Abstract:
Hume developed an original and revolutionary theoretical paradigm for explaining the spontaneous emergence of the classic conventions of justice—stable possession, transfer of property by consent, and the obligation to fulfill promises. In a scenario of scarce external resources, Hume’s central idea is that the development of the rules of justice responds to a sense of common interest that progressively tames the destructiveness of natural self-love and expands the action of natural moral sentiments. By handling conceptual tools that anticipated game theory for centuries, Hume was able to break with rationalism, the natural law school, and Hobbes’s contractarianism. Unlike natural moral sentiments, the sense of justice is valuable and reaches full strength within a general plan or system of actions. However, unlike game theory, Hume does not assume that people have transparent access to their own motivations and the inner structure of the social world. In contrast, he blends ideas such as cognitive delusion, learning by experience and coordination to construct a theory that still deserves careful discussion, even though it resists classification under contemporary headings.

Keywords: Hume, justice, property, fictionalism, convention, contractarianism.