



Hume and the Enlightenment

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Hume and Rawls on the Stability of a Society's System of Justice

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With *Political Liberalism*, Rawls's position on justice seems to converge with Hume's view that justice is an artificial virtue. However, their reasons for treating justice as an artificial virtue are totally different. Hume regards it as artificial because it arises only because members of society conclude that without enforced rules of legitimate possession, the advantages of society will not be secure. As Hume sees it, the system of these rules must also be stable, since it could not otherwise provide the assurance on which these advantages are based.

On the other hand, Rawls regards justice as an artificial virtue because it cannot be based on any one comprehensive morality in a society accepting that people may reasonably differ in their moral views. Rawls also argues that a system of just institutions must be stable but on the grounds that a system of just institutions could not otherwise constitute an ongoing system that provides fair arrangements for any generation. I show that the different reasons Hume and Rawls have for requiring a system of justice to be stable reveal fundamental differences in their accounts of our sense of justice.