

Between vice, moral and politeness: the quarrel of luxury in the 18th century British

Entre vício, moral e polidez: a querela do luxo no século XVIII britânico

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ABSTRACT:

It aims to present how the term luxury, mainly because of politeness, changed in Great Britain between the 17th and 18th centuries, becoming an object of quarrel, and, also, how this quarrel developed until the second half of the 18th century. It investigates the treatment provided by outstanding philosophers for the discussion, the contextual bases imposed by the polite national identity, as well as the relationship in which the term creates not only with politeness but also with commerce, scientific progress, and comfort. It expects to be possible to not only identify Britain's private luxury quarrel but that it becomes viable to take such a term, such as politeness, as an interpretative key proper to its time.

KEYWORDS: luxury; politeness; commerce.

RESUMO:

Tem-se por objetivo apresentar como o termo luxury, principalmente por conta da polidez, altera-se na Grã-Bretanha, entre os séculos XVII e XVIII, tornando-se objeto de querela e, ainda, como essa querela se desenvolve até a segunda metade do século XVIII. Para isso, investiga-se o tratamento fornecido por filósofos marcantes para a discussão, as bases contextuais impostas pela identidade nacional polida, e, também, a relação que o termo cria não apenas com a polidez, mas, também, com o comércio, o progresso científico e o conforto. Espera-se que seja possível não apenas identificar a querela do luxo particular à Grã-Bretanha, mas que se torne viável tomar tal termo, tal como a polidez, como uma chave interpretativa própria à época.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: luxo; polidez; comércio.

1. In 1751, in the second section of *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, David Hume states that “Luxury, or a refinement on the pleasures and conveniences of life, had not long been supposed the

source of every corruption in government, and the immediate cause of faction, sedition, civil wars, and the total loss of liberty”, which led to the consideration that it was unequivocally a vice. However, the Scotsman then reveals something quite interesting: there are authors who try to demonstrate “that such refinements rather tend to the increase of industry, civility, and arts” and, in this way, they attribute to luxury “regulate a new our MORAL as well as POLITICAL sentiments” and, consequently, what was previously considered pernicious or reprehensible is now represented “as laudable or innocent” (HUME, 2010, S 2, P 2, § 16).

The value of this passage, far from consisting merely in expressing the Scottish philosopher's relationship with the luxury quarrel, lies in informing, in an almost precise way, the situation in which this term (*luxury*¹) found itself in his time, and how it was getting to the point of meaning (at least to some extent) something “praiseworthy and innocent”. Ferguson, Kames and Smith, Hume's contemporaries, did not fail to agree, despite their idiosyncrasies, that - at least as far as politeness, liberal arts and fine letters were concerned - luxury would undeniably be beneficial to a nation's progress and success. As the philosopher rightly observed, it was a shift from a meaning laden with reprehensible valuation to an evaluation as something innocent - and for the second half of the 18th century, I would venture to say, to some extent, even a virtuous one. These authors do not fail to note, whenever they approach this quarrel, that the term *luxury* does not have a uniform meaning and, at the same time, how this is associated, on the one hand, with the refinements demanded by politeness² and, on the other, with the vices that seem inherent to it (a point that Benjamin Norton Defoe's and Samuel Johnson's dictionaries do not even question). This reveals not only the tensions surrounding the term *luxury*, but also illuminates, at least to some extent, the notion that these tensions are the fruit of the polite culture that flourished in the 18th century. This makes the assertion that “the interest in luxury, as well as the oscillations that its

¹ The term luxury, in the British dictionaries *A Table Alphabetical* by Robert Cawdrey (1604, 1617), *An English Expositor* by John Bullokar (1616, 1621, 1641), *Glossographia or a Dictionary* by Thomas Blount (1656), *The English Parnassus* by Joshua Poole (1657), *An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* by John Wilkins (1668), *An English Dictionary* by Elisha Coles (1677), *Gazophylacium Anglicanum* by Richard Hogarth (1689), *A New English Dictionary* by John Kersey (1702), *A New English Dictionary* by Benjamin Norton Defoe (1735) and *A Dictionary of the English Language* by Samuel Johnson (1755), means, in general, lasciviousness, desire, vice, libidinosity, and in the dictionaries of 1755 it comes to include the category of luxury in objects - which would be related to desires taken as vicious. As far as philosophers are concerned, as this text shows, in the 17th century luxury was seen as a vice and a human passion, in the first half of the 18th century its meaning began to oscillate and signify elements that received this valuation, while in the second half of the 18th century, there was an effort to treat luxury as a trait of material objects. It is worth noting that the dictionaries by Cawfrey, Wilkins, Defoe and Scott also use the term lechery, which would be another way of talking about luxury. The term lust was not taken into account because, in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was much more associated with a strong desire or concupiscence than with the meanings attributed to luxury - even though, in some cases, the dictionaries point to an alternative meaning for the word, this occurs (in the few cases) as the last option. All dictionaries mentioned above are available at LAME (Lexicons of Early Modern English) at the University of Toronto, and all following comments on British dictionaries refer to them.

² As Klein (2003) states, this term goes beyond the relationship with good manners, refinement and civility and, because of its scope in 18th century Britain, it comes to be seen as an interpretative key specific to the period.

meaning has undergone, developed alongside the culture of politeness” and that, consequently, “luxury can be taken as an interpretative key to the 18th century³”, very licentious considerations⁴.

If, on the one hand, the term *luxury* changes little in British dictionaries dating from 1604, with Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabetical*, to 1755⁵, with Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* and Defoe's *A New Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, the same cannot be said of philosophers who wrote at that time - and were selected for the investigation that follows, which, due to the brevity of existence, neglects some and sheds light on others, which can undoubtedly provide a certain fragility to the present investigation. That said, our inquiry on the term *luxury* can be divided into three phases: the first begins with Francis Bacon in 1620, with the *Novum Organum*, encompassing Hobbes (1651) and Locke (1689); the second begins in 1705 with Mandeville's *The Grumbling Hive*, and encompasses Addison and Shaftesbury; the third, finally, most likely begins with Hume, in 1758, with his *Essays*, and encompasses Smith (1759), Ferguson (1767), Kames (1774) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1792).

2. One thing that can be observed, right from the start, about the diversity of treatments of the term is that “while in the 17th century the British dedicated themselves to the containment of socially harmful passions, in the 18th century they focused primarily on affections considered naturally sociable” (SCHIMITTER *apud* RIBEIRO, 2019). As far as the 17th century is concerned, this can be attributed, at first, to the Renaissance iconography that associated *luxury* with sin due to excess, effeminacy and gluttony, alongside the growing number of sumptuary laws - implemented mainly by the Tudor dynasty - that sought to control such vices and manners, as well as the use of imported products. The force of the Gospel of Matthew (7:6) - “Do not give the holy things to the dogs, nor throw your pearls to the pigs, for they may trample them underfoot and turn and tear you to pieces” - as well as the assumption that the fall of the Roman Empire was due, at least in part, to the excess of luxury and the arts, undoubtedly formed the 17th century view of luxury as something pernicious that had to be contained. It is no wonder that, with the birth of the ideal of scientific progress, led in Britain by Bacon, there was a huge effort to show not only that these advances were a divine gift, but that they would generate in society “from united labors” (BACON, 2014, p. 89), the benefits of the discoveries would extend “to mankind in general” and could “former forever” (BACON, 2014, p. 104). Given the promises made by the author of the *Novum Organum*, it is to be expected that luxury, associated with the benefits of scientific progress, would weaken the exchange of attention given to the Gospel of Matthew for the book of

³ Something that Rousseau had already suggested in his Discourses.

⁴ The passage by David Hume mentioned above is not meant to be a foundation, it merely serves as a contextual expression of what will be said.

⁵ There are other dictionaries published later than this time, but none of them propose to introduce this term.

Ecclesiastes: “the spirit of man is like the lamp of God, with which he searches the interior of all secrets” (3:11)⁶. These are some of the elements that meant that British seventeenth-century luxury was not an element of dispute, but only of disapproval and little attention, and this continued until the writings of Hobbes and Locke⁷.

3. However, contempt and disapproval of *luxury* were replaced by a peculiar attention that the term started to receive in 1705, together with the term *politeness*, in Mandeville's *The Grumbling Hive*. Considered a hobbist⁸, the author rises up against the disapproval of the first term, and begins to consider it insofar as it benefits the nation and brings out politeness and ingenuity. This is the first movement that attempts to give *luxury* a new meaning, apart from vice⁹, since it would be nothing more than an action without “that it might either be injurious to any of the society, or ever render himself less serviceable to others” (MANDEVILLE, 2018, p. 17)¹⁰. This, alongside Shaftesbury and Addison, in 1711, became the subject of a modest debate about whether *luxury* was capable of promoting politeness and ingenuity, or lewdness and vice. It can be seen that, while in the 17th century *luxury* was no more than a reprehensible passion, at the beginning of the 18th century the term began to oscillate in its meaning, encompassing articles and manners; in other words, there was a certain materialization of human passions in objects.

At the same time, an interesting point is that the term *polite* ceases to mean, in the British dictionaries, the simple act of making objects glossy, and becomes synonymous with elegance, distinction and good manners in John Kersey's *A New English Dictionary* of 1702 – a time when Mandeville, Addison and Shaftesbury popularized debates about the term, associating it with refinement and civility. In other words, at the same time as the luxury quarrel was being born in a modest way in Britain, refinements were immediately associated with *luxury*, which in turn had its meaning reconsidered. The clue to this change in values from the 17th to the 18th century seems to lie not only in the anxieties related to vice, Christianity, the fall of Rome, effeminacy and the promises of the 17th century scientific ideal. Mandeville grounds his replacement of the term *luxury* on aspects that he claims to see in his time: the rising of a new class of poor people that emerged due to the import trade, the increase in health due to scientific

⁶ Highlighted by Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning*.

⁷ These authors were selected not only because of their importance in their century, but also because of their reverberations in the following century.

⁸ Berkeley, in his *Treatise on the Principles of Human Knowledge*, makes this accusation against Mandeville. The term “hobbist” referred essentially to a group which, as the name might suggest, was based on Hobbes' theory. What may be surprising is that this group was known for trying to “overthrow or subvert all those principles of government that have preserved the peace of this kingdom throughout the ages” (CLARENDON apud MONTEIRO, 1998, p. 8). In short, being a “hobbist” was synonymous with subversion, and the Hobbes's books were accused of heterodoxy and placed on the Index.

⁹ This, along with virtue, for the author, were nothing more than conventions made by the rulers to tame the selfishness of men.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that the problem, for Mandeville's detractors, would consist in the author's assertion that all human acts are the result of selfishness and the desire to satisfy appetites.

and refined progresses (“promised” by Bacon), as well as the increase in female participation in commerce and in the education of good manners.

4. These considerations seem to point directly to the profusion of debates that emerge forcefully in the second half of the 18th century on politeness, good manners, vices, virtues and *luxury*. The desires of the British 17th century, and their need to repress deleterious passions, are constantly confronted with the 18th century notion that, through refinement and politeness (provided, to some extent, by *luxury*), sociable passions would be aroused. This is such that the fear of effeminacy and the fall of the nation become shallow considerations about *luxury* and the benefits it undeniably brings to the nation. *Luxury* is considered, in most cases, as no longer simply vicious, but pernicious when “without any relish for the pleasures of ambition, study, or conversation, is a mark of stupidity, and is incompatible with any vigour of temper or genius” (HUME, 1987, p. 269), while it is common ground that “the fine arts, even when too much indulged, produce one good effect, which is, to soften and humanize our manners” (KAMES, 2007, p. 330). The questions about luxury developed by Hume, Ferguson, Kames and Smith not only seek to investigate the extent to which it can be beneficial to society, or whether it is a reprehensible vice; they also aim to demystify the 17th century ideal and reposition the quarrel firmly, so as to question its role in politeness, history, culture, social hierarchy, slavery, women's place and commerce.

As for the “opposition” to the ideals and debates of the third phase of luxury, Mary Wollstonecraft stands out. At first glance, she seems to be trying to recover the treatment given to this theme by 17th century British authors. However, on closer inspection, it is easy to see that this is not (at least completely) the case. 18th century Great Britain was not only the stage for the growing debate on *luxury* and politeness; it stood out for having among its best-selling books those on philosophy (SHEER, 2006), which were divided mainly between those on theoretical morality (like most of the aforementioned authors) and those on practical morality - which consisted, roughly speaking, of norms or manuals for virtuous and polite behavior¹¹, and made up a vast British catalog on the subject (DAVIDSON, 2004). Of the latter type of moral philosophy, John Gregory (1761) for female education and Lord Chesterfield (1774) for male refinement stand out with great relevance for the time¹². What both authors agreed on was, in most cases, to condemn *luxury* in its entirety and consider it a particular vice in the female sex. If, for example, *luxury* at the table was reprehensible in a man, it became repugnant in women (GREGORY, 2015). Women were not only seen as inferior beings, in need of being guided by men, but also placed at their disposal as an element that refines character, or a mere object of *luxury*. Wollstonecraft sheds a

¹¹ See my *Educação moral e poesia no século XVIII britânico*.

¹² As shown extensively in *Educação moral e poesia no século XVIII britânico*.

particular light on the limitation of such “blessings bequeathed to the human race”, that would supposedly have begun to face 17th century limitations.

Although the benefits of politeness are still visible today when it comes to good coexistence, mutual respect and, in some cases, a genuine commitment to civility, I can't help but notice what was linked to the history of this ideal. If, on the one hand, the concern of the second and third phases of luxury to discuss and point to the benefits of politeness is noteworthy, we cannot ignore the restricted role of women of that time, or and the “contrary” considerations that Wollstonecraft makes on the subject. Although Hume sees slavery as something deleterious and the fruit of barbaric nations devoid of politeness, it is impossible to ignore the racism to which he is committed - even if he was aware of the debates of his time (BALIEIRO, 2021). At the same time as there was an effort to show how *luxury* didn't weaken a nation, an attempt was made to defend it against any kind of effeminacy [taken as a kind of defect in male virility that was lost in feminine ways (CLERY, 2004), so that men's masculinity was at stake]. In other words, it is a matter of adopting what Davidson institutes: identifying hypocrisy and declaring it under its true name¹³.

5. In short, this modest text not only undertakes an investigation into the ideas of *luxury* and *politeness*, but seeks to contextualize them. The aim is to promote a vision, albeit limited, of the British luxury quarrel, which differs profoundly from what can be seen in Monzani's *Desejo e Prazer na Idade Moderna*, in that it does not universalize the ideals of *luxury* as, for example, something natural to human beings, a product of the imagination or something that does not mix with commerce. The aim is to highlight the characteristics that were particular to British *luxury* in the contexts in which it was inserted. Within the scope of this research, this study is divided into four stages: **I-** *Luxury* in the 17th century; **II-** *Luxury* in the first half of the 18th century; **III-** *Luxury* in the second half of the 18th century; **IV-** Final considerations - those can be found, respectively, in sections I, II, III and IV. It is also hoped that, with the following timid study, it will not only be possible to identify the *luxury* quarrel particular to Great Britain, but that it will become feasible to take this term, as well as *politeness*, as an interpretative key appropriate to its time and, at the same time, like Davidson's analysis (2004), promote reflections on

¹³ The term *hipocrisy* is inserted by Davidson (2004) with the aim of noting a gap between what is said and what is done and, at the same time, noting the uncertainties related to self-control and good manners - thus removing any veil that could be named politeness. This nomenclature would be a way for the hypocrites to sophisticate the justifications for their actions, putting forward arguments in favor of good behavior that would (at least that's what they believed) have a direct impact on social progress. For example: a thorough examination could reveal the real intentions of a man's heart and the authenticity of his good manners; by observing good acts, virtue would finally be found; under these pretexts, the term *hipocrisy* is considered inappropriate by moralists, to the detriment of the term *politeness* (Davidson, 2004).

certain ideals that are still present in contemporary times, insofar as hypocrisy is revealed to be the basis of some customs that have resisted (even if under the imposition of adaptations) the force of time.

I

1. In *A filosofia política de Adam Ferguson: uma interpretação*, Eveline Hauck states that this author took the Roman Empire as an example of a polite nation that should be evaluated by moderns, insofar as it could show which elements could lead to the corruption and downfall of the state in which they lived. This movement, it should be remembered, was to some extent made by other authors, such as Hume, Kames and Smith. However, if, for these authors who constituted the third phase of *luxury*, Rome served as an example of power and the spread of refined arts, allowing us to investigate how it would be possible to transport the reasons for its downfall to the 18th century states, the situation in the seventeenth century is somewhat different: for the philosophers of that century, their example would be that of scientific progress and the reasons and the question surrounding its downfall would be associated with this.

Part of the reason why the British 17th and 18th centuries devoted their attention to the Roman Empire as one of the greatest powers in existence, and were concerned with understanding the reasons for its downfall, with the aim of avoiding them, was due to the studies of Machiavelli - who directly influenced Bacon, Hobbes and Locke (POCOCK, 1975). In the *Discorsi*, the Florentine philosopher, on the one hand, observes the strength of Rome as a power that would serve as an example to be followed and, on the other hand, points out some of the reasons for its downfall; among them, the following stand out: economic inequality resulting from the new agrarian laws, the exchange of ancient religion for Christianity, idleness (fostered by the liberal arts and fine letters) and the loss of military *virtú*

In the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli pays little attention to luxury. But even so, this term can be taken as something opposed to virtue and which, when acquired by the Empire, along with pleasures, contributes to the "manners the conqueror becomes infected" (MAQUIAVEL, 2004, chapter XIX, § 8). In other words, in line with what happens throughout the 17th century, the term receives little attention, and there is little doubt that it is something that corrupts, and consists of a vice.

As far as British philosophers are concerned, it is noteworthy that Bacon, in his *Novum Organum*, divides history into three moments: "1. The Greek. 2. The Roman. 3. Our own, that is the philosophy of the western nations of Europe" (BACON, 2014, p. 56), because, according to the author, when we look at the Middle Ages, the relevance of its scientific progress is unfortunate because of the theology and scholasticism that dominated it, so that it should be disregarded in the course of history; for this author, theology (coming from Christianity, as Machiavelli pointed out) would be highlighted as the main cause

of the fall of the Roman Empire a – precisely because of the scientific restrictions that were imposed on it. Hobbes, on his turn, in *Leviathan*, takes the great Roman emperors as examples that should serve every statesman, while noting the titles of honor as vestiges of the apogee of that era, and attributes its fall to the excess of freedom (to follow natural appetites) provided to the people. Locke, on the other hand, in the *Second Treatise of Government*, points to Rome's apogee in the equality between free men where "no natural superiority or subjection" (LOCKE, 2005, chapter VIII, § 9); its downfall would consist, for this author, precisely in the corruption of the *commonwealth* resulting from the separation between people and senate.

Although these are not, at first glance, notes specifically about *luxury*, they reveal the culture of civic humanism that influenced 17th century Britain and the first steps in the debate about the term. It can be seen that *luxury* was no more than a vice to be repressed, it did not mix with the scientific progress observed in Rome and in the discoveries related to "printing, gunpowder, and the compass" which, because of their virtue, "changed the appearance and state of the whole world: first in literature, then in warfare, and lastly in navigation" (BACON, 2014 p. 105). The fall of Rome, for these authors, concerned the corruption of values, not the advances promoted by human ingenuity - these would serve as an example of human progress for the British of the 17th century.

2. Alongside the influence of the "Roman values", inserted mainly by Machiavelli, another extremely important point for understanding the relationship between the British 17th century and *luxury* were the sumptuary laws influenced by Roman notions, with the aim to control the vice seen as coming from *luxury*. These laws controlled not only the expenses that individuals (mainly from the lower classes) could have, but also determined what type of clothing was appropriate for each class, what manners could be appropriate, what type of food could be consumed, how (and by whom) imported articles should be bought, *etc.* They were especially profuse between the reigns of Henry VII (who reigned between 1509-1547) and Elizabeth I (1558-1603). However, noticing that these laws had little influence on the customs and expenses of the citizens, James I (1603-1625) ended up abolishing most of them - although, it should be remembered, the citizens of the 17th century did not fail to feel their influence in terms of the use of their finances and clothing.

With the growing decline of sumptuary laws, along with the rejection of scholastic and theological ideals, it is not by chance that we see (especially since Bacon) the switch of attention from the Gospel of Matthew, "Do not give the holy things to dogs, or throw your pearls to the pigs, for they might trample them underfoot and turn and tear you to pieces" (7:6), to the book of Ecclesiastes, according to which "the spirit of man is like the lamp of God, with which he searches the interior of all secrets" (3:11). The authors of this period endeavored to show how scientific and philosophical progress was not a human

usurpation of divine powers; Bacon, Hobbes and Locke sought to shed light on biblical passages that could not only highlight this, but at the same time question scholastic power.

Add to this the increase in the importation of mechanical and liberal arts brought about by the discoveries of the printing press, gunpowder and the sewing needle, and we can see Bacon's concern with *commerce* (a term that in 17th century dictionaries¹⁴ usually means conversation and the exchange of ideas), Hobbes' concern with how commerce (*traffick*) should be regulated by the sovereign and Locke's association of the term *commerce* with monetary exchange. This points not only to the importation of the arts and their relationship with conviviality, but also to noting the arts, exchange and conversation as important elements in scientific progress, which occurred as a result of the decline in the influence of sumptuary laws and the need to take into account civic notions interpreted from Machiavelli - of the corruption of manners due to the luxuries and pleasures of other nations.

3. Bacon published the *Novum Organum* in 1620, a time when scholastic doctrine still had some strength. The sumptuary laws, despite being progressively revoked by James I, were still in force, and the question of the fall of Rome was manifest. Aware that *luxury* could not be considered anything other than a human vice [placing it, in 1605 in *The Advancement of Learning*, on the list of "savage and unreclaimed desires" (BACON, 2021, 7.2)], he tried not to lose sight of it. 73], he wasted no time in drawing attention to the consideration that "let none be alarmed at the objection of the arts and sciences becoming depraved to malevolent or luxurious purposes and the like, for the same can be said of every worldly good; talent, courage, strength, beauty, riches, light itself, and the rest" (BACON, 2014, p. 106). In other words, it was an effort by the protagonist of the British scientific ideal to warn that the consequences of the progress he advocated could not be associated with *luxury* and other passions of the same kind.

In 1651, in his *Leviathan*, when talking about trade (*traffick*) and imports, Hobbes limits himself to considering that they should be controlled by the sovereign, not even considering *luxury*. This is defined by the author as "love of the same [we are talking about people, the consideration comes after the definition of carnal desire], acquired from Ruminatiion, that is Imagination of Pleasure past" (HOBBS, § 21, chapter 6, 2002); something that, in his Chapter XII, is placed on the list of vices that lead men to associate themselves with religion in the hope of becoming honorable. Later, the author observes, in Chapter XXX, that the *luxury* of private men could not lead to the wealth of the nation being defrauded - something that will be further explored by Mandeville later. In other words, although the term is still considered by the philosopher of Malmbesbury to be a passion, at a certain point it is placed as a kind of consumption that would not harm a nation.

¹⁴ See Note 1, above.

In 1689, in Chapter VII of the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke treats *luxury* as a passion distinct from virtue that is mixed with ambition; in 1695, in Chapter XXI of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he informs us that *luxury* is associated with debauchery, and cannot produce any happiness. In short, the 17th century authors tended not to go beyond the notion that *luxury* was a passion and a vice that should be condemned. Furthermore, that it is in no way associated with the scientific progress that influenced *commerce*, *traffick* and importation. That said, what stands out (in addition to what has been mentioned above) is that, although Hobbes and Bacon don't even try to comment on politeness, Locke, in 1695, in *Essay*, uses this term to note that his work would at least serve for polite conversation - just 10 years before the debates that emerge forcefully from the second phase of luxury.

In addition, it is worth noting that the end of the 17th century [a time when sumptuary laws and scholastic influence were no longer so influential] began to witness an increase in import trade and aristocratic luxury (BERG, 2003), while it also witnessed debating salons with a view to polite debate on literature and philosophy (CLERY, 2004) - it was at this time that Locke commented that polite debate is one of the possible uses of his study, the time when the trinity of British poets began to be popularized as an example of good education¹⁵, and when there was a strong incentive to create products and trade (BERG and EGER, 2003). The aspects presented so far outline not only how the scientific ideal, *luxury*, *commerce* and politeness begin to be related in a timid way, but also show part of the contextual movements that contributed to this, albeit modestly, beginning to happen. Given the birth of a new commercial culture at the end of the 17th century, at least in part due to what has been said so far, the second phase of *luxury* will take advantage of its antecedents and the new context in which it is inserted to promote a revision of the term *luxury*, which will come to be associated, from 1705 onwards, in Mandeville's *The Grumbling Hive*, with the ideal of politeness.

II

1. "And as happy as we are in this Establishment at home; we are still held in a perpetual Alarm" says (Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of) Shaftesbury in 1711, "by the Aspect of Affairs abroad, and by the Terror of that Power, which ere Mankind had well recover'd the Misery of those barbarous Ages consequent to the Roman Yoke, has again threaten'd the World with a Universal Monarchy, and A a new Abyss of Ignorance and Superstition" (SHAFTESBURY, 2000, p. 134). This passage stands out for its presentation of a concern that progressively grew among 18th British authors: that of having their happiness interrupted by an end similar to that of the Romans on account of foreign affairs – in a way

¹⁵ On this subject, see *Educação moral e poesia no século XVIII britânico*.

similar to what Machiavelli says about the capacity of external luxury to corrupt manners. Furthermore, Shaftesbury observes, in the first section of the second part of his *Soliloquy*, that shortly after the empire had rid itself of barbaric manners, ascended in terms of the arts and discovered a superior form of poetry, its freedom was lost. However, the philosopher doesn't just take one thing as a consequence of the other. Despite noting that the first model of *gentlemen* comes from the Romans, Shaftesbury attributes the fall of that empire, on the one hand, to the *luxury* present in its courts and, on the other hand, to the lack of military virtues (as Machiavelli informs us in the *Discorsi*), in exchange for an increase only in the refined arts. In other words, for Anthony Ashley Cooper, refinement and politeness alone could not be considered something that would bring about the downfall of a nation; but the exclusion of military virtues in exchange for foreign trade (as well as the *luxury* associated with it) could undoubtedly make a "happy nation" fear for its future.

Addison, in the first volume of *The Spectator*, like Shaftesbury, admires, in no. 62, the beautiful architecture (unlike the Gothic) and poetry the Roman empire left as an example of one of the most superior sensibilities for the refined arts; and, if in no. 34 he attributes its fall to the triumvirate that defended any of its members without the slightest scruple, he later states that Rome "sunk into those two Vices of a quite different Nature, Luxury and Avarice" (ADDISON, § 4, no. 55, 2004). Although Shaftesbury and Addison are on the same page, the same cannot be said of the third figure who marks this era. Mandeville, unlike them, attributes the Roman prominence to the great value they placed on moral and refined virtues, the honors and flattery they would have founded (which is in line with what Hobbes states) and the example of warlike courage - virtues that the author seems to suggest were lost with the rise of Christianity and, consequently, triggered its downfall.

In short, Rome remained an example, in different ways, for the British of the first half of the 18th century, and questions about its downfall did not cease to be debated; what changed was the focus of the authors' concern: while in the previous century the focus was on scientific progress, in the 18th century the emphasis was on politeness. This concern with noting Roman prominence in terms of the arts, refinement, morality and virtue was partly so that, as Shaftesbury explains, we could deal with the desire to end up as the empire that served, in so many ways, as an example to be followed, and, on the other hand, it allowed us to question whether or not the moderns were superior to the Romans – the so-called "Battle of the Books", as Hauck (2020) informs us, consisted of debates of this kind –; as can be seen, to some extent, in the defense of a national identity through the poetry provided by the British trinity, which was often taken as superior because of its refinement, politeness and capacity for moral education¹⁶.

¹⁶ See *Educação moral e poesia no século XVIII britânico*.

2. *Commerce*, in turn, for Addison and Shaftesbury, remains in use in the sense of a friendly conversation, and *traffick* continues as exchanges, in the sense we currently assign to commerce – with an emphasis on the fear, represented by the second, that imports might bring corruption. The distinction in the treatment of the first term is made with Mandeville throughout his *Fable of the Bees*, who, like Locke, employs both the meaning of versatile sense and that of exchange and conversation. In addition, the author became one of the first 18th century writers to protest against sumptuary laws, because. For this philosopher (observation 367), they were sacrifices demanded of the people, with which the powerful clerics could be delighted.

At least in part, for the author of the *Fable*, *luxury* from *commerce* (with the double meaning of exchange and conversation) would actually make a nation stronger, as it would allow imports to improve the economy, health and comfort of individuals - even the poorest, as they would have more opportunities for work and comfort. However, this was not the relationship that was generally nurtured with *luxury*; at the beginning of the 18th century, there was an explosion in the import trade and, along with this, there were fears of female indulgence (HUNDERT, 2003), as well as a relationship between the import of these articles and the notion of a debilitating and corrosive social evil that would contribute to plebeian idleness, urban chaos (BERG, 2003) and the effeminacy of male virility (CLERY, 2004).

As Styles (2003) observes, one of the poorest British plebeian families (the Lathams), between 1720 and 1760, was able to acquire small luxury items, especially with regard to clothing, despite their unfortunate condition – an observation which, if this family is taken as an example of plebeians in the 18th century, helps to make the upper classes feel fearful about what might follow the rise of the lower class. Also according to Styles (2003), at the beginning of the century, there was a profusion of fairs with affordable materials which, as well as becoming an environment for socializing, encouraged raffles that promoted luxury prizes (such as hats or dresses) – which contributed to the consumer culture and the desire to acquire such elements becoming popular among commoners; in addition, it is worth noting that there were special occasions when it was necessary to adorn oneself and demonstrate good taste in fashion, such as Sundays and festive seasons (STYLES, 2003).

Clothing contributed not only to the movement of commerce, but also to the expansion of the culture of gallantry, since interest between the sexes was related to good taste in fashion. In short, the trade of luxury goods provided a new type of sociability that, to a greater or lesser degree, influenced the lives of all those who were considered citizens of 18th century Britain; it was a means of presenting politeness, refinement, promoting gallantry and sociability; Because of this, it became a culture and a mode of sociability among the commoners, who set aside their mornings to adorn themselves "deck themselves in their gaudiest clothes, and have open doors and splendid entertainments, for the reception

and treating of their relations and friends, who visit them on that occasion, from each neighbouring town" (BOURNE *apud* STYLES, 2003, p. 112). 112).

3. In other words, the import and trade in *luxury* that was increasing in society and providing more opportunities for a lower class, on the one hand, could be seen – as in Mandeville's case – as a strong indication of the success of a nation and the improvement of its sociability, and on the other hand, in most cases, some sought to highlight the destructive potential of *luxury* not on account of male effeminacy and female depravity, but also of the chaos that the lower classes could cause. Alongside all this, at the beginning of the 18th century, there was a growing concern with *comfort*, which, due to the new polished culture and the profusion of the *luxury* trade, was given a new meaning - and, in an almost analogous condition to this very term, most of the dictionaries dating between 1605 and 1755¹⁷ did not register any major changes in its meaning. *Comfort* consisted of an internal condition that was confused with consolation, it was like promoting a certain softening of the hardships suffered, it was an emotional state. However, with the increase in trade and the creation of new jobs, the term came to represent a category of qualities of material objects capable of producing immediate physical satisfaction (CROWLEY, 2003)

If *luxury*, in the 17th century, tended to mean only a type of reprehensible passion, the change that we can see emerging in the following century concerns the opposition of its meaning to "necessity", which consequently affects the new meaning of *comfort*, to the extent that both terms cease to exist only in an emotional sphere and start to materialize in objects, on account of commerce, in life and in the sociability that emerges. *Luxury* was able to act as a thermometer of the capacity of work to make existence more comfortable than that of a "animal-like 'primitive Simplicity'" and "The diversity of production possible with a high degree of division of labor had allowed the 'accommodation' of 'an industrious and frugal peasant' to exceed that of a ruler in savage societies" (CROWLEY, 2004, p. 136). These elements helped to associate trade, due to an improvement in sociability and refinement, with a linear narrative in which progress could be seen (CLERY, 2004) and, at the same time, the novelty of class expenditure was a cause for concern (BERG, 2003).

While the debates about *luxury* and *comfort* were modest, the same cannot be said about *politeness*. This term was one of the pillars of most of the debates proposed in the works of Addison, Shaftesbury and Mandeville. This was related not only to the increase in refinement and the need to highlight the character of civility that was to be associated with the 18th century, but also to the increase in debating salons that encouraged discussions and the *commerce of polite ideals*. *The Spectator* was a newspaper founded in 1711 by Addison and Steele and was probably one of the forerunners of the practical moral philosophies that would become increasingly present throughout the century; it was so prominent in

¹⁷ See the first note on this text.

Britain that it was taken as an example of politeness, morality with the ability to educate, through short texts, the character of gentlemen and ladies, so that they would become truly polished. This episode highlights the growing concern with British national identity and its prominence, in terms of politeness and civility, with the meaning intended for the happy period pointed out by Shaftesbury.

Now, the fear of an end similar to that of the Romans and the new meaning that was progressively attributed to *luxury* and *comfort* – which went from a sense of passion or emotional state to materialization in objects – were the result of the increase in trade and the new polished culture that was spreading among the British in the 18th century. It remains to be seen how the three figures (Mandeville, Shaftesbury and Addison), taken as protagonists in the polite debate of the first half of the 18th century, positioned themselves with regard to *luxury*.

4. In *An Inquiry concerning virtue or merit* (book 2, part 2, section 2), published in 1711, Shaftesbury, in general, takes *luxury* as a miserable, intense and strong passion, considered to be a vice arising from false external pleasures; at first glance, it seems that the author is very close to the meaning that 17th century British writers assigned to *luxury*, however, albeit timidly, the author informs us that it comes from a feeling of loss of some element – even though he considers this feeling to be a corruption. In other words, there is, in Shaftesbury, a relationship, albeit modest, between the sense of passion and something materialized in objects, which, together with the fear he presents in his *Soliloquy*, seems to be related to the *luxury* items that were part of the Roman downfall.

Addison, in turn, following Shaftesbury's suggestion, presents the term as a vice close to madness and avarice (no. 35 of the *Spectator*); but, shortly afterwards (no. 55), he analyzes *luxury* as a characteristic of happy and powerful nations; which makes the treatment of the term somewhat complicated, since, on the other hand, it could be a degenerate pleasure that would have the capacity to lead men to overshadow the wealth of others. In an anecdote in the same issue, Addison states that *luxury* and avarice made a pact to dominate human hearts in polite nations, and this, the author jokes, was due to the capacities each of them had, and were desired by the other:

There were two very powerful Tyrants engaged in a perpetual War against each other: The Name of the first was Luxury, and of the second Avarice. The Aim of each of them was no less than Universal Monarchy over the Hearts of Mankind. Luxury had many Generals under him, who did him great Service, as Pleasure, Mirth, Pomp and Fashion. Avarice was likewise very strong in his Officers, being faithfully served by Hunger, Industry, Care and Watchfulness: He had likewise a Privy-Counsellor who was always at his Elbow, and whispering something or other in his Ear: The Name of this Privy-Counsellor was Poverty. (ADDISON, *Spectator*, n° 55, 2004)

In his anecdote, Addison highlights some of the elements that contributed to maintaining 18th century anxieties: the relationship between *luxury* and excesses and poverty – which, from the way he comments on it, does not seem to be a good advisor –; it is noteworthy that, in the various issues of the

Spectator, it is possible to observe a concern with fashion, table manners and consumption; this reinforces that, for the author, even though *luxury* is a vice, it deserved to be taken care of because of the blessings that were beginning to be noticed in the State.

But it was with Mandeville that the new way of dealing with *luxury* definitely emerged, influencing the way the term was treated by the British authors in the second half of the 18th century. The author stands out for observing that flattery – the element that would generate politeness – was the result of false notions of vice and virtue implemented by governors to tame humans (animals driven by their passions) and yet, for the author, the vices of men, to some extent, were capable of promoting benefits for the nation. In 1705, he published, anonymously, the poem *The Grumbling Hive*, in which he described the story of a beehive that represented the reality in which he found himself; in the first verses of his poem, he says that "A spacious hive well stock'd with bees, That liv'd in luxury and ease; And yet as fam'd for laws and arms, As yielding large and early swarms; Was counted the great nursery⁵ Of sciences and industry. No bees had better government, More fickleness, or less content" (MANDEVILLE, 2018, p. 4-5).

By removing any kind of "veil" on the subject, Mandeville instigated, with his verses, an immediate repulsion to what he intended to defend, leading his poem to be execrated by the British courts – which forced the author to publish, in 1714, *The Fable of the Bees*, a work in which he sought to present observations on his poem and included other texts, such as *An Inquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*. According to the author himself, his aim was to try to highlight what was vice and what was virtue, how the latter could not keep up with the refinements of polished culture, and, above all, he hoped that people "would be taught to look at home, and examining their own consciences, be made ashamed of always railing at what they are more or less guilty of themselves" (MANDEVILLE, 2018, p. VII).

For the author of *the Fable of the Bees*, *luxury* no longer means a mere vice, but is defined as something that "is not immediately necessary to make man subsist as he is a living creature" (MANDEVILLE, 2018, p. 56). This proposed definition challenges the kind of ideal attributed to the term in such a way that *luxury* comes to be understood as something that differs between generations; after all, the use of shoes was not even thought of by savages and became necessary on the streets of London. In other words, *luxury* takes on a fickle meaning insofar as its consideration depends, to a certain extent, on the time you are in to point out what is or isn't a *luxury* item and, at the same time, it is removed from the environment of passions and becomes a category that materializes in objects. Furthermore, throughout *Observation L*, the author seeks to defend himself against the attacks that are generally made on the term: firstly, a nation that lives in *luxury* would not be effeminate or have its military virtues corrupted because, the author notes, the generals were brave men and exemplary in the arts required by war and, above all, their profits

were directed to the *luxury* of fashion that was demanded by the politeness of the positions they held; secondly, the refinements produced by commerce and politeness contributed to the health of individuals, since there were improvements in cities and housing; thirdly, women would be taken as important characters for commerce and for the example of refinement and politeness; through the *luxury* they consumed, women were able to educate, to a certain extent, the younger generation in whatever elements the British national identity demanded.

In short, *luxury* is taken by Mandeville as a condition of possibility for British polite culture and for the strength and joy of the nation; even if there was excessive spending by individuals, this could only generate market movement and the production of new jobs. The author praises the rise of a new class and the inclusion of women in commerce – even if this was purely for the sake of strengthening the nation. Satisfaction from non-necessary elements, would also soften popular dissatisfaction, as manners would be polished and the pleasures of the mind would be sharpened. Contrary to what Addison and Shaftesbury feared, the author of the *Fable of the Bees* encourages what would be worthy of reproach and – with the exception of the consideration that private vices would generate public benefits – attributed new categories to *luxury* that would be accepted and debated in a forceful way by the authors of the second half of the 18th century.

III

1. All the cultural and commercial changes that the British in the first half of the 18th century could see emerging and taking shape, became a reality for those who experienced the second half of the century. *Luxury* was rediscussed, after Mandeville's considerations, much more in terms of the notion of power it brought with it, the participation it had in the lower classes and the new ideas of architecture, fashion and manners - all of this, of course, associated with the ideals of refinement and politeness. Debating salons became a manifest reality, improvements to the homes of commoners became more frequent, dress became associated with politeness, the participation of women and commoners became greater and (in most cases) desired in commerce.

According to Clery (2004), a distinction emerged at the same time between feminization and effeminacy – although the first term is still current, for the author, it highlights a different value given to the role of women in British eighteenth-century society. The "feminization" of customs, partly due to the new culture of politeness and *luxury*, was seen as something positive because women were considered not only to be purer and more sensitive for the time, but also because of their role in educating men's manners and becoming examples of politeness and good taste.

This type of valorization of women can be seen both in practical moral philosophies, such as Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* and Chesterfield's *Letters* (considering male politeness), as well as in Hume's *Of Essay Writing*, in which the author seeks to highlight the importance of women as good judges of writing, and in Gregory's *Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man, with those of the Animal World*, in which the author seeks to establish women as an example of politeness and civility for humanity. In short, "feminization" was a hallmark of polite culture and the good use of *luxury*, which contributed to a certain ascension – even if only in a utilitarian way – of women in the second half of the 18th century; notions that had already been suggested by Addison and Steele in *The Spectator*. "Effeminacy", on the other hand, consisted of a defect in virility, in which men began to behave in a way that was inappropriate for their sex, the main cause being *luxury*, and began to behave like women (CLERY, 2004). In other words, in a very general way, *luxury* provided two ways of relating to the feminine: on the one hand, with the civilizing and characteristic aspect of a polite culture and, on the other hand, with the loss of man's natural virility; in the latter case, there is an effort on the part the authors to highlight how *luxury* alone could not cause any weakness in men, either in their virility or in their military virtues.

At the same time, a certain plebeian ascension was visible in the consumption of *luxury* and participation in the market: even though their salaries were low, they were able to buy books, tobacco, crockery, clothing and tea (STYLES, 2003), even if they couldn't participate in the purchase of items such as oriental porcelain and imported cheeses, since these were reserved for the financial capacity of the wealthier classes (CROWLEY, 2003). Now, if in the first half of the century it was possible to nurture an anxiety concerning plebeian chaos, in the second half the court even instituted laws that obliged them to wear decent (more elegant and luxurious) clothes for special occasions, such as the Sunday worship (STYLES, 2003). These elements contributed to commercial sociability around *luxury*, politeness and gallantry becoming present, albeit to a lesser extent, in the lives of the lower classes – in addition, of course, to the increase in fairs and their idiosyncrasies that emerged in the first half of the century.

Another novelty in the second half of the British 18th century was the country houses. These residences were initially characteristic of plebeian families, with conditions of comfort and survival that hurt the eyes of the wealthier classes, leading to a significant improvement in architecture and comfort due to humanitarian initiatives, starting in the second half of the century, on the part of more fortunate classes (CROWLEY, 2003). Comfort, along with architecture, became a concern that even related to the national identity that was intended to be established for Great Britain, insofar as it valued nature and the idiosyncrasies of the nation with its refinement in the landscape; the importance of country houses was also due to their ability not only to present British refinement and politeness, but also to offer health conditions. Over time, these environments even became a refinement for the wealthier classes, with

luxurious elements including "halls, parlours, kitchens and water closets. A spectrum of leisure spaces – studies, dining rooms, withdrawing rooms, conservatories – provided both psychological and physical comforts" (CROWLEY, 2003, p. 136). Furthermore, it is worth remembering that *commerce*, from the second half of the century onwards, was treated with the double meaning of exchange and conversation. In short, what the first part of the British 18th century saw emerge and take shape was a consummate reality in the second part of the century, which led philosophers to be more concerned with exploring environments related to *luxury* and politeness, which were first braved by Mandeville. In this scenario, there was a profusion of practical moral philosophies¹⁸, to teach how polished and virtuous gentlemen and ladies should behave, and the theoretical moral philosophies – which we will deal with next – investigated the performance of these principles.

2. As far as the relationship with Rome is concerned, most authors tend to recognize *luxury* and effeminacy as causes of the fall of the empire, however, others strive to show the falsehood of such conclusions. Hume, in his *Essay Of Refinement in the Arts*, recovers this argument and then reminds us that the fall of the empire was in fact due to the command of women and priests who contributed to the disorganization of the nation; the loss of military virtue, for example, should not be feared, since the British were passionate about the liberal arts and their ideal of honor ensured that *luxury* did not corrupt men – something that would be different in the case of the Italians. Smith, for his part, tends to recognize Rome as one of the examples of virtue and inspiration for many men, whether in the refined arts, politeness or the military arts. Its fall, according to him, had been caused by an excessive attachment to refinement, due to the security acquired after the conquest of the other polished nations. For Smith – whose analysis is quite similar to Shaftesbury's – the military and refined arts should be equally encouraged, because "The most sublime speculation of the contemplative philosopher can scarce compensate the neglect of the smallest active duty" (SMITH, 1853, p.348).

In *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Ferguson observes that, as a result of the plundering, pillaging and domination of the empire, on the one hand, Rome was able to indulge in crime and, on the other, promote liberal arts that the world had never seen, to the point of being able to promote changes in government. However, for this author, the problem consisted, at least in part, of the fact that the advancement of Rome was due to the usurpation of foreign goods resulting from despotic powers; in general, the end of Rome was due to the same reason why it was able to conquer so many peoples and place itself as the mightiest power for a long time: the security and peace, which led to a neglect of military arts. Kames, in his *Sketches*, seems to agree that the rise of despotism and the decline of military virtue contributed to the fall of Rome, however, he notes that *luxury* had an immediate effect on the progress

¹⁸ See *Hipocrisia ou Polidez? Boas maneiras no iluminismo britânico*.

of the nation, be it in the refined taste for architecture, poetry and cuisine, as well as the improvement in health care – because, with the increase in contact between different peoples, there was an increase in diseases that forced the development of medicine. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft assigns the reason for the fall of Rome to the barbarity of despotism, which consumed the freedom and justice that existed in the Empire (something close to Locke's observation).

In other words, in general, *luxury* was not placed as a condition for the fall of Rome, but rather the corruption of conduct (something similar to the movement made by the authors of the first half of the century): the exchange of good rulers for women and priests, investment only in refined arts and the rise of despotism. For these authors, in general, the empire served as a point of analysis and comparison for the nation in which they lived because it allowed them to avoid a similar end (HAUCK, 2020); and what they noticed was that *luxury* actually allowed Rome to grow as a power, insofar as it promoted more refined education, good taste and improvement in some sciences, such as medicine. Therefore, avoiding *luxury* would be the same as preventing the civilized and polished stage in which they lived, and what should be done to escape the same fate as Rome concerned the military conduct that should accompany polished culture – something that, for Hume, was already happening because of British honor. Furthermore, overcoming Rome, or imitating its good examples, was important for the Battle of the Books, which helped to canonize the British trinity (Shakespeare, Spencer and Milton), and to create a polished British national identity, taken as an example of human superiority. It is worth remembering that, in *On Commerce*, Hume states that one of the reasons why the ancients could not overcome the moderns was that the latter were not violent, but relied on politeness; Moreover, as Kames says, "How delightful to a true-hearted Briton is the prospect, that London, instead of Rome, may become the centre of the fine arts" (KAMES, 2007, p. 41).

3. The first interesting point to observe is that *luxury*, for almost all the philosophers of the second phase of the 18th century (at least those who were selected for the present investigation), is noted as being a word "of an uncertain signification, and may be taken in a good as well as in a bad sense" (HUME, 1987, p. 268). Sometimes is "employed to signify a manner of life which we think necessary to civilization, and even to happiness", sometimes "It is, in our panegyric of polished ages, the parent of arts, the support of commerce, and the minister of national greatness, and of opulence", and sometimes "It is, in our censure of degenerate manners, the source of corruption, and the presage of national declension and ruin. It is admired, and it is blamed; it is treated as ornamental and useful, and it is proscribed as a vice" (FERGUSON, 2005, P 6, S 2, § 1). In short, for British authors of the second half of the 18th century, it is "obscure by giving different meanings to the term luxury" (KAMES, 2007, p. 324).

Although the authors seek to claim the value of this element in sociability – noting, for instance, its role and importance in British life in the 18th century – one should not lose sight of the fact that society did not necessarily share the values defended by philosophers. This can be seen, for example, in the dictionaries of the time, which, since the 17th century, considered *luxury* to be a vice, an excessive and carnal pleasure, lasciviousness, there being only a small inclusion, from 1755, from Johnson and Scott's dictionaries, which begin to include, in their entries, meanings that associate luxury items and vicious purposes – which, to a certain extent, combines the material and passionate aspects of the term.

It may also be remembered that the practical moral philosophies of Gregory and Chesterfield saw *luxury* as a vice to be tamed, due to its destructive role in polite society, and part of the aim of their writings was to tame this enemy. In other words, although the new commercial culture, the rise of women and plebeians in society, the indissoluble relationship between *luxury*, refinement and politeness, as well as the treatment of *luxury* as something that refers to the passions and can be materialized in objects (as well as *comfort*) were easily observed by the authors of the second half of the 18th century, what the records of practical morals and dictionaries show is that *luxury* remained in the list of social disfavor, after all "In common language and in common apprehension, luxury always implies a faulty excess; and upon that account, is condemned by all writers" (KAMES, 2007, p. 324).

To some extent, in addition to the history presented so far, the opening of the debate in the terms proposed by Mandeville, that private vices generate public benefits may have collaborated to this pejorative conception of *luxury*, something that the authors endeavored to dispel by trying to dissociate *luxury* from the notion of vice. We proceed to investigate the treatment of the term in each of the authors, following the chronology of their publications. Considering the greater attention paid to the term in the second half of the 18th century, they shall be examined at some length.

4. α. In 1758, in his essay *Of Refinement in the Arts*, Hume defines *luxury* as "In general, it means great refinement in the gratification of the senses" (HUME, 1987, p. 268), which goes hand in hand with the notion that, for the author, there needed to be a certain education that would allow *luxury to be* used in a harmless and non-stupid way. For this Scottish philosopher, *luxury* was associated with a happier nation, more committed to work - since this was a condition for taking advantage of the indolence of *luxury* – with refinement, scientific advancement, liberal arts and fine literature, with fewer vices (such as exchanging drunkenness for gallantry) and more knowledge. Now, Hume argued that softened behavior, along with an ingenious mind, would be more useful and polite in environments where *luxury* existed; it is possible, for example, to make use of *luxury* (from *commerce* and manufacturing) to promote the good or improvement of another person's condition. Accusations that could treat the term as a vice, for example, were dispelled in the face of the British sense of honor that Hume believed to go hand in hand

with refinement; and in the face of the improvement and versatility that *luxury* had in Britain in the second half of the 18th century: it fed commerce, allowed (to a certain degree) inequalities to be overcome, promoted respect for property and freedom, as well as, of course, boosting politeness and refinement.

In other words, *luxury*, in the *Refinement* essay, is taken as something versatile, which depends much more on the use made of it than on some intrinsic quality of vice or virtue. In the case of a polite nation, for the author, "Treachery and cruelty, the most pernicious and most odious of all vices, seem peculiar to uncivilized ages", and therefore the anxieties of the evil that *luxury* could cause can only be "ascribed to all the barbarous nations" (HUME, 1987, p. 278). In this way, the philosopher proposes a new categorization of *luxury*, the "vicious" (HUME, *ibid.*), which would consist of abstaining from the duties of generosity, and allowing it to be accompanied by laziness and idleness.

In the essay *On Commerce*, also from 1758, Hume notes how *luxury* is important for the generation of new jobs (insofar as new arms can be employed for the production of fine literature, liberal arts and discoveries), while at the same time surplus production could become a product for export, which would strengthen the nation economically. Men, moreover, could be encouraged by the possibilities of pleasures provided by *luxury*, which would force them to work harder and be able to acquire goods that, in other times, were attainable only by the nobility – something that I believe the Letham family and its increased expenses can exemplify. In general, for Hume, from what can be seen in these two essays, *luxury* consisted much more of something beneficial, and even virtuous for a nation or an individual depending on the way it was used – that is, without losing the principle of honor that would guarantee control of "vicious *luxury*" - so that the word seems to lose its passionate component almost completely for Hume, existing only as a certain quality of material objects.

β. Although *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1759, Adam Smith does not offer a definition for *luxury*, he seems to show a great deal of agreement with what is set out in Hume's essays; he also seems to dismiss the passionate component of the term and pay more attention to the material. In the *Theory*, the desire for *luxury* would be related to the need to obtain respect and, consequently, better conditions for enjoying life; respect, for the author, could only be acquired through virtue and honor, or through the power that fortune and *luxury* provide; given the character of society, for Smith, personal wealth bore good fruit in conviviality, after all "To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it", so that "It is the vanity, not the ease, or the pleasure, which interests us. But vanity is always founded upon the belief of our being the object of attention and approbation" (SMITH, 1853, p. 71). Consequently, human vanity has a greater or lesser capacity to be gratified depending on the class in which one finds oneself socially; the rich are treated with "all those agreeable emotions with which the

advantages of his situation so readily inspire him", while "The poor man, on the contrary, is ashamed of his poverty", after all this situation "places him out of the sight of mankind [...] if they take any notice of him, they have, however, scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers" (SMITH, 1853, p. 71).

Therefore, the desired paths to social ascension through honor and work have little immediate social benefit – even though, for the author, this shouldn't be the case – and, as a result of the inequality between classes, Smith claims that moral sentiments are corrupted. Furthermore, although the most desirable means of being respected and noticed is wealth, middle and lower class men are obliged to work and show their honor, so that they can ascend socially and consume *luxury and* comfort - which, for the philosopher, would make them more virtuous men; they were expected to have "real and solid professional abilities, joined to prudent, just, firm, and temperate conduct" (SMITH, 1853, p. 83).

In other words, it's not *luxury* or wealth in itself that promotes moral corruption, but rather the social hierarchy that constrains some and favors others. All of this, together with the human disposition to practically idolize the rich and powerful because of the example of near perfection they seem to set, means that the wealthy dictate the fashions, language and customs of an era, so that man "assumes the equipage and splendid way of living of his superiors, without considering [...] whole merit and propriety from its suitableness to that situation and fortune which both require" (SMITH, 1853, p. 88). In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, we can see that *luxury* is associated with commercial items capable of stimulating trade and generating jobs, which, in turn, would offer comfort and *luxury*; moreover, the term is used as a synonym for "superfluity" (SMITH, 1996, P 3, § 95). In short, in a very general way, *luxury* in Smith's works seems to refer to a quality of material objects¹⁹ that cannot necessarily be taken as virtuous or vicious, but, in the face of sociability, can be used as a means capable of producing joys and misfortunes, at the same time as being able to dictate the customs of a nation.

γ. As early as 1767, Ferguson, in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, defined *luxury* as the "accumulation of wealth, and that refinement on the ways of enjoying it, which are the objects of industry, or the fruits of mechanic and commercial arts" (FERGUSON, 2005, P 4, S 3, § 1), so that, like Hume and Smith, he removes the element of passion from the term and restricts it to the materiality of objects. Passion is now restricted to corruption, which means, for the author, "a real weakness, or depravity of the human character, which may accompany any state of those arts, and be found under any external circumstances or condition whatsoever" (FERGUSON, 2005, P 4, S 3, § 1) – an alternative similar to the

¹⁹ In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith informs us that *luxury* can be harmful, to a certain extent, only when it comes to procreation, since, for him, wealthy women have fewer children than poor women because of the pleasures of *luxury*.

one Hume provided in the *Refinement* essay when it comes to vicious *luxury*, but in Ferguson's case, there is a complete dissociation between *luxury* and corruption or vice. For this author, it is inconceivable to mean *luxury* according to the notions of an era, since these conceptions change over the course of generations. For the author, it is necessary to take into account that refinement and politeness have allowed for a moderate use of *luxury*, so that it should be taken as an element of life that can provide benefits and comfort, but never be the existence's main object of it – in other words, one shouldn't consume refined items in a depraved way. In addition, *luxury* had the capacity to contribute to the wealth and progress of a nation, overcoming, as Hume and Smith suggest, certain inequalities imposed by British eighteenth-century society.

Ferguson seems to follow Smith and Hume on many points with regard to sociability, something that is not surprising, given the influence that the works of both had on the author's writings (HAUCK, 2020). Roughly speaking, *luxury* can only be deleterious in cases where military virtue and a sense of honor do not go hand in hand with refinement, thus generating effeminacy; in addition, it is a condition of possibility for a certain overcoming of hierarchies (given its role in commerce) and, at the same time, strengthens a nation's wealth and power. On the other hand, *luxury* would have the capacity to provide men with a certain power and reputation due to "the figure they are able to make; by their buildings, their dress, their equipage" (FERGUSON, 2005, P 4, S 3, § 11) – something that, for the author, does not surpass true refinement and politeness, and is the consequence of a mind with ideals of "envious, servile, or dejected mind" (FERGUSON, 2005, P 4, S 3, § 11) – allowing them to feed their desire for fame²⁰. Even so, the benefits that refined and polished use could bring are undeniable: an increase in the mechanical and liberal arts, working conditions, more comfort and happiness for individuals, and even some level of political commitment.

In other words, for Ferguson, as for Hume and Smith, *luxury* was no longer seen from the perspective of the first half of the 18th and 17th centuries, as a passion and a vice, but rather as a material quality of objects that, like any other, could be used to a nation's advantage (financial strengthening, a certain overcoming of hierarchies, progress in the arts) or to its degradation (when devoid of politeness and honor). After all, for this author, as for others, vice was more likely to appear in barbarian nations that were devoid of the British national identity.

δ. As far as Kames is concerned, in the first volume of his *Sketches of the History of Man*, published in 1774, specifically in *Progress and Effects of Luxury*, it is noteworthy that the author follows what Hume, Smith and Ferguson defend, that is: that it cannot be considered from a historical point of view – due to the imprecision of discerning what *luxury* is and what it isn't –; that it favors the financial strength of a

²⁰ Which, for the author, could be the driving principle for virtuous and courageous actions, as well as for committing crimes.

nation, acts in overcoming certain hierarchies, as well as its refined arts and that it is not a vice. However, if these three authors sought to remove *luxury* from the condition of passion, Kames seems to reassign this status to the term, meaning it as "every indulgence in corporeal pleasure, which favours either too violent or too languid exercise, whether of mind or body, is hurtful" (KAMES, 2007, p. 326) – which means that excesses at the table, for example, are always reprehensible, but attention to the refined arts is not. In short, for Kames, *luxury remains a condition of passion*, but at the same time, it is a condition of possibility for the blessings and refinement of a nation and is not a vice, being reprehensible only in cases of excess in which there is harm to a nation or an individual.

IV

In short, the British context of the second half of the 18th century evinced the rise of the lower classes and the participation of women due to the new culture of politeness and *luxury* culture, at the same time as commerce, comfort, architecture, fashion, *etc.* became elements that made this new culture possible. Although the dictionaries of the time and practical moral philosophies took the term to mean something related to vice and which should be avoided, we can see that these four philosophers made an effort to present the benefits it brought and, at the same time, to dissociate the condition of vice from *luxury*. This was largely due to their perception of the context in which they were inserted, as well as the relationship they perceived between *luxury*, politeness, refinement and the constitution of British national identity - which meant that most of the authors stripped *luxury* of its passionate character (which it had in the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century), and considered it as a material characteristic of objects. The expectations of the first half of the 18th century and the 17th century are, in most cases, for these authors, insufficient to remove the character of virtues that *luxury* could bring to a nation – which, due to its politeness and honor, would not have an end like that of the Romans.

Furthermore, we can see how the term *luxury* was reframed, from Mandeville on, to meet the new demands of the polite culture that was emerging in the first half of the 18th century. The term moves from a passionate meaning to materialization in a way that closely follows the development of politeness - and can even be considered its condition of possibility to a certain degree. All of this underlines the importance of politeness and *luxury*, together, for the understanding of 18th century Britain; they even function as interpretative keys for approaching the period.

However, it is worth noting that Wollstonecraft opposed this view that *luxury* was not a vice. In 1792, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the author tends to see it as an element that weakens the human being, generates indolence, promotes bodily excesses (such as in feeding), weakens the individual,

incites chaos in the lower classes, at the same time as "a little mock dignity to lust" insists "that man should not exert his strength, but depend on the will of the woman, when he seeks for pleasure with her" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 1792, p.65). Women, the philosopher points out, were forced to desire *luxury* and licentiousness without having "some duty to fulfil, more noble than to adorn their persons" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 1792, p. 113) and, at the same time, were blamed for it.

Perhaps these observations seem a little astonishing, because of the time in which the author writes, i.e., the end of the 18th century, and the fact that she places herself against philosophers such as Hume, Smith, Ferguson and Kames. However, it is extremely important to keep in mind that Hume takes the rule of women as a certain cause of the Roman downfall; effeminacy, i.e. the acquisition of feminine traits, is considered to be something reprehensible, which called into question a man's virility; women had a merely utilitarian role in the culture of politeness and *luxury*, in that their only purpose was to educate men and satisfy their desires; and practical morals, such as those of Chesterfield and Gregory, completely disapproved of any expression of *luxury* in women. Now, with all the burdens that an eighteenth-century British woman received from the association with *luxury*, it seems natural that Wollstonecraft didn't see it as something positive for a nation and for individuals, keeping it in the passionate and vicious register, after all, as the author informs us, women are "rendered weak and luxurious by the relaxing pleasures which wealth procures; but added to this they are made slaves to their persons, and must render them alluring that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright" at the same time as they were reduced "to a mere cypher" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 1792, p. 119).

Wollstonecraft's diagnosis serves not only as her positions concerning the British luxury quarrel, or an expression of his republican values, but also to highlight something that should be kept in sight: the vantage point from which writers evaluated the ideals and culture of their time. After all, all the authors had the opportunity to come to conclusions concerning the benefits of *luxury* not only because of their cleverness, and their analysis of the context in which they lived, but also because of their places, which they said was a space for "all mankind" – while women, the lower classes and, above all, black people were excluded.

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