countries: «ce métier de Contenance a anéanti plus d'hommes que les pestes & les guerres les plus sanglantes n'ont jamais fait»⁵⁶. He also attacks the unjust right of primogeniture as «si défavorable à la propagation»: «il porte l'attention d'un pere sur un seul de ses enfans, & detourne ses yeux de tous les autres; en ce qu'il l'oblige, pour rendre solide la fortune d'un seul, de s'opposer à l'établissement de plusieurs»⁵⁷. In the *Esprit* Montesquieu entitles a chapter «De l'exposition des Enfans»⁵⁸. Seven pages before he had quoted Plutarch's *On love for offspring*⁵⁹.

Montesquieu does not talk of the Greeks; he defends his favourites, the Romans. The father, he thinks, has an «obligation naturelle [...] de nourrir ses enfans»⁶⁰, and the Romans «eurent une bonne

(vd. J. BODIN, *Les Six Livres de la Republique* II 3, Paris, I. du Puys, 1578³, p. 210); «Fourli» recalls the Italian city of «Forlí», «Furlí» or «Furly»; «Elcouf» recalls «El Kouf» o «Al Coufi». For «Gulki» I have no suggestion.

⁵⁶ MONTESQUIEU, *Lettres Persanes* CXIII, 2 vols., Cologne, P. Marteau, 1730, vol. I, p. 95. Montesquieu speaks of those who «se vouient à une continence éternelle», which, among the Christians, «c'est la vertu par excellence» (*ibidem*); and he does not understand them: «en quoi je ne les comprends pas, ne sachant ce que c'est qu'une vertue, dont il ne résulte rien» (*ibidem*). Similarly Hume's narrator asks with Xenophon («if you are asking me whether I know of anything good in relation to nothing, I neither know nor want to know»): «where would be the Sense of extolling a good Character or Action, which, at the same Time, is allow'd to be good for nothing?» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 242; XENOPHON, *Memorabilia* III VIII 3, in *Memorabilia Oeconomicus Symposium*, London, Harvard University Press, LOEB, 1997, pp. 218-9). Hume possibly owned Montesquieu's 1730 edition of the *Lettres* (D.F. NORTON, M.J. NORTON, *The David Hume Library*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 1996, p. 115).

⁵⁷ MONTESQUIEU, *Lettres Persanes* CXV, cit., vol. I, p. 101; vd. HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., p. 235.

⁵⁸ MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des Loix* XXIII 22, cit., vol. II, pp. 162-3.

⁵⁹ Montesquieu refers to «*Oeuvres Morales*, de l'Amour des Péres envers leurs enfans» (ivi XXIII 21, vol. II, p. 154 and n.).

⁶⁰ Ivi XXIII 2, vol. II, p. 129. «La Loi naturelle ordonne aux pères de nourrir leurs enfans, mais elle n'oblige pas de les faire héritiers» (ivi XXVI 6, vol. II, p. 234). «Propagation de l'espèce. Élien cite une loi des Thébains, *qua capitis poena sancitur civi infantem exponenti aut in solitudine abjicienti*, et si un homme était si pauvre qu'il ne pût nourrir son enfant, il devait, dès qu'il était né, le porter aux magistrats, qui le donaient à nourrir à un homme qui en devenait le maître. (Cette loi a été établie en Écosse)» (MONTESQUIEU, *I miei pen-*

police sur l'exposition des Enfants»⁶¹. Romulus, he argues following Dionysius of Halicarnassus, «imposa à tous les Citoyens la nécessité d'élever tous les enfans mâles & les ainées des filles. Si les enfans étoient difformes & monstueux, il permettoit de les exposer, après les avoir montré à cinq des plus proches voisins»⁶². – Yet Dionysius allows that the deformed children, and the girls after the first-born daughter, could be exposed⁶³. The Law of the Twelve Tables, Montesquieu adds, referring to Cicero, permitted suffocating «l'enfant monstueux» immediately after its birth; therefore, Montesquieu concludes, «les enfans qui n'étoient pas monstueux étoient donc conservés»⁶⁴. – Yet Cicero does not draw this conclusion⁶⁵. The ancient Germans, Montesquieu remarks, quoting Tacitus, «n'exposent point leurs enfans, & chez eux les bonnes mœurs ont plus de force que n'ont aillurus les bonnes loix»⁶⁶. Montesquieu concludes: «on ne trouve aucune loi Romaine qui permette d'exposer les enfans: ce fut sans doute un abus introduit dans les derniers tems lorsque un luxe ôta l'aisance, lorsque les richesses partagées furent appellées pauvreté, lorsque le père crut avoir perdu ce qu'il donna à sa famille, & qu'il distingua cette famille de sa propriété»⁶⁷. – Yet Tacitus

sieri 1817, in *Scritti postumi (1757-2006)*, a cura di D. Felice, Milano, Bompiani, 2017, pp. 2338-9).

⁶¹ MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des Loix* XXIII 22, vol. II, p. 162. Later Montesquieu corrects himself: «Les premiers Romains eurent une assez bonne police sur l'exposition des enfans» (MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des Loix* XXIII 22, 2 vols., éd. par V. Goldschmidt, Paris, GF-Flammarion, 1979, vol. II, p. 129; italics mine).

⁶² MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des Loix* XXIII 22, cit., 1748, vol. II, p. 162.

⁶³ *The Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus* II 15 1-2, 7 vols., London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1960, vol. I, pp. 354-5 (vd. ivi IX 22 2, vol. V, pp. 364-5). Dionysius's account is ambiguous: «at 9.22 he says that they must rear all children born to them, at 2.15 only the males and the firstborn female. He says that a deformed child could be exposed if five neighbors examined it and agreed to its abandonment» (BOSWELL, *The Kindness of Strangers*, cit., p. 59 n. 13): «even Dionysius's statements do no indicate a blanket prohibition of infanticide, since at the least the deformed could be killed» (ivi, p. 60 n. 16).

⁶⁴ MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit* XXIII 22, cit., vol. II, p. 162.

⁶⁵ CICERONE, *De legibus* III 19 8, a c. di L. Ferrero e N. Zorzetti, in *Opere politiche e filosofiche*, 3 voll., Torino, UTET, 1995, vol. I, pp. 546-7. Cicero merely writes: «like a child, immediately killed [necatus] for his deformity according to the law of the twelve tables».

⁶⁶ MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit* XXIII 22, cit., vol. II, p. 163.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

only says that, with the Germans, exposition was deemed a «shame», a *flagitium*, and good manners had more force than good laws with others⁶⁸.

Hume has to deal with Montesquieu, «a late Author of great Genius, as well as extensive Learning, [who] [...] has establish'd [...] the best System of political Knowledge, that, perhaps, has ever yet been communicated to the World»⁶⁹. According to Montesquieu, Roman exposition is the child of luxury and corruption. It is a question of custom and law, Palamedes replies; it is caused by poverty and motivated by love, the narrator maintains.

IV. *The essay: exposing and population.*

Also encouraged by the reading of Robert Wallace⁷⁰, Hume writes his essay on «the most curious and important of all questions of er-

⁶⁸ TACITUS, *De Germania* 19, in *Dialogus / Agricola / Germania*, London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1914, pp. 290-3. Tacitus says that the Germans do not expose their children and take it as a «shameful» action. Then he remarks: with them the good manners have more force than the good laws «elsewhere». Montesquieu concludes that the Romans had good laws and bad manners: they did not follow the good laws anymore.

⁶⁹ HUME, *Enquiry*, 1751, cit., pp. 54-5 (vd. HUME to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 133). In seven years, and after the death of Montesquieu, Hume will mitigate his positive (and slightly envious) judgment: «A late author of genius, as well as learning, [who] has established [...] a system of political knowledge, which abounds in ingenious and brilliant thought, and is not wanting in solidity» (HUME, *Enquiry*, in *Essays and Treatises*, 1758, cit., p. 415; vd. HUME to H. Blair, 1 April 1767, *Letters*, cit., vol. II, p. 133).

⁷⁰ Vd. HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 155n; HUME to R. WALLACE, 22 September 1751, *New Letters*, cit., p. 29. Wallace's paper was first read to the Philosophical Society before 1745; the original version was later developed into a dissertation. Hume reads Wallace (and Wallace reads Hume) in manuscript possibly in summer 1751 (E.C. MOSSNER, *The Life of David Hume*, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 1980², p. 263; BOX, SILVERTHORNE, *The «most curious & important of all questions of erudition»*, cit., p. 251 n. 12). It is an unanswered question «whether Hume wrote his essay having read the MS of the original paper or an augmented dissertation like the book that Hume saw through the press for Wallace» (BOX, SILVERTHORNE, *The «most curious & important of all questions of erudition»*, cit., p. 251 n. 11; vd. *ivi*, p. 250 n. 5, n. 8): «if when composing his essay Hume read a version of Wallace's dissertation close in content to the published book minus the appendix, many of the parallels between the essay and the book would seem to be reactions to Wallace. If [...] Hume was reacting

udition»⁷¹, and declares himself «inclin'd to scepticism, with regard to the great populousness ascrib'd to antient times»⁷². Assuming that populousness, happiness, virtue and wise institutions are linked together («the general rule, that the happiness of any society and its populousness are necessary attendants»⁷³), Hume «coolly» considers «the domestic life and manners of the antients, compar'd to those of the moderns»⁷⁴. What practice is less unfavourable to propagation, modern convents or ancient exposing?

«Modern» convents certainly («no doubt») are «very bad institutions»⁷⁵. Yet the ancient great family probably («there is reason to suspect») was a «species of convent»⁷⁶. Convents, these «nunneries» of abject superstition, are «burthensome to the public, and oppressive to the poor prisoners»⁷⁷. We have reason to «detest» them, but they are probably («may it be question'd») not «so destructive to the populousness of a state as is commonly imagin'd»⁷⁸; at least, they would not furnish less citizens to the public than noble families⁷⁹. The modern practice has its explanation: the common reason why parents «thrust their daughters into nunneries» is poverty: «not be overburthen'd with too numerous a family»⁸⁰. To the same purpose, the ancients had «a method almost as innocent and more effectual, viz. the exposing their children in the earliest infan-

only to Wallace's paper, then some of the parallels could easily reflect Wallace's reaction to Hume's published essay» (ivi, p. 251 n. 11).

⁷¹ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 155 n.

⁷² Ivi, p. 220.

⁷³ Ivi, pp. 160, 166 n. The question regarding the «comparative populousness» of ages or kingdoms «implies very important consequences, and commonly determines concerning the preference of their whole police, manners, and constitutions of government» (ivi, p. 159), because the population levels provide their measure. On Montesquieu, Hume and populousness, vd. L. TURCO, *Hume e Montesquieu*, in *Montesquieu e i suoi interpreti*, 2 voll., a c. di D. Felice, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2005, vol. I, pp. 56-62.

⁷⁴ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 161, 182.

⁷⁵ Ivi, p. 179.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*. «Were the land, which belongs to a convent, bestow'd on a nobleman, he wou'd spend its revenue on dogs, horses, grooms, footmen, cooks, and chamber-maids; and his family wou'd not furnish many more citizens than the convent» (*ibidem*).

⁸⁰ Ivi, p. 180.

cy»⁸¹. This practice, Hume neutrally observes, was «very common», and no ancient author mentions it «with the horror it deserves, or scarce even with disapprobation»⁸². Like Bayle⁸³, Hume reminds us that Sextus Empiricus tells us that Solon, «the most celebrated» among the Greek sages, «gave parents permission by law to kill their children»⁸⁴ (again exposition is explicitly killing)⁸⁵. – Yet Sextus adds: «with us the laws forbid the slaying of children»⁸⁶.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*. Hume is slightly ironic: ancient exposition is «almost as innocent» and «more effectual» than modern convents.

⁸² *Ibidem*. From a modern point of view only, the ancient practice should be mentioned with «disapprobation», if not with «horror».

⁸³ Hume refers to «*Sext. Emp. Lib. 3. Cap. 24*» (ivi, p. 180 n.). In the *Réponse* Bayle maintains that «Solon permit aux peres de faire mourir leurs fils: Voyez Sextus Empiricus *ubi supra* [*Pyrrhon. Hypotyp. lib. 3. c. 24, pp. 180-1*] p. 182» (P. BAYLE, *Réponse aux Questions d'un Provincial* 104, in *Œuvres Diverses de Mr. Pierre Bayle*, La Haye, Compagnie des Libraires, 1737, vol. III, p. 712b n. d). In Hume's *Memoranda* a note on the god Summanus refers to a passage in Bayle's *Réponse*, which is quite close to that on exposition (Edinburgh, NLS MS 23159, item 14, f. 34; MOSSNER, *Hume's «Early Memoranda»* II 29, cit., p. 502; BAYLE, *Réponse* 107, cit., p. 718b).

⁸⁴ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 180. Discussing Sextus's *Outlines*, Pufendorf reports: «Solonis lege permissum unicuique apud Athenienses filium necare» (S. PUFENDORF, *De Jure Naturæ et Gentium. Libri Octo. Editio Ultima* II 3 8, Amsterdam, J. Wolters, 1704, p. 129). He also adds that Sextus «ut ostenderet circa turpia & honesta nihil certe esse, magnam ejusmodi re-pugnantiorum institutorum cumulat farraginem» (*ibidem*). Barbeyrac translates: «par une Loi de Solon, il étoit permis aux Athéniens de tuer leurs propres Enfants» (S. PUFENDORF, *Le Droit de la Nature et des Gens ... Traduit du Latin Par Jean Barbeyrac ... Avec des Notes du Traducteur* II 3 8, 2 vols., Amsterdam, Briasson, 1734⁵, vol. I p. 206); «il ramasse un grand nombre de ces diverses Coûtumes, pour montrer qu'il n'y rien de certain dans la Morale» (*ibidem*). Palamedes only meant «to represent the Uncertainty of all these Judgments concerning Characters» (HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, p. 237).

⁸⁵ «The exposing their children [...] murder'd, or, if you will, expos'd [...] to kill their children» (HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 180), «To kill one's own child» (ivi, p. 182).

⁸⁶ «Cronos decided to destroy his own children, and Solon gave the Athenians the law 'concerning things immune,' by which he allowed each man to slay his own child; but with us the laws forbid the slaying of children» (SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* III 211, London, Harvard Univ. Pr., LOEB, 1990, pp. 466-7; vd. HUTCHESON, *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* IV 3, cit., pp. 138-40); habit, Sextus maintains, «is opposed also to legendary belief, as when the legend says that Cronos devoured his own children, though it is our habit to protect our children» (SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 154, cit., pp. 90-1). In general, exposing, like incest, pederasty, adultery etc., is a traditional

The «humane, good natur'd» Plutarch, Hume writes (is he still reading Bayle? ⁸⁷), «recommends it [exposition] as a virtue in *Attalus*, king of Pergamus, that he murder'd, or, if you will, expos'd all his own children, in order to leave his crown to the son of his brother, Eumenes: Signaling in this manner his gratitude and affection to Eumenes, who had left him his heir preferably to that son»⁸⁸. – Yet Plutarch does not recommend exposition as a virtue in Attalus, who simply did not acknowledge his children, and Hume is probably stressing Plutarch's assertion or correcting Bayle's version of it⁸⁹. Even Seneca, Hume observes, adopting Montaigne's sceptical strat-

sceptical topic (vd. SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 145-154, III 198-211, cit., pp. 84-91, 460-9). While Sextus remarks that «with us it is sinful to marry one's mother or one's own sister; but the Persians, and especially [...] the Magi [...] marry their mothers; and the Egyptians take their sisters in marriage» (SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* III 205, cit., p. 464-5), Hutcheson maintains that «in Greece, the marrying half Sisters was counted honourable; and among the Persian Magi, the marrying of Mothers» (HUTCHESON, *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* IV 6, cit., p. 144).

⁸⁷ Hume refers to «*De fraterno amore*» (ivi, p. 180 n.). According to Plutarch «Attalus, therefore, the eldest of the king's brothers, an honourable man and more loyal to Eumenes than any of the others [...]. When Eumenes was dead, he was unwilling to acknowledge as his own any of the children his wife had borne him, though they were many, but brought up and educated his brother's son and in his own life-time placed the crown upon his head and saluted him as king» (PLUTARCH, *On Brotherly Love* 18 489E-490A, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, 15 vols., London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1962, vol. VI, pp. 311-13).

⁸⁸ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 180.

⁸⁹ Hume writes «*Attalus*, king of *Pergamus*»; Bayle's article is entitled «*Pergame* (*Attale*, roi de)» (P. BAYLE, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 4 vols., Amsterdam-Leyde etc., P. Brunel et al., 1740⁵, vol. III, pp. 658-61). Bayle quotes Titus Livius's and Plutarch's accounts; his mixture may explain Hume's account, where Attalus murders his own children in order to leave his crown to the son of Eumenes and show his gratitude and affection to him, because he had left Attalus his heir rather than Eumenes's son. Bayle remarks that Plutarch turned Livius's (more likely) account into a «*matiere de Panegyrique*, tant pour Eumenes, que pour Attalus». He cites «*Plutarque*, de *l'Amitié fraternelle*, pag. 273 [...] *je me sers de la Version d'Amvot.*», where it is said that Attalus, «*homme de bien*, et qui s'estoit tousiours plus fidelement et plus loyaument que nul autre porté envers son frere [...] ne voulut jamais faire nourrir aucun de ses enfans [...], & si en eut plusieurs, ains nourrit & esleva le fils de son frere defunct [...] lui mit sur la teste le Diademe Royal, & l'appella Roy» (ivi, REM. F, p. 659b). Hume could have turned «*ne voulut jamais faire nourrir*» into «*murder'd*, or, if you will, *expos'd* all his own children».

egy⁹⁰, «approves of the exposing of sickly, infirm children»⁹¹. – Yet Seneca allows drowning only weak and monstrous children⁹².

Apparently Tacitus is the only exception (yet Epictetus attacks Epicurus's defence of exposition⁹³). «Tacitus blames it»⁹⁴, Hume acknowledges, and refers to the passage quoted by Montesquieu⁹⁵. But on Tacitus's passage Hume does not draw any consequence concerning manners and laws. As in the *Dialogue*, exposing also concerns morals. But Hume stops here and goes back to his former question: are modern monastic vows and ancient exposing of children, Hume asks, «unfavourable, in equal degrees, to the propagation of mankind»? Do they «compensate each other»⁹⁶?

Hume seems to make some concessions to those who maintain the superior populousness of the ancients. «Perhaps», he suggests, «the barbarous practice of the antients might rather render those times more populous»⁹⁷. He explains this surprising suggestion by «an

⁹⁰ Under certain circumstances (sickness, infirmity, and necessity), even the Stoics approve of some «barbarous» practices. Montaigne argues that «Chrysippus et Zénon, chefs de la secte Stoïque, ont bien pensé qu'il n'y avait aucun mal de se servir de notre charogne à quoi que ce fût pour notre besoin, et d'en tirer de la nourriture» (M.E. de MONTAIGNE, *Des Cannibales*, in *Saggi*, a c. di A. Tournon, trad. it. di F. Garavini, Milano, Bompiani, 2012, pp. 380-1).

⁹¹ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 180 n.

⁹² Hume refers to «*De ira*, lib. I. cap. 15.» (*ibidem*). According to Seneca «there is no anger there, but the pitying desire to heal. [...] we destroy any prodigious progeny; we also drown the children, if they are born weak and monstrous. Yet it is not anger, but reason that separates the harmful from the sound» (SENECA, *De Ira* I 15 2, in *Moral Essays*, 3 vols., London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1928, vol. I, pp. 144-5; vd. ivi III 15 1-4, pp. 292-5).

⁹³ Epicurus has the audacity to say «Let us not bring up children». Epictetus replies: «But a sheep does not abandon its own offspring, nor a wolf; and yet does a man abandon his? What do you wish us to do? [...] your mother and your father, even if they had divined that you were going to say such things, would not have exposed you!» (EPICTETUS, *Arrian's Discourses of Epictetus* XXIII 7-10, in *The Discourses as reported by Arrian, the Manual and Fragments*, 3 vols., London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1956, vol. I, pp. 150-1).

⁹⁴ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 180 n.

⁹⁵ Hume refers to «*De morib. Germ.*» (*ibidem*); and Montesquieu: «*De morib. German.*» (MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit* XXIII 22, vol. II, p. 163); vd. TACITUS, *De Germania* 19, cit., pp. 290-3.

⁹⁶ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 180.

⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 181. Discussing domestic slavery as «unfavourable to propagation» (ivi, p. 174), Hume appeals to Svetonius and makes the example of «the severe, I might say, barbarous manners of antient times» (ivi, p. 162). He recalls

odd co[n]nexion of causes»⁹⁸. The exposition, «by removing the terrors of too numerous a family»⁹⁹, [...] wou'd engage many people in marriage», and «such is the force of natural affection, that very few, in comparison, wou'd have resolution enough, when it came to the push, to carry into execution their former intentions»¹⁰⁰. Here we are: the *Memoranda* and «the force of natural affection»¹⁰¹. Elsewhere Hume amuses himself by asserting against Hutcheson that, unlike the belief in God, love of progeny springs from an instinct of nature¹⁰². And the Italian scholar promptly detects Hume's amusement¹⁰³.

something apparently «pretty common» in Rome: the custom of «exposing old, useless, or sick slaves in an island of the *Tyber*, there to starve» (ivi, p. 163). «Whoever recover'd, after having been so expos'd, – he adds – had his liberty given to him, by an edict of the emperor Claudius; where it was likewise forbid to kill any slave, merely for old age or sickness» (ivi, p. 163; vd. SVETONIUS, *The deified Claudius* V 25 2, in *Suetonius*, 2 vols., London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1959, vol. II, pp. 50-1). This is also the only case quoted by Hume, where exposing does necessarily imply death.

⁹⁸ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 181.

⁹⁹ The cause of exposition («terrors of too numerous a family») recalls that of nunneries: «[to] be overburthen'd with too numerous a family» (ivi, p. 180).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰¹ «Perhaps the Custom of allowing Parents to murder their Infant Children, tho barbarous, tends to render a State more populous» (*Memoranda*); «Perhaps, by an odd connexion of causes, the barbarous practice of the antients might rather render those times more populous» (*Of the Populousness*); «Many marry by that Inducement» (*Memoranda*), «engage many people in marriage» (*Of the Populousness*); «such is the force of natural Affection» (*Memoranda*); «such is the force of natural affection» (*Of the Populousness*); «none make Use of the Privilege but in extreme Necessity» (*Memoranda*), «very few [...] wou'd have resolution enough, when it came to the push, to carry into execution their former intentions» (*Of the Populousness*). Vd. Edinburgh, NLS MS 23159, item 14, f. 9; MOSSNER, *Hume's «Early Memoranda»* III 1, cit., p. 503; HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 181.

¹⁰² The belief in an invisible intelligent power, Hume maintains, «springs not from an original instinct or primary impression of nature, such as gives rise to self-love, affection between the sexes, love of progeny, gratitude, resentment; since every instinct of this kind has been found absolutely universal in all nations and ages, and has always a precise determinate object, which it inflexibly pursues. The first religious principles must be secondary» (HUME, «Introduction» to *The Natural History of Religion*, in *Four Dissertations*, London, A. Millar, 1757, p. 2). Hutcheson had claimed that «No Determination of our Mind is more *natural* than this, no Effect more *universal*. One has better Reason to deny the Inclination between the Sexes to be natural, than a Disposition in Mankind to Religion» (HUTCHESON, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the*

Here, we have two instincts and a fear: sex¹⁰⁴ and children (the instincts)¹⁰⁵, and a numerous family (the fear). The availability of ex-

Passions and Affections. With Illustrations on the Moral Sense, London, J. and J. Knapton, et al., 1730, p. 175).

¹⁰³ L. TURCO, *Hutcheson nei «Dialoghi sulla religione naturale» di Hume*, in *I filosofi e la società senza religione*, a c. di M. Geuna e G. Gori, Bologna, il Mulino, 2011, p. 454.

¹⁰⁴ There is in «all men, both male and female, a desire and power of generation more active than is universally exterted», therefore «the restraints, which it lyes under, must proceed from some difficulties in mens situation» (a wise legislator should carefully «observe and remove» these difficulties): «almost every man, who thinks he can maintain a family, will have one; and the human species, at this rate of propagation, wou'd more than double every generation, were every one coupled as soon as he comes to the age of puberty» (HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 159).

¹⁰⁵ In modern great cities, like London, «every man is master of himself, and provides for his children from the powerful instinct of nature, not the calculations of sordid interest» (HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 168). Hume maintains that «kindness to children» is a «certain instinct [...] originally implanted in our natures» (HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 2.3.4.8, ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. by P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 417; vd. ivi 3.2.12.3, p. 570; HUME, *Enquiry*, 1751, cit., p. 19); that «love» of children is a «natural» affection or inclination (HUME, *A Treatise* 2.2.4.2, 2.3.4.8, 3.2.1.5, 3.2.1.18, 3.2.2.4, 3.2.5.6, cit., pp. 352, 417, 478, 483, 486, 519); that the natural «prejudice in favour» of children is a «passion» which arises from the «the original Structure and Formation of human Nature» (HUME, *The Sceptic*, in *Essays Moral and Political*, Edinburgh, R. Fleming, A. Alison for A. Kincaid, 1742, vol. II, pp. 145-6); that we are impelled to «love» our children by «a natural Instinct or immediate Propensity» (HUME, *Of Original Contract*, in *Essays, Moral and Political*, London, A. Millar, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid, 1748³, p. 303); that love of children «springs up from an original instinct or primary impression of nature» (HUME «Introduction» to *Natural History of Religion*, 1757, cit., p. 2); that this affection «seems founded on an original instinct» (HUME, *Of the Passions*, in *Fours Dissertations*, 1757, cit., p. 158 n. a), «arises from a simple original instinct in the human brest, which nature has implanted» (HUME, *Enquiry concerning the principles of Morals*, in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 4 vols., London, T. Cadell, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid, A. Donaldson, 1770, vol. IV, p. 55). The «care of children» is therefore a duty (HUME, *A Treatise* 3.2.1.5, 3.2.5.6, cit., pp. 478, 519; HUME, *Of Original Contract*, cit., p. 303), and «we blame a father for neglecting his child» (HUME, *A Treatise* 3.2.1.5, cit., p. 478). Even though love of children has «no Manner of Dependance» on self-love, and is «commonly able alone to counterballance» its strongest motives (HUME, *Enquiry*, cit., p. 19), some people think that it is derived from self-love: «all is self-love. Your children are loved only because they are yours [...] [and have] a connexion with yourself» (HUME, *Of the Dignity of Human Nature*, in *Essays and Treatises*, 1753², vol. I, p. 126). Yet, the «negroes» would sell «their children»,

posing removes the fear and promotes the instinct to couple, and love of children does the rest. Someone says «it is an opinion at first suggested by Hume»¹⁰⁶ (Malthus calls it «a very just observation»¹⁰⁷). As in the *Memoranda* («as in China»), to confirm his suggestion, Hume moves to a modern country: China is «the only country where this barbarous practice of exposing children prevails at present», and China, he traditionally remarks, is «the most populous country we know»¹⁰⁸. In China, he says with Ricci and Du Halde, «every man is married before he is twenty»¹⁰⁹; and these «early» marriages can be general because «men [have] the prospect of so easy a method of getting rid of their children»¹¹⁰.

Plutarch shows up as a possible objection against the populousness of those countries where exposition is a practice. In *On love for offspring* (quoted by Hume in the *Dialogue*) he says that «it is a very universal maxim of the poor to expose their children»¹¹¹ and, as «the rich were then averse to marriage», Hume concludes, «the public must have been in a bad situation betwixt them»¹¹².

together with their wives and mistress, «for a cask of brandy» (HUME, *Of National Characters*, in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 2 vols., London, T. Cadell, 1777, vol. I, p. 228); in the former editions they would have sold «their Parents» (HUME, *Of National Characters*, in *Essays, Moral and Political*, London, A. Millar, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid, 1748, p. 287). Is selling children more cruel or easier than selling parents?

¹⁰⁶ J.W. GILBERT, *The Philosophy of History*, London, R. Clay, 1857, pp. 82-3.

¹⁰⁷ T.R. MALTHUS, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* V, 2 vols., London, J. Johnson, 1807⁴, vol. I, p. 89; vd. T.R. MALTHUS, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* IV, London, J. Johnson, 1798, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 181; on Hume and China, vd. E. MAZZA, *The Humean Way to China: Beyond the Stereotype*, «Frontiers of Philosophy in China», 13.2, 2018, pp. 265-85.

¹⁰⁹ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 181; vd. N. TRIGAUT, *De Christiana Expeditione Apud Sinas ... Ex P. Matthæi Ricij eiusdem Societatis Commentariis* I 8, Ludguni, H. Cardon, 1615, p. 85; M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina* 7, a cura di F. Mignini, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2011, p. 106.

¹¹⁰ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 181.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*. Hume refers to «*De amore proliis*» (ivi, p. 181 n.). According to Plutarch «poor men do not rear their children», because the don't want them «to be educated less well than is befitting» (because they «will become servile and boorish and destitute of all the virtues»), and «they consider poverty the worst of evils» and «they cannot endure to let their children share it with them, as though it were a kind of disease serious and grievous» (PLUTARCH, *On Affection for Offspring* 5 497e, in *Moralia*, cit., vol. VI, pp. 355-7).

¹¹² HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 181.

But in politics, Hume admonishes, first appearances are very «deceitful»¹¹³. What seems favourable to populousness, like hospitals, may reduce it; and what seems unfavourable to it, like exposition, may enlarge it. «Hospitals for foundlings *seem* favourable to the encrease of numbers; and, perhaps, may be so, when kept under proper restrictions»; yet, when they «open the door to every one, without distinction, they have *probably* a contrary effect, and are pernicious to the state»¹¹⁴. Hume appeals to the *Memoranda* evidence (possibly drawn from the 1733 *Political State*¹¹⁵): «'Tis computed, that every ninth child born at *Paris*, is sent to the hospital»¹¹⁶; but «it *seems certain*» that «'tis not a hundred part, whose parents are altogether incapacitated to rear and educate them»¹¹⁷. In general, for health, industry and morals, there is an «infinite difference» between an education in an hospital and in a private family, and this, Hume observes, «shou'd induce us not to make the entrance into an hospital too easy»¹¹⁸. Hume draws his conclusion: to «kill» one's child, like the ancient Greeks did and the modern Chinese do, is «shocking to nature» and «must therefore be pretty unusual»; but to «turn over the care of him upon others», like the modern French do, is «very tempting to the natural indolence of mankind»¹¹⁹. And «sloth and idleness», *Of Luxury* admonishes, are

¹¹³ *Ivi*, p. 182.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem* (italics mine).

¹¹⁵ «Bill of Mortality at *Paris*. By the Registers of the the Parishes, Convents and Hospitals of the City and Suburbs of *Paris*, it appears that in the Year 1732, there were 18605 Baptisms, 2474 Foundlings, 3983 Marriages, and 17532 Burials. Fewer Baptisms in this last Year, than in the preceding Year 272. Fewer Foundlings 65; fewer Marriages 186; and fewer Burials 3300» (*The Political State of Great Britain*, XLVI, July-December, London, T. Cooper, 1733, «Advices from France», p. 264).

¹¹⁶ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 182 (vd. Edinburgh, NLS MS 23159, item 14, f. 14; MOSSNER, *Hume's «Early Memoranda»* III 61, cit., p. 506): «A ninth of the Children born in *Paris* sent to the *Enfans Trouvés*» (*Memoranda*); «'Tis computed, that every ninth child born at *Paris*, is sent to the hospital» (*Of the Populousness*).

¹¹⁷ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 182.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*. Exposition is «shocking to nature». According to Philo death is «so shocking to Nature» (HUME, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* XII 28, ed. by N. Kemp Smith, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1981, p. 225); according to Hume the Templars were «universally charged with murder, robbery, and vices the most shocking to nature» (HUME, *The History of England, from The Invasion*

«more pernicious» to private persons and to the public than excessive luxury¹²⁰.

China is a modern example of exposition. Is Hume reading the Jesuit *Lettres Edifiantes*? It is possible¹²¹. Chinese people, the *Lettres* say, «multiplient beaucoup, & c'est ce qui cause leur pauvreté»¹²²; they are «si pauvres, qu'ils ne peuvent fournir les alimens nécessaires à leurs propres enfans: c'est pour cela qu'on en expose un si grand nombre»¹²³. Exposition «ne laisse pas d'en couster à leur tendresse naturelle; mais enfin ils se déterminent à ce parti, & ils croient pouvoir disposer de la vie de leurs Enfans, afin de prolonger la leur»¹²⁴.

of *Julius Cæsar to The Accession of Henry VII*, 2 vols, London, A. Millar, 1762, vol. II, p. 150).

¹²⁰ D. HUME, *Of Luxury*, in *Political Discourses*, cit., p. 40.

¹²¹ Hume is probably reading these *Lettres* even in 1750 when, announcing *Of the Populousness*, he writes: «the Chinese houses, where each apartment is separate from the rest, and rises no higher than a single story» (HUME to J. Clephane, 18 April 1750, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 140; vd. HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 231). The passage recalls the *Lettres*: «A la Chine les Bastimens publics ont en profondeur, ce que ceux d'Europe ont en hauteur: il y a très-peu de maisons à deux étages: les maisons n'ont point de vuë sur la ruë. On y voit plusieurs appartemens à la suite les uns des autres, qui sont séparez par de grandes cours. Dans toutes les maisons, mesme dans celles des particuliers, il y a toujours une Salle destinée à recevoir les visites» (*Lettres Edifiantes*, cit., pp. 120-1). Hume's assertion that the ancient men of quality had «very spacious palaces; and their buldings were like the Chinese houses at this day» (HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 231) also recalls (and corrects) Hutcheson: «The Chinese or Persian Buildings are not like the Grecian and Roman, and yet the former has its Uniformity of the various Parts to each other, and to the Whole, as well as the latter» (HUTCHESON, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, &c.* III 8, cit., p. 41).

¹²² *Lettres Edifiantes*, cit., p. 118.

¹²³ Ivi, p. 102: «nous voyons parmi le peuple des gens si pauvres, qu'ils ne peuvent fournir les alimens nécessaires à leurs propres enfans: c'est pour cela qu'on en expose un si grand nombre. Autrefois sous une ancienne Dynastie, on tascha de pourvoir à la conservation de ces Enfans exposez: on bastit à ce dessein un Edifice, qu'on nomma l'Hostel des Enfans de la misericorde. Quand on trouvoit un enfant exposé, on le portoit à l'Hôpital, & le Mandarin luy donnoit une nutrice pour l'allaiter».

¹²⁴ Ivi, p. 124. «Quand on jette sans pitié, dans les flots un fruit tendre qu'on vient de produire, peut-on dire qu'on luy a donné & qu'il a reçu la vie, puisqu'il la perd aussi-tôt qu'il commence d'en jouïr? La pauvreté des parens est la cause de ce désordre; ils ont de la peine à se nourrir eux-mesmes, encore moins peuvent-ils payer des nourrices, & fournir aux autres dépenses néces-

In the *Description Géographique* of the empire of China Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (one of the editors of the *Lettres*) accounts for this (seeming) «paradoxe»: «le plus riche & le plus florissant Empire du monde, est dans un sens assez pauvre»¹²⁵. It «suffit à peine» to maintain its inhabitants: their great number causes a «misere extrême», which leads into «terribles excès»: «les parens exposent plusieurs de leurs enfans»¹²⁶. The Chinese are often «hors d'état de nourrir une nombreuse famille»: «ne pouvant fournir à leurs enfans les alimens nécessaires, il les exposent dans les ruës»¹²⁷. These «petits innocens sont condamnez en quelque manière à la mort, presque au même instant qu'ils ont commencé de vivre»¹²⁸.

Hume's argument in the essay, it has been suggested, «is best examined in relation to Wallace rather than to Montesquieu»¹²⁹. Yet, it is Montesquieu who reminds us that «le climat de la Chine est tel qu'il favorise prodigieusement la propagation de l'espèce humaine»¹³⁰. The climate is fertile, women are fertile, and human kind

saires pour l'entretien de leurs enfans; c'est ce qui les désespere, & ne pouvant se résoudre à laisser mourir deux personnes pour en faire vivre une seule, il arrive qu'une mere, afin de conserver la vie à son mari, consent à l'oster à son enfant. Cependant il ne laisse pas d'en couster à leur tendresse naturelle; mais enfin ils se déterminent à ce parti, & ils croient pouvoir disposer de la vie de leurs Enfans, afin de prolonger la leur. S'ils alloient exposer leurs enfans dans un lieu écarté, l'enfant jetteroit des cris, leurs entrailles en seroient émuës: que font-ils donc? Ils jettent ce fils infortuné dans le courant d'une riviere, afin de le perdre de vûë d'abord, & de lui oster en un instant toute espérance de vie. Vous me donnez le nom de Pere du peuple : quoyque je ne doive pas avoir pour ces Enfans la tendresse des parens qui les ont engendrez, cependant je ne puis m'empescher d'élever ma voix pour vous dire avec un vif sentiment de douleur, que je défends absolument de semblables homicides. La Tygre, dit un de nos livres, tout tygre qu'il est, ne déchire pas ses petits, il a pour eux un cœur tendre, il en prend un soin continuel. Quelque pauvres que vous soyez, est-il possible que vous deveniez les meurtriers de vos propre Enfans? C'est avoir moins de naturel que le Tygres les plus féroces» (ivi, pp. 123-5).

¹²⁵ J.-B. DU HALDE, *Description Géographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique, et Physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise*, 4 voll., La Haye, H. Scheurleer, 1736, vol. II, p. 172.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ Ivi, p. 87.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ BOX, SILVERTHORNE, *The «most curious & important of all questions of erudition»*, cit., p. 227.

¹³⁰ MONTESQUIEU, *Esprit* VIII 21, cit., vol. I, p. 201. Montesquieu even suggests (is he ironic?) that «Peut-être même que les parties huileuses du poisson

multiplies so much and so fast¹³¹. Cruel tyranny, lack of food, frequent famines cannot stop the progress of propagation¹³². Not even exposition: «malgré les expositions d'enfans le peuple augmente toujours à la Chine»¹³³. Sometimes, Montesquieu observes, «la fécondité du climat donne assez du peuple [...] le climat est plus favorable que le terrain [à la propagation]; le peuple s'y multiplie, & les famines le détruisent: c'est le cas où se trouve la Chine. Aussi un pere y vend-t-il ses filles & expose-t-il ses enfans»¹³⁴. The cause of exposition is poverty, not the belief in metempsychosis, as Ricci and others suggest¹³⁵.

In short: in China the population is always growing because of its climate and *despite* the exposition, Montesquieu asserts; on the contrary, Hume replies, it is always growing partly *because of* the availability of exposing.

V. Tradition: a «barbarous» practice.

Arguing against the existence of innate principles of morals, Locke remembers that there have been nations, even the «most civilized», where «the exposing their Children, and leaving them in the Fields,

sont plus propres à fournir cette matière qui sert à la génération. Ce seroit une des causes de ce nombre infini de peuple qui est au Japon & à la Chine où l'on ne vit presque que de poisson [vd. Du HALDE]. Si cela étoit, de certaines Régles monastiques qui obligent de vivre de poisson, seroient contraires à l'esprit du Législateur même.» (MONTESQUIEU, *Esprit* XXIII 13, vol. II, p. 139). Montesquieu first observes that «La Chine est pleine de ruisseaux» (ivi XXIII 13, vol. II, p. 139 n.), then he quotes Du Halde: «Voy. Le P. Du halde, Tom. 2. p.139-42. & suivantes».

¹³¹ MONTESQUIEU, *Esprit* VII 6, vol. I, p. 161; ivi VIII 21, vol. I, pp. 202-3; ivi XXIII 16, vol. II, pp. 142-3. In China «des causes tirées la plûpart du physique, du climat, on pû forcer les causes morales» (ivi VIII 21, vol. I, p. 201).

¹³² Ivi VII 6, vol. I, p. 161; VIII 21, vol. I, pp. 202-3; XXIII 16, vol. II, p. 143.

¹³³ Ivi VIII 21, vol. I, p. 203. «Ce que j'ai dit de la dépopulation de l'univers demande quelque modification à l'égard de la Chine, qui semble être dans un cas particulier [quoiqu'ils tuent leurs enfans]» (MONTESQUIEU, *I miei pensieri* 234, cit., pp. 1604-5; vd. ivi 1792, pp. 2324-5).

¹³⁴ MONTESQUIEU, *Esprit* XXIII 16, vol. II, p. 143.

¹³⁵ Ivi XXIII 16, vol. II, p. 143; vd. TRIGAULT, *De Christiana Expeditione* I 9, p. 97; TRIGAULT, *Histoire de l'Expedition Chrestienne au Royaume de la Chine ... Tirée des Memoires du R.P. Matthieu Ricci* I 9, Lyon, H. Cardon, 1616, pp. 153-4; RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina* 9, cit., p. 123.

to perish by Want or wild Beasts, has been the Practice, as little condemned or scrupled, as the begetting them»¹³⁶. But we don't need to «seek so far as *Mingrelia* or *Peru*, to find instances of such as neglect, abuse, nay and destroy their Children»¹³⁷; and we should not «look on it only as the more than Brutality of some savage and barbarous Nations»¹³⁸. It was «a familiar, and uncondemned Practice among the *Greeks* and *Romans*, to expose, without pity or remorse, their innocent Infants»¹³⁹.

At the beginning of the Eighteenth Century Gerard Noodt publishes a «singular» treatise on the exposing the children in ancient times¹⁴⁰. In the *Réponse aux Questions d'un Provincial* Bayle quotes Noodt¹⁴¹ and deals with the problem in his own manner. «Il y a eu beaucoup de Nations», he observes, where parents had «un plein droit de disposer de la liberté, & de la vie même des leurs en-

¹³⁶ LOCKE, *Essay* I 3 9, cit., p. 70; vd. *ivi* I 3 9, p. 72; M. COLLIER, *The Humean Approach to Moral Diversity*, «The Journal of Scottish Philosophy», 11.1, 2013, pp. 41-52.

¹³⁷ LOCKE, *Essay* I 3 12, cit., p. 73. Anticipating Swift's *Modest Proposal*, Locke maintains: «*Garcilasso de la Vega* tells us of a People in *Peru*, which were wont to fat and eat the Children they got on their female Captives, whom they kept as Concubines for that purpose; and when they were past Breeding the Mothers themselves were kill'd too and eaten» (LOCKE, *Essay* I 3 9, cit., p. 71; vd. LOCKE, *Two Treatises on Government* I 6 55-9, ed. by P. Laslett, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1988, pp. 180-3). On exposition vd. T. HOBBS, *Leviathan* II 20 5, ed. by J.C.A. Gaskin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 134; HOBBS, *De corpore politico* XXIII 3, in *Human Nature and De corpore politico*, ed. by J.C.A. Gaskin, Oxford, Oxford Univ. Pr., 1994, p. 131.

¹³⁸ LOCKE, *Essay* I 3 12, cit., p. 73.

¹³⁹ LOCKE, *Essay* I 3 12, cit., pp. 73-4. According to La Loubère, which is quoted by Locke, the Chinese «tuënt leurs enfans quand ils en ont trop, & disent que c'est pour les faire renaître plus hereux» (S. DE LA LOUBERE, *Du Royaume de Siam*, Amsterdam, A. Wolfgang, 1691, vol. I, p. 385; vd. *ivi*, pp. XIV, 163). In the *Reasonableness of Christianity* Locke maintains that our reason had not «yet been able to convince the Civilized Part of the World, that they had not given, nor could without a Crime, take away the Lives of Children, by exposing them» (LOCKE, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, As deliver'd in the Scriptures*, London, A. Bettesworth et al., 1736⁶, pp. 234-5).

¹⁴⁰ G. NOODT, *Julius Paulus, sive de Partus Expositione et Nece apud Veteres. Liber singularis*, Amsterdam, F. Haaring, 1710³. The treatise is reviewed by the *Acta Eruditorum*, X, October, 1701, pp. 458-62; vd. F. CONRAD, *Julius Paulus, ab injurijs Criticorum vindicatus*, Helmstad, 1733.

¹⁴¹ BAYLE, *Réponse* 104, cit., p. 710b and n. i.

fans»¹⁴²; and they were not «barbares, & si abruties», but «les plus polies & les plus savantes qui fussent au monde»¹⁴³. They were the Greeks and the Romans. They had laws, Bayle goes on, that «permettoient a chaque particulier de se défaire de ses enfans nouveaux nez, s'il n'aimoit mieux leur sauver la vie»¹⁴⁴. Exposing the children is also typical of civilized and learned nations. They even suffocate them, Bayle adds, referring to Arnauld who refers to Ricci¹⁴⁵. In some provinces of China, Bayle reports, the fathers drown their children when they cannot nourish and rear them¹⁴⁶. Since they believe in metempsychosis, he says with Arnauld, they mistake cruelty for pity, and openly kill their children thinking they are doing something good to them: it is a «carnage des enfans»¹⁴⁷. Can we excuse the inhumanity of the Chinese? Bayle refers to Chardin and the «sentiment tout à fait inhumain» of the Mingrelions¹⁴⁸: even some Christians believe that «c'est charité de tuer les enfans nouveaux nez quand on n'a pas le moyen de les nourrir»¹⁴⁹.

In 1737 Charles Rollin informs that «cette coutume barbare, d'exposer les enfans, étoit néanmoins d'un usage commun chez les Payens»¹⁵⁰. But when Romulus wanted to people Rome, «il obligea ses sujets d'élever tous leurs enfans mâles, & leurs filles aînées, leur défendant même de livrer à la mort aucune de celles qui naîtroient ensuite, qu'elle n'eût trois ans accomplis: le tout néanmoins si l'enfant n'étoit estropié; & dans ce dernier cas il permettoit aux parens de les exposer, après les avoir fait voir à cinq des plus proches

¹⁴² Ivi 104, cit., vol. III, p. 710b.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁵ Ivi 104, cit., vol. III, p. 711a and n. m; vd. A. ARNAULD, *Quatrième Denonciation de l'Herésie du Peché Philosophique* IV 7, Cologne, N. Schouten, 1690, p. 32; TRIGAULT, *De Christiana Expeditione* I 9, cit., p. 97; TRIGAULT, *Histoire de l'Expedition Chrestienne* I 9, cit., pp. 153-4; RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina* 9, cit., p. 123. Arnauld quotes from Trigault's Latin text and translates it into French; he does not use Trigault's French version, which seems to be used by Bayle.

¹⁴⁶ BAYLE, *Réponse* 104, cit., p. 711a.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*; ARNAULD, *Quatrième Denonciation* IV 7, cit., p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ CHARDIN, *Journal du Voyage* I, cit., p. 78. On the «inhumanité» of the Chinese, vd. BAYLE, *Réponse* 104, cit., p. 711a.

¹⁴⁹ BAYLE, *Réponse* 104, cit., p. 711a.

¹⁵⁰ C. ROLLIN, *Histoire Romaine depuis la Fondation de Rome jusqu'à la Bataille d'Action*, Paris, Veuve Estienne, 1738, vol. I, p. 46.

voisins pour savoirs leur sentiment»¹⁵¹. By his «restriction importante» (three years) Romulus appears «bien plus sage, & plus humaine» than Lycurgus: the child «peut fortifier sa santé», and the parents, «après avoir élevé leur enfant pendant trois ans, se sont accoutumés à l'aimer, & par là auront plus de peine à prendre la cruelle résolution de le faire mourir»¹⁵².

In 1733 John Leland protests against all those who praise the Chinese virtuous atheists: «Certainly we need not [...] their Instructions as to the Duties and Offices of the civil and social Life. For not to mention the inhuman Practice so prevalent among them [the Chinese], of exposing and destroying their Infants...»¹⁵³. Even the English translator of Voltaire's *History* asks him how he would reconcile the «excellent system of government, and [...] humane disposition» of the Chinese and their «barbarous and inhuman practice of exposing infants, which prevails through the whole empire of China»¹⁵⁴. In the 1738 *Divine Legation* William Warburton discusses Bayle's *Réponse* and attacks the Pagans: «that most degenerate and horrid Practice amongst the Ancients, of exposing Infants, was universal; and, had almost erased Morality and Instinct. So that it needed the strongest and severest Check»¹⁵⁵.

Hume certainly knows Locke, Bayle and Rollin; and he certainly dislikes Leland and Warburton. Yet, Montesquieu seems to be his most probable target (as Hume politely puts it: «not altogether in opposition»¹⁵⁶), and the *Lettres Edifiantes* (and Du Halde), together with Rollin's observation, his most probable sources. Even though Bayle's *Réponse* could have been the youthful starting point of his reflections on exposition.

¹⁵¹ Ivi, p. 45.

¹⁵² Ivi, p. 46.

¹⁵³ J. LELAND, «Introduction» to *An Answer To a Late Book Intituled, «Christianity as Old as the Creation»*, Dublin, S. Powell, 1733, vol. I, pp. LIV-LV.

¹⁵⁴ *The Works of M. de Voltaire ... With Notes, Historical and Critical. By Dr. Smollet, and Others*, London, J. Newbery, 1751, vol. I, p. 24 n.

¹⁵⁵ W. WARBURTON, *The Divine Legation of «Moses» demonstrated* II 4, 2 vols., London, F. Gyles, 1738, vol. I, pp. 207-8.

¹⁵⁶ HUME to J. Clephane, 18 April 1750, *Letters*, cit., vol. I, p. 139; vd. TURCO, *Hume e Montesquieu*, cit., p. 62

VI. Conclusion (the maxims of a period).

Hume's opinions on exposition did not pass unnoticed. His «ill-founded» sceptical arguments «puzzled, but did not convince», Wallace denounces, following a Berkeleyan anti-sceptical commonplace¹⁵⁷. Hume, Wallace points out, makes «several concessions» to his adversary¹⁵⁸: he considers «the barbarous and inhuman custom [Hume never calls it «inhuman»], among the antients, of exposing infants, and their unnatural passions, as disadvantages on the side of antiquity [Hume does not say so]»¹⁵⁹. But Hume, Wallace remarks, also acknowledges that «the discouragements to marry in the Popish church are yet greater disadvantages»¹⁶⁰. Convents, Wallace maintains, are «oppressive to those confined in them», «burdensome to the public», and especially «destructive to populousness»¹⁶¹; Hume's comparison with noble families «may sometimes be true, but is not sufficient to shew that convents are not very unfavourable to populousness»¹⁶². Malthus agrees with Wallace¹⁶³.

There can be no «greater barbarity» than to hurt an infant, Adam Smith declares in the *Theory of moral sentiments*¹⁶⁴. The exposition «was a practice allowed of in almost all the states of Greece, even among the polite and civilized Athenians»: «whenever the circumstances of the parent rendered it inconvenient to bring up the

¹⁵⁷ R. WALLACE, «Appendix», in *A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind in antient and modern Times*, Edinburgh, G. Hamilton, J. Balfour, 1753, p. 163.

¹⁵⁸ Ivi, p. 164.

¹⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 165. While he acknowledges that «perhaps too the unnatural lusts of the antients ought to be taken into consideration, as of some moment» (HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 182 n.), Hume says: «I doubt the advantage is here on the side of antiquity. Perhaps, by an odd co[n]nexion of causes, the barbarous practice of the antients might rather render those times more populous» (ivi, pp. 180-1).

¹⁶⁰ WALLACE, *Appendix*, cit., p. 165.

¹⁶¹ Ivi, pp. 165-6 n.

¹⁶² Ivi, p. 166 n. (vd. HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 179, and *supra*, n. 79).

¹⁶³ MALTHUS, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* V, 1807, cit., vol. I, p. 89; vd. MALTHUS, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* IV, 1798, cit., p. 59.

¹⁶⁴ A. SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* VI 2, London, A. Millar, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid, J. Bell, 1759, p. 409. «Custom should never pervert our sentiments [...]. There never can be any such custom. No society could subsist a moment in which the usual strain of mens conduct and behaviour was of a piece with the horrible practice I just now mentioned» (ivi, p. 412).

child, to abandon it to hunger, or to wild beasts, was regarded without blame or censure»¹⁶⁵. Today, Smith goes on, the practice prevails among «all savage nations», and in that «rudest and lowest state of society it is undoubtedly more pardonable than in any other»¹⁶⁶. It is a question of «extreme indigence», but also of «custom» and «remote interest»¹⁶⁷. Even philosophers supported that «horrible abuse» by an «established» custom and «far fetched considerations of public utility»¹⁶⁸. And Hume, according to Smith, is the one who resolves virtue into utility¹⁶⁹. In the *Wealth of Nations* Smith follows Hume (and Du Halde). The cause of this «horrid» practice is «poverty» and the «difficulty which a labourer finds in bringing up a family»; the effect is propagation¹⁷⁰: «marriage is encouraged in China, not by the profitableness of children, but by the liberty of destroying them»¹⁷¹.

Yet, between Smith and Hume some distance remains. With regard to the ancients, Palamedes takes exposition as a proof that we have no universal standard of morals (only fashion, vogue, law, and custom); the narrator that we have it (utility and pleasure). However, exposition does not deny our instinct: its cause is our love of progeny. With regard to the Chinese, Hume makes some (seemingly stylistic) revisions: following the *Memoranda*, the essay on *Populousness* calls the practice «barbarous»; in 1760 it becomes a «cruel» practice, and in 1770 it remains only a «practice»¹⁷².

¹⁶⁵ Ivi VI 2, p. 410. Also for Smith exposing is killing: «the exposition, that is, the murder of new born infants» (*ibidem*).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁷ Ivi VI 2, pp. 410-1.

¹⁶⁸ Ivi VI 2, p. 411.

¹⁶⁹ Ivi VI 3, p. 520; vd. Ivi IV 1, p. 338.

¹⁷⁰ A. SMITH, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols., London, W. Strahan, T. Cadell, 1776, vol. I, pp. 87-8; vd. DU HALDE, *Description Géographique*, cit., 1736, vol. II, p. 87; HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 180.

¹⁷¹ SMITH, *An Inquiry*, cit., p. 88. «In all great towns several are every night exposed in the street or drowned like puppies in the water» (*ibidem*).

¹⁷² According to the *Memoranda* exposition is a «barbarous» custom, which is diffused also in modern China. According to *Of the Populousness*, exposition is an ancient and modern «barbarous» practice: «the barbarous practice of the antients [...] China the only country, where this *barbarous* practice of exposing children prevails at present» (HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 181; italics mine). In 1760 the «barbarous practice» of the modern Chinese be-

Even though he deems Herodotus a «superstitious» historian¹⁷³, Hume seems to have learned his lesson: to account for others' customs and practices (their causes and effects) without blaming them, and without forgetting that «each [nation] is persuaded that its own are by far the best»¹⁷⁴. We should not try a Greek by the common law of England¹⁷⁵. We should have «indulgence» for the manners and customs of different ages and places¹⁷⁶, instead of measuring them by a «standard, unknown to the persons»¹⁷⁷ (the passage was marked by T.S. Eliot in his student textbook¹⁷⁸). As Hume the Historian says in 1754: «it seems unreasonable to judge of the measures, embraced during one period, by the maxims which prevail in another»¹⁷⁹.

Unlike his sources, friends and enemies, Hume does not speak of exposition with the horror it deserves. He coolly (and traditionally) calls it a «barbarous» practice. À la Montaigne we could say: we may call it «barbarous» in respect of the rules of reason and nature, but not in respect of us that exceed them in all kinds of barba-

comes a «cruel practice»: «the barbarous practice of the antients [...] China, the only country where this *cruel* practice of exposing children prevails at present» (HUME, *Of the Populousness of antient Nations*, in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 4 vols., London, A. Millar, 1760, vol. II, p. 196; italics mine). In 1770 it is simply a «practice»: «the barbarous practice of the ancients [...] China, the only country where this *practice* of exposing children prevails at present» (HUME, *Of the Populousness of antient Nations*, in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 4 vols., London, T. Cadell, Edinburgh, A. Kincaid, A. Donaldson, 1770, vol. II, p. 193; italics mine). The change has a probable stylistic origin: Hume has just referred to the same «barbarous practice» of the ancients and, in order to avoid the repetition, makes the practice of the modern Chinese less barbarous (first cruel, then just a practice) than that of the ancient Greeks. Yet, whether intentionally or not, Hume renders less barbarous the practice of the modern (and more populous) Chinese than that of the ancient Greeks: is populousness a standard of civilization also from a stylistic point of view?

¹⁷³ HUME, *Of the Populousness*, 1752, cit., p. 260 n.

¹⁷⁴ HERODOTUS, *Histories* III 38, 4 vols., London, W. Heinemann, LOEB, 1928, vol. II, pp. 50-1.

¹⁷⁵ HUME, *A Dialogue*, 1751, cit., pp. 232-3.

¹⁷⁶ *Ivi*, p. 232.

¹⁷⁷ *Ivi*, p. 233.

¹⁷⁸ L.A. CUDDY, *T.S. Eliot and the Poetics of Evolution. Sub/Versions of Classicism, Culture, and Progress*, London, Associated Univ. Prs., 2000, p. 111.

¹⁷⁹ HUME, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I. Containing The Reigns of James I and Charles I*, Edinburgh, Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, 1754, p. 213.

rism¹⁸⁰. Exposing the children is certainly illegal¹⁸¹ and «cruel»¹⁸², «shocking to nature» and «pretty unusual»¹⁸³. How do we expose ourselves and our children today? Like the modern French we still prefer to abandon their care to others, which is «very tempting» to our natural indolence¹⁸⁴.

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¹⁸⁰ MONTAIGNE, *Des Cannibales*, cit., pp. 380-1.

¹⁸¹ FORBES, *The Institutes of the Law of Scotland*, cit., vol. II, p. 99.

¹⁸² HUME, *Of the Populousness of antient Nations*, 1760, cit., p. 196.

¹⁸³ HUME, *Of the Populousness of antient Nations*, 1752, cit., p. 182.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.