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*Man as He Is: politics and propriety in the thought of David Hume*

by

K. N. SHEPPARD

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Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## *Abstract*

This thesis considers propriety and politics in the thought of David Hume. It argues that Hume's political thought was intimately connected with his philosophical investigation of the 'science of man', first undertaken in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40). It outlines how the 'science of man' progressed from Pyrrhonian scepticism to a 'mitigated' scepticism that affirmed 'common life' and moderation. A principle factor in this development was the articulation of sympathy and a philosophy of sentiment, consistent with, yet critical of, earlier philosophical traditions. This moderate scepticism was accompanied by the early articulation of Hume's enlightened scale of values – amusement, virtue, understanding, moderation. In highlighting these values this study argues that Hume be considered an establishment thinker, connecting philosophical values to a political context where stability was a mainstay of debate. Thus, the thesis compliments both Duncan Forbes and J. G. A. Pocock, scholars who have argued along similar grounds that Hume's self-conceived revolution in philosophy ironically investigated the concept of revolution in political terms, but failed to give it any hearty endorsement. This study also casts light upon how Hume offered his philosophical investigations to a broader eighteenth-century audience and why an endorsement of political revolution was not to be found in this work. It suggests that the *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* represent Hume's attempt to cultivate a political culture of politeness and moderation, containing, as they do, a critique of superstition and enthusiasm, both religious and political. Not only did these dispositions deviate from a

scientific understanding of human nature, they threatened the stability of state. In contrast, for those capable of philosophical conversation, Hume suggested a Ciceronian posture. This study also examines how the 'science of man' and Enlightenment values play out in the *History of England*, specifically through Hume's investigation of the Civil Wars and the Revolution of 1688. This historically contextualized analysis of Hume renders his political writings as *acts*, which critique both Hanoverian Tory and Whig political discourse. Finally, this thesis argues that Hume's thought fits into a variety of historical processes. Hume's four essays on philosophical sects outlined a modern philosophical outlook for the post-Cartesian world. His essays on opinion, principles, and parties outlined a political perspective for the post-Revolutionary polite world. Lastly, Hume's series of economic and aesthetic essays provided a commercial, neo-classical, and critical outlook for a post-Reformation world. Collectively they offered a coherent though sceptical view of politics, and the science of man, for the 'polite and commercial people' of Hanoverian Britain.

## *Acknowledgements*

The finished product of a thesis is never the work of one individual alone; in this case it has been the product of conversation, criticism, dialogue, and support. I have, like countless graduate students before me, incurred a dossier of debts. First, I should like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Richard Connors, who has been a thoughtful and supportive critic for the duration of my research; I am thankful for the opportunity to have worked with him. I also want to acknowledge in a general way the host of people I have discussed with in some way or other topics of interest to the history of thought and of ideas.

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E MO Of Money  
 E MP Of Moral Prejudices  
 E MS Of the Middle Station of Life  
 E NC Of National Characters  
 E OC Of the Original Contract  
 E OG Of the Origin of Government  
 E PA Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations  
 E PC Of Public Credit  
 E PD Of Polygamy and Divorce  
 E PG Of Parties in General  
 E PGB Of the Parties of Great Britain  
 E PL The Platonist  
 E PO Of Passive Obedience  
 E PR That Politics may be reduced to a Science  
 E PS Of the Protestant Succession  
 E RA Of Refinement in the Arts  
 E RC Of Some Remarkable Customs  
 E RP Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences  
 E RW A Character of Sir Robert Walpole  
 E SC The Sceptic  
 E SE Of Superstition and Enthusiasm  
 E SH Of the Study of History  
 E SR Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing  
 E ST Of the Standard of Taste  
 E ST The Stoic  
 E SU Of Suicide  
 E TA Of Taxes  
 E TR Of Tragedy

- EHU *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. ed. Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.  
     EHU, 1.2, p. 1                      Section, paragraph, page number  
     EHU, D.1, p. 1                      ‘A Dialogue’, paragraph, page number
- EPM *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. ed. Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.  
     EPM, 1.2, p. 1                      Section, paragraph, page number
- H *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. 6 vols. ed. William B. Todd. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983.  
     H, I, p. 1                              Volume, page number
- L *The Letters of David Hume*. 2 vols. ed. J. Y. T. Greig. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932.

	L, 1, p. 1	Volume, page number
ML	'My Own Life'. In <i>Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary</i> . ed. Eugene F. Miller, xxxi-xli. rvsd ed. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987.	
	ML, p. 1	Page number
NHR	<i>Natural History of Religion</i> . In <i>Dialogues and Natural History of Religion</i> . ed. J. C. A. Gaskin, 134-193. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.	
	NHR 1, p. 1	Section, page number
OP	'A Dissertation on the Passion' ['Of the Passions']. In <i>The Philosophical Works of David Hume</i> . eds. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, IV: 139-166. London: Longmans, 1874.	
	OP 1.1, p. 1	Section, paragraph, page number
T	<i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> . eds David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.	
	T 1.2.3.4, p. 1	Book, part, section, paragraph, page number

## *Preface*

According to Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, ‘history is philosophy teaching by examples’.<sup>1</sup> This vision of history is unlikely to find broad support today in our post-modern, post-structural, post-colonial scholarly world. For example, one of the central tenets of post-modernism is the dubious nature of history as pedagogy. Needless to say, this was not the view of the eighteenth-century mind. Eighteenth-century scholars approached history from a very different perspective. One of the broad assumptions of historical and philosophical thought was that Clio, the Muse of history, *did* have lessons to teach. For obvious reasons, what these lessons were was vociferously contested by contemporaries; but that there were lessons to be learned, whatever these might be, few ‘men of letters’ questioned.

David Hume, the central figure of this study, certainly thought Clio had a pervasive pedagogical function: ‘the study of history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy’ (T 3.2.10.15, p. 359). Along with such ‘philosophical historians’ as Edward Gibbon and William Robertson, Hume took up his pen in order to put Clio to work. On one level, this essay investigates the ways in which Hume put Clio to use and why; more

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<sup>1</sup> Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, in *Historical Writings*, (ed.) Isaac Kramnick (Chicago, 1972), p. 9. This tag was, of course, lifted from Dionysus of Halicarnassus, *Ars rhetorica*, XI, 2.

specifically, it does so through an examination of Hume's 'science of politics'.<sup>2</sup> Although Hume was well known for his historical work in his own day, it was only one aspect of his synoptic thought. Hume's scope was comprehensive; this is reflected in the variety of his literary endeavours and in the plethora of academic adjectives now attached to his name. Philosophy, history, politics, religion, ethics and aesthetics were all subjects of his analysis; this study was understood by Hume as the 'science of man'.<sup>3</sup>

On another level, this study attempts to integrate Hume's broad philosophical programme with the conclusions of his political science. This approach to Hume's work could be called 'philosophy with the politics put back'.<sup>4</sup> As a method it places special emphasis on the interconnectivity of Hume's thought. Along with contextualising Hume's political science (*scientiae*) within the 'science of man', this essay argues that his philosophical approach was fundamentally informed by an historical perspective framed within specific historical contexts. In other words, Hume's political thought was articulated within the political developments, activities, and discourse of Hanoverian Britain. This is hardly a novel or profound suggestion. It seems clear, however, that this direct approach to Hume's political thought has yet to be undertaken or explored in

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<sup>2</sup> In this context 'science' is used in keeping with 'science' as *scientiae*. Cf. J. Martin, *Francis Bacon, the State, and the Reform of Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 141-171; A. Cunningham and P. Williams, 'De-centring the "big picture"', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 26 (1993); Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, 1996). Alexander Rosenberg, 'Hume and the philosophy of science', *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, (ed.) David Fate Norton (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 64-89.

<sup>3</sup> For recent 'holistic' interpretations of Hume see, Norton (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Hume*, Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (Penguin, 2000); Claudia Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (University Park, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> I am intentionally echoing Patrick Collinson's criticisms; cf. *De republica anglorum: or, History with the politics put back* (Cambridge, 1990). This kind of approach – not without its critics – has been conducted before, but not, so far as I am aware, in the specific way taken here. Such studies are highlighted in the notes.

detail.<sup>5</sup> This essay addresses aspects of Hume's political thought in such a manner. It is specifically concerned with Hume's account of 'political stability', its connectedness to his enlightened attempt to display 'man as he is', and his analysis of momentous episodes within English history from 1640 to 1689. Thus, it concentrates on Hume's understanding of the Civil War, the Restoration, the Glorious Revolution and the Revolution Settlement. From such an exploration, this study posits that Hume was a 'sceptical' or 'establishment Whig'; as such he provided the Hanoverian regime with a pragmatic *apologia* attempting to stabilise and moderate politics during the 'Whig ascendancy'.<sup>6</sup>

This is, then, an 'historical account' of Hume's political thought. Such an approach is revealing for several reasons. First, it shows that to remove Hume's political thought from its historical context is to distort it; Hume's meaning is intimately related to context.<sup>7</sup> How is one to make sense of Hume's essay 'A Character of Sir Robert Walpole',

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<sup>5</sup> For recent interpretations along this line, cf. Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975); Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge, 1981); *idem*, 'Introduction' in David Hume, *Hume: Political Essays*, (ed.) Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1984), xi-xxx; Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume* (New York, 1989); Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume* (Ithaca, 2000); Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> For Hume as a 'scientific' or 'establishment Whig' see Duncan Forbes, 'Scientific Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar', *Cambridge Journal* 7 (1953-4), pp. 643-670; *idem*, 'Sceptical Whiggism, commerce and liberty' *Essays on Adam Smith*, (ed.) Andrew S. Skinner and T. Wilson (Oxford, 1975), pp. 179-201; *idem*, 'Hume's science of politics', *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, (ed.) G. P. Morice (Edinburgh, 1977), pp. 39-50; *idem*, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*. For the 'Whig ascendancy' see John Cannon (ed.), *The Whig Ascendancy: colloquies on Hanoverian England*, (ed.) J. Cannon (London, 1981); J. H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability 1675-1725* (Penguin, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas', *Visions of Politics: Regarding method* (3 vols., Cambridge, 2002), I, pp. 57-89; J. G. A. Pocock, 'Introduction: the state of the art', *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political*

published on the eve of his fall, without contextual apparatus? This is a relevant question for the whole of Hume's corpus.<sup>8</sup> A thorough knowledge of its historical context provides the means for a more holistic understanding of what Hume was attempting to say. Secondly, this study seeks to establish Hume's *own* meaning and how contemporaries would have understood him. Rather than directly taking issue with subsequent interpreters of Hume's political thought, this study has a more specific goal: what did Hume hope to accomplish with his political works? Why did he articulate certain political ideas and what were the means of making these arguments? In what ways did Hume's thought reflect, contest, or interact with the political discourse prominent in Hanoverian Britain? Within this type of analysis there is room to consider some important questions of methodology in the history of ideas. Did Hume's political science take part in a 'perennial debate' or was it strictly addressing contemporary and, therefore, contextual political questions?<sup>9</sup>

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*Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 1-34. Skinner and Pocock are, of course, not without their critics – too numerous to list here; one extension of their arguments from the analytic philosophical tradition which I have found useful is Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Understanding Hume's aesthetics, economics, history, character sketches, and skeptical philosophy can only be accurately understood in light of his Enlightenment and Hanoverian contexts. Cf. Alexander Broadie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003); Peter Jones, 'Hume's literary and aesthetic theory' *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 255-280; Andrew S. Skinner, 'David Hume: Principles of political economy', *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 222-254; Eugene Rotwein, 'Introduction', in David Hume, *Writings on Economics*, (ed.) Eugene Rotwein (Edinburgh, 1955), ix-cxi; Nicholas Phillipson, 'Towards a definition of the Scottish Enlightenment', *City and Society in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, (eds.) Pauls S. Fritz and David Williams (Toronto, 1973), pp. 125-147; *idem*, 'Culture and society in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century province: the case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment', *The University in Society: Europe, Scotland, and the United States from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, (ed.) Lawrence Stone (Princeton, 1974), pp. 407-448.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Quentin Skinner, Richard Rorty, and J. B. Schneewind (eds.), *History of Philosophy: Essays in the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1984).

Such an approach is meant to rid Hume scholarship of problematic interpretive frameworks. Analysis of Hume's political thought, not to mention his metaphysics, has been plagued by anachronism and teleology.<sup>10</sup> For example, interpretations of Hume that stress his 'liberal' or 'conservative' ideological stance seem particularly unhelpful, even misleading.<sup>11</sup> Ideological terms of the nineteenth century are not appropriate for an eighteenth-century mind familiar with the vocabularies of Whig and Tory. This anachronistic interpretation needs to be contrasted with a more accurately 'past-centred' one.<sup>12</sup> This essay argues that a rigorous contextual methodology is required in order to determine more precisely what Hume *meant* and what he attempted to *do* with his writings.<sup>13</sup> This study, then, attempts to endorse the contextual method – with due caution – for studying the history of ideas.

If one of the ostensible goals of intellectual history, at least as we apprehend it today, is to develop 'meaning and understanding', then Hume provides an excellent example of how this goal may be achieved. A case can be made, then, for viewing this

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<sup>10</sup> The 4 cardinal sins of historians – anachronism, prolepsis, teleology, solecism – are trenchantly asserted in J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: religion, ideology and politics during the ancien regime* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1-13, 'Keywords'.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. David Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought* (Oxford, 1981); John B. Stewart, *The Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume* (New York, 1963); *idem*, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1992); Frederick G. Whelan, *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1985). Criticisms of the anachronistic categories and at times teleological nature of the interpretations of these texts should not be confused with the useful analysis they contain.

<sup>12</sup> The classic is still H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York, 1965); see also Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant, 'Whig History and Present-Centred History', *Historical Journal* 31 (1988), pp. 1-16; T. G. Ashplant and Adrian Wilson, 'Present-Centred History and the Problem of Historical Knowledge', *Historical Journal* 31 (1988), pp. 253-274; Michael Bently, 'Herbert Butterfield and the Ethics of History', *History and Theory* 44 (2005), pp. 55-71.

<sup>13</sup> For an argument that Hume's writings were also intended as political acts, see: Knud Haakonsen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 100-128, at 101.

approach to Hume as ‘philosophy with the history put back’. And while Hume has received contextual study in some form,<sup>14</sup> other notable philosophers have been better served.<sup>15</sup> This study is meant as a contribution to this historical method and more specifically to the continuing conversation in Hume scholarship.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics*. This book examines Hume’s precursors as well his analysis of Whiggism and constitutionalism in Hume’s *History of England*. My debt to Forbes’s text will be obvious to those familiar with that study.

<sup>15</sup> For Niccolò Machiavelli see, J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Princeton, 2003); for Edward Gibbon see, *idem*, *Barbarism and Religion* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1999, 2003); for Thomas Hobbes see, Quentin Skinner, *Reason and rhetoric in the philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996); and for John Locke see, John Dunn, *The political thought of John Locke: an historical account of the argument of the ‘Two Treatises of Government’* (Cambridge, 1967); Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke’s Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton, 1986).

## INTRODUCTION

### *Studying Hume's political thought*

#### §I. STUDYING HUME IN CONTEXT

Reinvigorating Hume's reputation amongst philosophers and historians is, quite simply, an unnecessary task. In his own lifetime he was praised and paraded in Parisian salons and referred to as the 'Scottish Tacitus'. Jeremy Bentham claimed to have received inspiration and insight from Hume's work, while Immanuel Kant was disturbed from his 'philosophical slumbers' by Hume's ghost. One would presume many modern sceptics and empiricists reserve a place for Hume in their respective pantheons or claim him as an ancestor in their philosophical pedigree – much as the Vienna School has done. David Hume's reputation as a careful and profound philosopher has retained its currency from his day to our own.

Hume's achievements in metaphysics and epistemology are well known; his achievements in political philosophy, perhaps, less so. Assembling Hume's political thought is, to be sure, a daunting task. It requires cutting through myriad layers of philosophical, historiographical and literary interpretation. As a prominent figure in the history of philosophy, Hume has been the subject of countless studies that have approached his thought from an array of scholarly and lay disciplines. Many principal studies of Hume, however, have been conducted within the disciplinary enclave of philosophy. Even introductory works meant to acquaint students with 'past masters'

address Hume's metaphysical philosophy while neglecting detailed analysis of his historical, political or literary works. This lopsided treatment is evident in a significant number of twentieth-century monographs dedicated to Hume. Explicit analysis of Hume's political thought is not voluminous in the way that analysis of his metaphysics is. Moreover, his political thought usually receives attention *vis-à-vis* some other aspect of his thought and as an adjunct to it; studies rarely approach his political thought as a whole and generally fail to integrate this thought within his broader philosophical achievement.<sup>1</sup>

This essay seeks to correct this interpretive myopia. It offers a sensitive and understandable account of Hume's intellectual project *via* his political thought. This approach raises several significant questions. Most importantly, it requires direct attention to what Hume actually wrote; why did he write what he did? when he did? for whom? and in what manner? In pursuing such questions, I do not mean to impose form or coherence on Hume's thought where none exists.<sup>2</sup> Over time and with greater experience and insight, Hume, like most profound thinkers, made responses and alterations to his views.<sup>3</sup>

Hume's scope as a philosopher of human nature was first articulated in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740). Subsequently, he refined and polished his thought by

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<sup>1</sup> For some representative examples, cf. Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines* (London, 1941); Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London, 1977); A. J. Ayer, *Hume* (Oxford, 1980). For some notable exceptions see p. ii, note 3 above.

<sup>2</sup> J. G. A. Pocock has wisely warned scholars of the danger of assuming coherence in 'Languages and their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought', *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Chicago, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> There is no *a priori* justification for approaching figures of intellectual history as systematic; a systematic programme can only be confirmed upon investigation, *a posteriori*.

casting it in more polite form within the pages of his *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, the *History of England*, as well as the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*. In so doing he wrote for public consumption, writing that literature was ‘the ruling passion of [his] life’ (ML, p. xxxiii; L, I, p. 13). With Hume’s literary pursuits in mind, his work on the science of politics can be properly situated within the context of his philosophical programme as well as the context of Hanoverian political discourse and, more broadly, eighteenth-century European thought.<sup>4</sup>

The articulation of his thought in different forms places Hume within the changing historical context of the eighteenth-century. This changing atmosphere, though containing strong elements of continuity, took place in both society and state. In important respects Hume’s writings reflect and project such change. A philosophical treatise written in technical and sophisticated prose was recast in the form of polite essays; they did not appear *sui generis*. These essays were written for the patrons and culture of the coffeehouse where conversation and commerce were dominant features.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 184-204; Schmidt, pp. 261-297; Haakonssen, *Science of a Legislator*, pp. 4-44; Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-c.1800* (New Haven, 1995), pp. 2, 70, 115, 147, 160, 179, 194; Peter Miller, *Defining the Common Good: empire, religion and philosophy in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 124, 127; J. G. A. Pocock, ‘The varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A history of ideology and discourse’, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, pp. 215-310, at 222, 234, 239, 248, 250-2.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Nicholas Phillipson, ‘Politics and Politeness in the Philosophy of David Hume’, *Politics, Politeness, and Patriotism*, (ed.) Gordon J. Schochet (Washington, 1993), pp. 305-318; Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Politeness and the interpretation of the British eighteenth century’, *Historical Journal* 45 (2002), pp. 869-898; Brian Cowan, ‘The rise of the coffeehouse reconsidered’, *Historical Journal* 47 (2004), pp. 21-46; Steven Pincus, ‘“Coffeehouse politicians does create”: coffeehouses and restoration political culture’, *Journal of Modern History* 67 (1995), pp. 807-834; Piero Camporesi, *Exotic Brew: the*

increasingly 'polite and commercial people' of William Blackstone's Britain consumed Hume's thought in their own vernacular. Along with the political discourse with which Hume was interacting, it must be remembered that the burgeoning public sphere was an important feature of the Hanoverian context.<sup>6</sup>

## §II. POLITICAL THOUGHT AND THE 'SCIENCE OF MAN'

The context of Hume's political thought historically was that of Hanoverian Britain and 'Enlightenment Europe';<sup>7</sup> the context of Hume's political thought within his literary work was that of the 'science of man'. Exactly how this relationship was conceived by Hume is demonstrated in his autobiography 'My Own Life', in which he speaks of his life as 'the History of my Writings' (ML, p. xxxi). As has already been noted, one of Hume's enduring passions was literary fame and the life of letters. This does not mean that he wrote only what would bring him fame, far from it. Although he eventually received accolades for his

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*Art of Living in the Age of Enlightenment*, (trans.) Christopher Woodall (Cambridge, 1994); Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989); John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1991); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb (eds.), *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> I refer to 'the Enlightenment' acknowledging the problematic use of the definite article. Cf. Roy Porter and Mikulas Tiech (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1985); J. G. A. Pocock, 'Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment', *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, (ed.) P. Zagorin (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 91-111; *idem*, 'Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England', *L'Età dei Lumi: studi storici sul settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, (eds.) L. G. Crocker et al. (2 vols., Naples, 1985), I, pp. 525-562; *idem*, 'Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French Cases in British Perspective', *Government and Opposition* 24 (1988), pp. 81-105; *idem*, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764*, I, pp. 1-10, 'Introduction'.

*Essays* and the *History*, Hume faced constant criticism, persecution and harassment for his philosophical writings.<sup>8</sup>

It was upon the foundation of the principles established in the philosophical writings that Hume constructed his literary corpus.<sup>9</sup> A unified conception of his aims was present from the outset. Hume's first published work, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, made this philosophical programme clear.

Here then is the only expedient, from which we can hope for success in our philosophical researches, to leave the tedious lingering method, which we have hitherto follow'd, and instead of taking now and then a castle or village on the frontier, to march up directly to the capital or center of these sciences, to human nature itself; which being once masters of, we may every where else hope for an easy victory. From this station we may extend our conquests over all those sciences, which more intimately concern human life, and may afterwards proceed at leisure to discover more fully those, which are the objects of pure curiosity. There is no question of the importance, whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security. (T Int.6, p. 4)

The *Treatise* was meant to initiate a revolution in philosophy by pursuing the study of human nature as a 'compleat system of the sciences' based on observation.<sup>10</sup> This science was synoptic and panoramic; all other forms of inquiry derived their legitimacy as a part of the 'science of man'. This, as we shall see shortly, included politics.

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<sup>8</sup> Most notably, in his application to succeed John Pringle as professor of Ethics and Pneumatical Philosophy at Edinburgh University in the summer of 1744, which provoked *A Letter to a Gentlemen to His Friend in Edinburgh*. See E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 153-62.

<sup>9</sup> A prominent interpretation of Hume, though not without its critics. Cf. Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago, 1984), pp. ix, 1-4; *idem*, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy* (Chicago, 1998); Phillipson, *Hume*, p. 4; Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Shirley Robin Letwin, 'Hume: Inventor of a New Task for Philosophy', *Political Theory* 3 (1975), pp. 134-158.

The ‘Introduction’ to the *Treatise* makes clear that Hume operated within, though not exclusively, the philosophical tradition of empiricism. Isaac Newton, John Locke, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Bernard de Mandeville, Francis Hutcheson and Joseph Butler were all acknowledged forbearers – there were, of course, many unacknowledged authors such as Pierre Bayle and Nicholas Malebranche (T Int.n1, p. 5).<sup>11</sup> Hume made observation and experience the foundations of his philosophy. This ‘revolutionary’ method – applying the scientific method to morals – pervades Hume’s philosophical scope and is made quite clear in the ‘Advertisement’ to the *Treatise*.<sup>12</sup> Hume initially planned a panoptic study where morals, politics and criticism formed a constitutive part of the ‘science of man’. At this point, however, Hume desires the public’s approbation regarding the first parts of that science, the ‘understanding’ and the ‘passions’.

My design in the present work is sufficiently explain’d in the *Introduction*. The reader must only observe, that all the subjects I have there plann’d out for myself, are not treated of in these two volumes. The subjects of the *Understanding* and *Passions* make a compleat chain of reasoning by themselves; and I was willing to take advantage of this natural division, in order to try the taste of the public. If I have the good fortune to meet with success, I shall proceed to the examination of *Morals*, *Politics*, and *Criticism*; which will compleat this *Treatise of Human Nature*. The approbation of the public I consider as the greatest reward of my labours; but am determin’d to regard its judgement, whatever it be, as my best instruction. (T Adv., p. 2)

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<sup>11</sup> For the French context of Hume’s thought, see Peter Jones, *Hume’s Sentiments: Their Ciceronian and French Contexts* (Edinburgh, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Michael Barfoot, ‘Hume and the culture of science in the early eighteenth century’, *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, (ed.) M. A. Stewart (Oxford, 1990), pp. 127-150; Nicholas Capaldi, *David Hume: the Newtonian Philosopher* (Boston, 1975); *idem*, *Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy* (New York, 1989); James Force, ‘Hume’s Interest in Newton and Science’, *Hume Studies* 13 (1987), pp. 166-216; Jane L. McIntyre, ‘Hume: Second Newton of the Moral Sciences’ *Hume Studies* 20 (1995), pp. 1-18; Eugene Sapadin, ‘A Note on Newton, Boyle, and Hume’s “Experimental Method”’, *Hume Studies* 23 (1997), pp. 337-344; S. K. Wertz, ‘Hume and the Historiography of Science’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993), pp. 411-436).

Here, then, is a clear articulation of the scope of Hume's thought; there is even reason to believe that this programme was conceived in advance of the *Treatise's* publication.<sup>13</sup>

The point being, however, to establish the interrelatedness of Hume's method and his endeavour; the same method that he makes use of in examining the 'understanding' and the 'passions', Hume claims, is used in examining morals, politics and criticism.

Hume eventually made good on his 'science of man', though not within the pages of the *Treatise*. Book III of the *Treatise*, 'Of Morals', was published in 1740; having made the public the arbiter of his work Hume responded accordingly. He writes in 'My Own Life' that the *Treatise* fell '*dead-born from the press*, without reaching such distinction, as even to excite a murmur among the zealots' (ML, p. xxxiv). Soon after 'Of Morals' was published, in 1741, Hume collected the first volume of his *Essays, Moral and Political* which was quickly followed by a second with corrections of the first. These are, as previously noted, polite renditions of principles worked out in the *Treatise*; these post-Augustan essays must be considered the completion of the 'science of man'. Having initially put the public in the place of judge, it retained its steadfast silence. The failure of the *Treatise* had, Hume claimed, 'proceeded more from the manner than the matter' and having gone to the press 'too early' (ML, p. xxxv).

The crucial point is that the 'science of man' – founded upon the study of human nature – included politics as a constituent *and* necessary ingredient; hence the claim that 'Politics May be Reduced to a Science' and its application in a character sketch of Sir

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, pp. 52-80. See also, 'Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-40: The Complete Text', *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1948), pp. 492-518.

Robert Walpole.<sup>14</sup> Part of this study will demonstrate such interconnectivity, asserting definitive links between the conclusions of a ‘mitigated sceptic’, as Hume professed to be, and the political scientist who was an avowed ‘friend to moderation’. These junctions within Hume’s thought need to be emphasized and examined.

### §III. MODERATION AND STABILITY

To appreciate the aforementioned junctions, the concept of ‘political stability’ will be analysed within Hume’s political science. A useful place to begin would be with a definition. J. H. Plumb has defined ‘political stability’ in its Augustan contexts as ‘the acceptance by society of its political institutions, and of those classes of men or officials who control them.’<sup>15</sup> This is an adequate definition for the period, though it needs elaboration if it is to cover completely how Hume might employ that concept. Hume sought to reveal what the foundations of politics were, arguing that politics was fundamentally based upon ‘opinion’ and ‘interest’. In the *Essays* Hume’s political thought was made accessible to a commercial, conversational and civilised society. This public, in turn, ‘consumed’ a science of politics that enabled it to judge its regime upon enlightened philosophical principles, almost unconsciously. The public would learn that political society and political institutions were founded on ‘artifice’, equipping Britons to assess governments contextually based upon their ‘first’ or ‘original principles’. At the same

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<sup>14</sup> The essay bearing this title appeared in Hume’s first edition of *Essays* in 1741. The character sketch of Sir Robert Walpole was included in the 1742 edition of the *Essays* after Walpole’s fall, though it was later subjugated to a footnote beginning in the 1748 editions, and dropped altogether in 1770.

<sup>15</sup> Plumb, *Growth of Political Stability*, p. xvi; see also C. Roberts, N. Landau and S. Baxter, ‘Political stability: A symposium’, *Albion*, 25 (1993), pp. 237-277; D. Cannadine, ‘Historians in “the liberal hour”: Lawrence Stone and J. H. Plumb re-visited’, *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), pp. 316-354.

time, such enlightenment would moderate 'enthusiastic' and 'fanatical' polemic by uncovering its patent absurdity; such deconstruction included, as we shall see, a sceptical critique of both Whig and Tory political theory.

Unlike many of his ideological brethren, Hume endorsed a politics shorn of ideological extremes. Writing *Cato's Letters*, Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard had asserted that the 'sole reason' men formed government was to preserve liberty.<sup>16</sup> Such explicit endorsement of Lockean Whig theory was not a sufficient explanation or formulation for Hume. To grasp the nature of liberty and its importance to politics required a sufficient understanding of human nature, something Hume set about to explore. Hume's stance in political theory had the effect of providing the Hanoverian regime with the equivalent of an establishment *apologia*. This does not mean that Hume failed to criticise the Hanoverian state; such a statement would be misleading. However, in eschewing the foundations of Tory and Whig political discourse Hume can properly be described as a 'sceptical' or 'establishment Whig'.<sup>17</sup> In order demonstrate this claim it is necessary to examine precisely the concept of political stability in Hume's thought through his conceptualisation of revolution and rebellion, obligation and duty, allegiance and faction, liberty and order. This analysis will also include the practical demonstration of Hume's thought through his discussion of the English/British constitution, the Civil War, and the Revolution of 1688-89.

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<sup>16</sup> [Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard], *Cato's Letters: or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religion, And other Important Subjects*, (ed.) Ronald Hamowy (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1995), 1, p. 427. *Cato's Letters* was originally published in the *London Journal* from 1720-1723 and was collected and reprinted repeatedly throughout the eighteenth century up to 1755 which this edition is based from. See the 'Publishing history' in the edition cited here, pp. xi-xiii.

<sup>17</sup> See above p. iii, n. 6.

Part of delineating the links in Hume's thought requires, as mentioned, attention to contemporary political discourse. This scholarly political discourse ranged from philosophical to historical, literary to theological, and popular to practical. The interplay of this discourse's dialectic and its contextual characteristics had a definitive impact on the types of questions asked and, in turn, how they were answered. As far as Hume was concerned, such influence was concretely realised when he examined the major events within English history. With one eye on contemporary debate and another on the philosophico-historical issues, Hume produced an eminently popular and profound series of works. By the middle of the 1750s Hume was referred to as the leading man of letters in Britain. In order to shed light on Hume's status and engagement within Hanoverian political discourse, his thought needs to be compared and contrasted with that of other notable figures from Viscount Bolingbroke to Edmund Burke, from Samuel Clarke to Cato, from John Locke to Lord Shaftesbury.<sup>18</sup> A perusal of alternative perspectives will help to adjust the clarity and innovativeness of Hume's thought.<sup>19</sup>

Stuart history had a ubiquitous place in Hanoverian discourse. It touched on the powerful issues of the nature of the constitution, the place and status of liberty, and

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<sup>18</sup> Such comparison cannot be comprehensive in an essay of this length and has been carried out to some degree already. See, for example, Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 160-161, 166, 176; *idem*, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: How the Enlightenment Transformed the Way We See Our Bodies and Souls* (Penguin, 2004), pp. 113-147; Jones, *Hume's Sentiments*.

<sup>19</sup> As has been pointed out in previous studies (Jennifer A. Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 39-81), it is quite easy to miss Hume's audacity when read by twenty-first century readers. The secular pull of his thought would have been abrasive to eighteenth-century minds. Caution against such lapses in past-mindedness requires constant reminder.

ultimately the nature of state.<sup>20</sup> Nor was Stuart history merely an academic or pamphlet war; the Jacobite uprisings styled the '15 and the '45 reminded Britons that questions regarding the legitimacy of a regime contained immediate and practical consequences. Hume – a Scotsman – certainly appreciated. The contested nature of the British regime, then, necessitates consideration of alternative political theories. Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, ex-Jacobite and 'patriot', represents a significant strand of political thought in Hanoverian Britain and his perceptions are analysed and compared with Hume's in chapter 3. Equally important is *Cato's Letters* which represents a prominent early eighteenth-century strand of Whig political thought in print, and they too are analysed in comparison with Hume's ideas. Alternative political theories, both Whig and Tory, need to be considered in some measure in order to fully grasp the range of political vocabularies available and why Hume's political idiom took the form it did. In short, I will argue that in the midst of cut-throat political debate, Hume was innovative as a political theorist in so far as his investigation was premised on the character and content of his philosophical investigation of human nature.

#### §IV. HISTORIOGRAPHY

For the period currently known as the 'long eighteenth-century', c.1660-c.1832, the nature of politics, state, society, and culture, are stridently contested in the historiographical literature. In several respects this debate includes Hume and his place in the Hanoverian and Enlightenment worlds. Such an historiographical predicament is bivalent; interpretations of Hume affect the way in which the Hanoverian world is

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<sup>20</sup> For the emergence of the modern concept of State, the classic study is Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, see especially vol. II, pp. 349-358.

interpreted, and *vice versa*. For this reason, I have attempted to include the relevant historiographical material where appropriate, attempting to outline the ways in which Hume's thought connects with current interpretative approaches to the 'long eighteenth century'.<sup>21</sup>

There are, generally speaking, two approaches (amongst many) to the long eighteenth century relevant for this study. One may be referred to as the 'continuity thesis', most notably associated with J. C. D. Clark and Jeremy Black.<sup>22</sup> The other might be referred to as the 'change thesis' associated with a host of scholars, such as John Brewer, Linda Colley, Paul Langford, Frank O'Gorman and Roy Porter.<sup>23</sup> These two interpretive frameworks approach the period in very different terms, providing an ideal test case to gauge the relative strength of these interpretive categories. A consideration of Hume's thought may be able to provide a place from which to evaluate these interpretive categories. Moreover, such interpretations may also be useful for studying Hume in that

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<sup>21</sup> This is not to ignore other important and relevant contexts such as eighteenth-century France, where Hume wrote the bulk of the *Treatise*, or the variety of skepticisms available. I have attempted to keep such considerations in mind throughout this study. See, for example, David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Skeptical Metaphysician* (Princeton, 1982); Jone's, *Hume's Sentiments*; Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*; Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, (Berkeley, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Clark, *English Society*; *idem*, 'England's Ancien Regime as a Confessional State', *Albion* 21 (1989), pp. 450-474; *idem*, 'Reconceptualizing eighteenth-century England', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15 (1992), pp. 135-138; Frank O'Gorman, 'Eighteenth-Century England as an *Ancien Regime*', *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in memory of Philip Lawson*, (eds.) Stephen Taylor, R. Connors and Clyve Jones (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 23-36; J. Innes, 'Jonathan Clark, Social History and England's "Ancien Regime"', *Past and Present* 115 (1987), pp. 165-200.

<sup>23</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State 1688-1783* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1837* (London, 2003), Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*; Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British political and social history, 1688-1832* (London, 1998); Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1989).

they provide contexts which Hume was part of. While such contexts may or may not limit or define our interpretation of Hume, they do, no doubt, contribute to our understanding of him within a broader historical framework.

In one sense, then, we may be able to comment upon the varying theses regarding the nature of the Hanoverian world; is it one best understood as an ‘ancient regime’, or is it, after all, the acorn that leads to the oak of modernity? Most likely it is neither of these things *in toto*. Most Hanoverian scholars steer the middle ground between Charybdis of Clark and Scylla of Porter *et al.* Aside from this particular interpretive debate, there are countless others within which Hume is tangled.<sup>24</sup> These may also be a part of the debate regarding the search for the origins of modernity.<sup>25</sup> Several interpretations of Hume attempt to fit him within either a ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’ taxonomy. Such ideological interpretations – obsessed with tracing the political lineages of modern political parties to their so-called origins – obscure Hume’s more immediate context, that of Whig and Tory. It should be stressed that the parties of Whig and Tory are *not* reducible to the muddled ideologies of liberal and conservative; any attempt to conflate these terms would be anachronistic and proleptic. This interpretive blunder is a common phenomenon in the history of philosophy; Hume, like John Locke before him and Edmund Burke after, is anachronistically characterized as an ancestor to either modern ‘liberalism’ or ‘conservatism’. While Hume may, correctly I think, have been a ‘founder’ of modern

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<sup>24</sup> Debate’s on whether or not Hume was a ‘moral realist’, if he fits neatly into a Natural Law tradition, if he was primarily a naturalist, an empiricist, an associationist, *et cetera ad absurdum*.

<sup>25</sup> J. A. W. Gunn has draw attention to the fact that anachronism can work both ways, looking too soon for modernity or ushering off the stage early modern understandings before they are gone. See *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Kingston and Montreal, 1983), p. 120.

political thought, holding views bearing affinity to modern liberalism or conservatism, it does not necessarily follow that he himself was an adherent of either of these two traditions.<sup>26</sup>

Donald Livingston and David Miller have argued that Hume is best understood as a conservative in ideological outlook, who advocated cautious and moderate reform.<sup>27</sup> John Stewart and Frederick Whelan, on the other hand, have argued that Hume allowed for liberal, radical change.<sup>28</sup> As a set-piece for this type of debate, Hume's essay 'Of the Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth' proves symptomatic. Miller, and those who share his outlook, interpret this essay as a piece of fictive idealism, meant as something of a satire, parodying James Harrington's *Oceana* and Thomas More's *Utopia*. Stewart argues, on the contrary, that this particular essay is meant as a practical suggestion, and should not be studied as satire but as a serious contribution to Hume's corpus.<sup>29</sup> Quite aside from whether or not either of these interpretations grasps the significance of Hume's essay, I contend that the entire debate could be waged without any reference to the modern and present-centred ideological categories these interpretations bring with them. If this is a defensible position, we can safely jettison *undue* meditation on Hume's place in the ancestry of modern party-politics.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas', p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, pp. 306-342; *idem*, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, esp. Pt 2, pp. 317-408; Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology*, pp. 15, 203-204.

<sup>28</sup> Stewart, *Opinion and Reform*, pp. 6, 194-223; Frederick Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli: Political Realism and Liberal Thought* (Lanham, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> This essay has been helpfully placed in the Enlightenment debate on the question of republics, their stability, and their size, by John Robertson in his essay 'The Scottish Enlightenment at the limits of the civic tradition', Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 137-178.

These first two interpretive considerations – the Hanoverian and ideological contexts – are concerns of history and political philosophy respectively.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that Hume has received better treatment from the history of ideas. Although such treatment is not the privilege of this discipline alone, it has so far provided characterisations of Hume that are, in general, more rounded and robust. For example, Istvan Hont has written expertly of Hume's relationship to the discourse of eighteenth-century political economy, while J. G. A. Pocock has considered Hume's vocation as an 'enlightened' and 'philosophical historian' as well as a 'sceptical Whig'.<sup>31</sup> These assessments pay due attention to the frameworks and contexts from which Hume operated, and balance such considerations with what Hume actually wrote.<sup>32</sup> In doing so they have painted several different kinds of Hume, all of which, when understood holistically, go some way to providing a comprehensive understanding of what Hume actually thought about politics. Here is the framework this essay adopts, hoping to cast a shade of new light on a figure subject to constant investigation.

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<sup>30</sup> Other contexts, such as the story of the development of modern moral philosophy could be added. However, this lies outside the scope (and capability) of this paper. One approach I have found useful is J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Istvan Hont, 'The Rhapsody of Public Debt, David Hume and Voluntary State Bankruptcy', Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), 321-48; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government*, II, pp. 163-257.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Porter, *Enlightenment*.

## CHAPTER 1

### *The genesis of Hume's political thought*

The goals of this chapter are fourfold. First, it seeks to outline the ways in which philosophy, human nature, and the science of man interact to lay the foundation upon which Hume's political thought is built. Second, it argues that Hume's 'mitigated scepticism', as the conclusion of his philosophical enquiries, informs the kind of science of politics he conducts: sceptical, moderate, establishment. Third, it suggests that Hume's initial meditation on politics, conceived in the context of a philosophical treatise on human nature, provides the groundwork for his polished meditation on politics that highlights certain enlightenment virtues. Fourth, it notes that Hume's work aims, in a negative fashion, to stabilise politics under the Hanoverians by undercutting the extremes of eighteenth-century political discourse; this is accomplished by laying bare the principles and structures of politics, exposing alternative conceptualisations for the sham justifications they are and the dangers they present.

We have already noted that Hume's *Treatise* and the first two volumes of his *Essays* roughly coincided with the fall of Sir Robert Walpole (1741-2), 'statesman of peace' and 'architect of stability'.<sup>1</sup> Several historians have argued that Walpole's political machinations worked towards the secure establishment of the Hanoverian regime. He

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<sup>1</sup> O'Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, p. 86; M. M. Goldsmith, 'Faction Detected: Ideological Consequences of Robert Walpole's Decline and Fall', *Historian* 64 (1979), pp. 1-19.

achieved this by pragmatically manipulating the political machine; he made no apology for this fact, claiming to be ‘no Saint, no Spartan, no Reformer’. It was Walpole, more than any other, that secured the Whig supremacy, and with it, a workable and stable political world.<sup>2</sup> Hume’s philosophical aims also included the establishment of stability and smooth functioning in politics although his perspective was dramatically different than Walpole’s, or any other mid-eighteenth century politician. Hume’s method, his means, and his solution for moderating politics and firming up the status of the Hanoverian regime were dictated by his philosophy, his account of human nature, and his science of man. What, then, is the appropriate way to understand Hume’s philosophy? More specifically, what does the genesis of this philosophical outlook have to do with his science of politics? These are the two broad questions this chapter addresses.

#### §I. PHILOSOPHY, HUMAN NATURE, AND THE SCIENCE OF MAN

It is evident that the eighteenth century presented Hume with a variety of paradigms to canvass; some were political, some were philosophical, and some were historical. Most of these categories made use of the concept ‘human nature’ in the workings of its logic. Hume was not, strictly speaking, an entirely ‘innovative ideologist’ – to use Quentin Skinner’s apt phrase – when he proposed that his philosophical treatise be explicitly dedicated to an investigation of this concept.<sup>3</sup> Hume’s ‘attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects’ in a rigorously Newtonian or

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<sup>2</sup> William B Willcox and Walter L. Arnstein, *The Age of Aristocracy 1688-1830* (8<sup>th</sup> ed., Boston, 2001), pp. 94-96.

<sup>3</sup> Quentin Skinner, ‘Moral principles and social change’, *Visions of Politics*, I, 145-157; cf. Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics*, pp. 3-58.

empiricist fashion, while new in its thoroughness, was different in degree, not in kind.<sup>4</sup>

For Hume, the only way to construct a science of man was to base it upon human nature, to 'take the castle', as it were. Being a constitutive component of the science of man, the concept of human nature required a philosophical articulation.<sup>5</sup>

Like natural philosophy, the 'science of man' required certain 'principles' by which to study it.<sup>6</sup> The constancy of the idea of 'human nature', like gravity, was one such principle; it made possible the science of man and of morals. As an anatomist of the science of morals, Hume has been the subject of many studies.<sup>7</sup> In Book III of the *Treatise* Hume observes that the 'natural and inherent principles and passions of human nature' are 'inalterable' and even 'immutable' (T 3.2.5.9, pp. 334, 395). The merit of this system, as Hume sees it, is that he takes human nature as it is naturally found, and builds his moral system upon it rather than some speculative illusion. He clearly wished this teaching to be known on a broader public scale; in the second *Enquiry* we find that the 'humanity of one man is the humanity of every one; and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures' (EHU, 8.1, p. 148). The principles of the passions and sentiments are, generally speaking, universal. Yet the 'difference, which nature has placed between one man and another, is so wide, and this difference is still so much farther

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<sup>4</sup> See note 11 p. 5 above.

<sup>5</sup> Hume was unique in his thoroughness and commitment to see this method as the appropriate one; it was the means by which to understand man and, therefore, to construct the most realistic and workable civil and political society. For similar observations see Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 130-132, 138-142, 179.

<sup>6</sup> For the Natural Law context of this concept see Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*; Richard Tuck, *Natural rights theories: Their origin and development* (Cambridge, 1979); James Tully, *An approach to political philosophy: Locke in context* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> John Biro, 'Hume's new science of the mind', *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 39-47; John Immerwahr, 'The Anatomist and the Painter: The Continuity of Hume's *Treatise* and *Essays*', *Hume Studies* 27 (1991), pp. 1-14.

widened, by education, example, and habit, that, there is no scepticism so scrupulous, and scarce any assurance so determined, as absolutely to deny all distinction between them' (EPM, 1.2, 3.45, pp. 73, 97). Are these statements contradictory? Not when read in light of Hume's observations made elsewhere in his corpus. The 'springs' or the principles of morals are the same, Hume argued, regardless of context; the 'course' they followed, however, accounts for contextual diversity, rendering the seeming paradox innocuous.<sup>8</sup> 'A Dialogue', placed at the end of the second *Enquiry*, clears the mist by tracing matters to the first principles each nation establishes 'of blame or censure'. He illustrates this principle by way of a natural example: 'The RHINE flows north, the RHONE south; yet both spring from the same mountain, and are also actuated, in their opposite directions, by the same principle of gravity. The different inclinations of the ground, on which they run, cause all the differences of their courses' (EPM, D.26, D.36, D.38, pp. 192, 193, 194). Hume's analysis is careful; the principles of human nature are inalterable while inclination accounts for the difference between humans.<sup>9</sup>

Hume was concerned in his philosophical and historical writings with both similarity and variety; he also investigated the balance between continuity and discontinuity. One of the primary characteristics of human nature – and a distinctively human characteristic – is man's capability for sympathy, the sentiment which allows man

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<sup>8</sup> Livingston lays special emphasis on Hume's analysis of human nature in context, see *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, chap 8, pp. 210-246.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Robert Brown, *The nature of social laws: from Machiavelli to Mill* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 83, 92; Leon Pompa, *Human Nature and Historical Knowledge: Vico, Hume, and Hegel* (Cambridge, 1990); Simon Evnine, 'Hume, Conjectural History, and the Uniformity of Human Nature,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31(1993), p. 592; T. P. Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830* (New York, 1933), p. 22; J. W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (2 vols., Gloucester, Mass., 1967), II, p. 71; Roger Trigg, *Ideas of Human Nature: An Historical Introduction* (London, 1999), chap 6, pp. 79-93.

to identify with other human beings, past or present.<sup>10</sup> We have already noted that certain ‘principles’ or ‘laws’ must be present in order for the study of human nature to be amenable to a naturalistic account in keeping with the ‘new science’; similarity, for Hume, is accompanied by both sympathy and continuity (what it means to have a ‘nature’ in the first place).<sup>11</sup> While ascribing to the method of natural philosophy,<sup>12</sup> Hume also held to a probabilistic account of uniformity; that is, uniformity was not certain but merely probable.<sup>13</sup> This gave Hume’s account of human nature a sceptical and cautious texture. Like similarity and diversity, uniformity was conceived within a flexible framework. In the midst of a discussion of the love of fame, embedded in Book II, ‘Of the Passions’, Hume makes clear his meaning.

Now ’tis obvious, that nature has preserv’d a great resemblance among all human creatures, and that we never remark any passion or principle in others, of which, in some degree or other, we may not find a parallel in ourselves. The case is the same with the fabric of the mind, as with that of the body. However the parts may differ in shape or size, their structure and composition are in general the same. There is a very remarkable resemblance, which preserves itself amidst all their variety; and this resemblance must very much contribute to make us enter into the sentiments of others, and embrace them with facility and pleasure. Accordingly we find, that where, beside the general resemblance of our natures, there is any particular similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or language, it facilitates the sympathy. (T 2.1.11.5, p. 207)

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<sup>10</sup> Hume granted that some animals were capable of sympathy, but human sympathy was distinctive because it is central to human nature and therefore morals, knowledge/belief, and politics.

<sup>11</sup> S. K. Wertz, ‘Hume, History, and Human Nature’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975), pp. 481-496; *idem*, ‘Hume and the Historiography of Science’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993), pp. 411-436; Christopher J. Berry, ‘Hume on Rationality in History and Social Life’, *History and Theory* 21 (1982), pp. 234-247.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Ingenious Pursuits: Building the Scientific Revolution* (New York, 2000); Shapin, *Scientific Revolution*; Porter, *Enlightenment*, chap. 6, pp. 130-155.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. David C. Stove, *Probability and Hume’s Inductive Scepticism* (Oxford, 1973); David Owen, *Hume’s Reason* (Oxford, 1999); Barry Gower, ‘Hume on Probability’, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 42 (1991), pp. 1-19; Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (Cambridge, 1975).

We can, through sympathy, conduct an investigation of human nature, and the general similarity and continuity of that nature even allows of conclusions based on that inquiry.<sup>14</sup>

It is also what generates Hume's acute historical observations. We know that this individualistic psychologization of human nature was important to his thought, finding a repeated and extended account of sympathy in the first *Enquiry* (EHU 3.11-18, pp. 104-107).

Hume's investigations led him to conclude that human nature was contextual and not impervious to a variety of forms. He could not dogmatically assert a uniform view of human nature that took no account of diversity. His analogy, found in the second *Enquiry*, was that men in different times and places may build their houses differently, but they all have walls, roofs, windows, and doors (EPM, 3.45, p. 97). The behaviour of men takes place in diverse settings, yet the reason that it can be explained at all, on Christopher Berry's reading, is because 'it instantiates universals'.<sup>15</sup> It is this quality of human nature that allows us to learn from history, making it both intelligible and meaningful.<sup>16</sup> It is also why Hume emphasises 'the importance of custom and culture in shaping human thought', and views human nature as 'highly adaptive and immensely flexible'; human beings are 'structurally', but not 'substantially similar'.<sup>17</sup> Like

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<sup>14</sup> Haakonssen, *Science of a Legislator*, pp. 4-44; Herdt, *Religion and Faction*, chap 1, pp. 17-38; David Fate Norton, 'Hume, human nature, and the foundations of morality', in *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 169-71; John Radner, 'The Art of Sympathy in Eighteenth Century Moral Thought', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 9 (1979), pp. 189-210; Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy*, pp. 108, 133.

<sup>15</sup> Berry, 'Hume on Rationality in History and Social Life', p. 242.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Robert Brown, *The nature of social laws: Machiavelli to Mill* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 83, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Dees, 'Hume and the Context of Politics', p. 231; cf. Leon J. Goldstein, 'Review of Leon Pompa *Human Nature and Historical Knowledge*', *History and Theory* 31 (1992), pp. 57-8; Simon Blackburn, *Truth* (Oxford, 2005), last chapter.

Montesquieu, Hume argues that human nature has a certain matter, while context partially determines the form, depending on a variety of factors such as culture, climate, language, etc. Appreciating Hume's subtle, yet consistent view of human nature, is a vital component of his 'science of man', yet it has managed to elude otherwise thoughtful readers of his work.<sup>18</sup> It is only by philosophically grasping human nature, and thus the science of man, that 'politics may be reduced to a science'.

## §II. MITIGATED SCEPTICISM AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

Hume's investigation of human nature is based on what he calls a 'durable and useful' scepticism (EHU, 12.24, p. 207; T 1.4, pp. 121-178).<sup>19</sup> This mitigated sceptical perspective is derived from a rejection of Pyrrhonian or excessive scepticism that doubts all things, resulting in the suspension of belief and action.<sup>20</sup> Moderate, true scepticism, on the other hand, entails a return to normal social life where correction, not mere suspension, of belief and action are possible (T 1.4.3.10, 1.4.7.13-15, pp. 148, 176-178).<sup>21</sup> Although solitary philosophical study leads to the conclusion that reason can provide no justification for knowledge, 'nature proves too strong for reason' (EHU, 12.4, 12.21 12.23, 12.25, pp. 200, 206, 207, 208). Moderate scepticism also acknowledges that it is not

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, (ed.) Jan van der Dussen (Oxford, 1993), pp. 82-3, 206, 207, 224; for more sympathetic yet critical accounts see: Norton, 'Hume, human nature', pp. 169-71; Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Robert J. Fogelin, 'Hume's scepticism', *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 90-113; Norton, *David Hume*, chap. 5, pp. 192-238; Miller, p. 41; Whelan, *Order and Artifice*, p. 32; Schmidt, chap. 5, pp. 137-160.

<sup>20</sup> Richard H. Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, (eds.) Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (Indianapolis, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Hume can be adequately summarised on this subject in one sentence drawn from the *Abstract* (A, p. 414): 'Philosophy would render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it.'

‘reason, which is the guide of life, but custom’ (A, p. 411; EHU, 5.6, p. 122).<sup>22</sup> The consequence is a shift in the right role of reason.<sup>23</sup> Contrary to what many rationalist moralists had taught, custom is architectonic. In both private and public life, as we shall see, it specifies both natural and political duty, which is in turn determined by context. An analysis of custom becomes part of the science of morals. This sceptical inquiry into morals still aims at teaching ‘us our duty; and, by proper representations of the deformity of vice and beauty of virtue, to beget correspondent habits, and engage us to avoid the one and embrace the other’ (EPM, 1.7, p. 75). Yet custom varies according to time and place, due to the fact that the ‘springs’ of human nature run different ‘courses’ upon different ‘ground’. Therefore, strictly speaking, we should not expect to find uniformity. Instead, based on Hume’s thought, we are able to account for a broad range of moral and political behaviour, including the standards of duty and obligation, by appealing to the different dispositions of diverse times and places.<sup>24</sup>

Hume’s science of morals dwells on custom rather than reason because it is custom that plays a central role in moral life, and particularly in belief. This is something Hume shared with Burke; both placed a fundamental importance on custom in moral life and its relationship to politics.<sup>25</sup> Hume treats the science of man as a philosophical investigation of human nature on par with the method of natural science because

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<sup>22</sup> Hume published the ‘Abstract’ after the publication of Books I and II, in attempt to clarify their contents and draw further attention to the work. The fact that it is retained and emphasized in the first *Enquiry* alerts us to its importance.

<sup>23</sup> On Hume’s conception of reason see: Owen, *Hume’s Reason*; Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 15-20, 49, 101, 127-133; Schmidt, pp. 225-229.

<sup>24</sup> See Hume’s essays ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, ‘Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Science’ and ‘Of Some Remarkable Customs’ in this setting. On Hume’s view of morals and context see: Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas’, *Politics, Language, and Time*, pp. 202-232.

knowledge and belief can be accounted for naturally. And, the most natural way of doing so is to analyse custom, realising that reason plays an instrumental rather than constitutive role. This kind of natural explanation incorporates in its analysis both 'habit' and 'interest' which Hume argues play significant roles in human life, especially in belief and society. Hume's incorporation of these concepts into his investigation allowed him to eschew the Pyrrhonian philosophy and its melancholy conclusions in favour of a useful and moderate scepticism.

There are several places in Hume's corpus from which we can draw out the consequences of moderate scepticism. The four essays on 'philosophical sects' found in the *Essays*, as well as the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, reveal the civil consequences of Hume's sceptical-scientific method. The four essays articulate an enlightened relationship between philosophy and life; they attempt to ascertain how to live the moderate and modern life of a polite and commercial society taking 'man as he is'. The *Dialogues* is dedicated to an investigation of the claims of natural religion; one of its central messages is that the religious sceptic, while holding the most philosophically rigorous position, is also best equipped for 'modern' life. He too is polite, moderate, and civil. The dialogic form of parts of Hume's work, from 'A Dialogue' to the *Dialogues* to the neo-classical aspects of the *History of England*, reveals Hume's approval of conversant thought and sympathetic understanding as important virtues for modern British society. Hume's sceptical investigation of human nature dispensed with the shoddy speculations of many contemporary moralists because such speculations did not lead to happiness, good morals, or the common good of society. Instead, taking man simply as he is, accompanied by the realisation of what modern life entailed, created the possibility of a

life of enlightened virtue; it also allowed for the useful citizen who contributed to the well-being of society, rather than undermining its foundations by appealing to specious speculative fantasies. Here is a sketch of politics aptly appropriate for the world of the Georgian gentleman.<sup>26</sup> If the reasonings of true philosophy proved ‘medicine of the mind’ then it proved also a panacea for the body politic (E ST, p. 169).

In a note to ‘The Epicurean’ Hume explains that the purpose of these four essays is to articulate the delivery of the sentiments of philosophical sects as they ‘naturally form themselves in the world’. He is not concerned to accurately represent them, but to contrast their different conceptions of happiness and the good life (E EP, p. 138n). The Epicurean, or ‘the man of elegance and pleasure’, criticizes those who think that ultimate pleasure rests with inner contemplation: ‘Thy mind be happy within itself! With what resources is it endowed to fill so immense a void, and supply the place of all thy bodily senses and faculties? Can thy head subsist without thy other members?’ (E EP, p. 140). The Epicurean embraces a refined hedonism; he rejects the cold speculation of the schools and instead embraces the mundane pleasures of civil conversation and worldly desires. Why cast a melancholy shadow over the pleasures of the present life by soberly prying into the existence of the next? Reflection should ease the thoughts of the after-life, not bring anxiety. ‘Our fruitless anxieties, our vain projects, our uncertain speculations shall all be swallowed up and lost. Our present doubts, concerning the original cause of all things, must never, alas! be resolved’ (E EP, p. 145). The Epicurean lives a life of this-

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishmen, 1689-1798* (Oxford, 1991); J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Authority and property: The question of liberal origins’, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, pp. 51-71; James Moore, ‘Hume’s Theory of Justice and Property’, *Political Studies* 24 (1976), pp. 103-119.

worldly pleasure because, according to him, the metaphysical speculations of melancholy philosophers can add nothing to it.

By placing the essay 'The Stoic' after that on Epicureanism, Hume sharply contrasts the two paradigms. The Stoic is a 'man of action and virtue'; pleasure is certainly central to his view, but his pleasure is of a different kind than that embraced by the natural hedonist. Happiness is for him the 'great end of all human industry'. It is to the securing of this end that all the arts, sciences, laws, and societies, are directed. Rather than surrender blindly to worldly pleasure, the true philosopher 'governs his appetites, subdues his passions, and has learned, from reason, to set a just value on every pursuit and enjoyment.' Once this just value has been determined and 'we have fixed all the rules of conduct, we are *philosophers*. When we have reduced these rules to practice, we are *sages*' (E ST, pp. 148-149). The Stoic is the man whose governing principle is reason and hopes to secure happiness and pleasure through such governance. This means combining a life of action and virtue; through the cultivation of the mind he is able to learn the value of each pursuit and thereby the proper objects of industry (E ST, pp. 149-150). The Stoic spends an appropriate amount of time in study and contemplation in order to be a better man of action, which includes, quite importantly, helping his family, friends, and country (E ST, p. 151). Being satisfied with a reputation of virtue he does not enter the disputes regarding the nature of the Supreme Being or the after-life. His philosophy is one that best equips him for an active life, especially one marked out by civil conversation and political participation (E ST, p. 154). For Hume, the Stoic is best represented by his

beloved hero Cicero. The similarity of Cicero's Stoicism to some of Hume's philosophical positions should prevent us from aligning Hume solely with 'The Sceptic'.<sup>27</sup>

'The Platonist', or the man of contemplation and philosophical devotion, receives the shortest treatment in Hume's essays and is set directly before his apology for scepticism. Both the Epicurean and the Stoic attack the man of mere contemplation and deplore his philosophical stupor. For both, the Platonist is not successful in achieving happiness or pleasure. He is caught up in the meditations of his mind, bringing genuine happiness for neither himself, nor others. His philosophical devotion incapacitated him for the life of action or virtue; of what use, then, was he to his family, his friends, or his country? As Hume's poetic rendition of this sect makes clear, the Platonist shuns sensuous pleasure and worldly wisdom in favour of contemplating and worshiping divine perfection (Cf. E PL, pp. 156-157, 158). Pressed between the hostility of all the other voices, the Platonist is soundly drowned out.

'The Sceptic' returns to a style of writing that most clearly resembles Hume's own philosophic voice. The Sceptic begins by doubting the dogmatism of all the other systems of philosophy which are put forward. Such philosophies failed to note the vast variety of Nature's operations. Instead, they take hold of some philosophic principle which agrees with their temper and proceed to spin a web over the whole edifice of nature (E SC, pp. 159-160). Although the Sceptic has a great deal more to say on a wider breadth of subjects he still comes remarkably close to the Stoic's conception of the good life: 'the happiest disposition of mind is the *virtuous*; or, in other words, that which leads to action

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<sup>27</sup> 'The Stoic' is the second longest of the four essays; 'The Epicurean' is the third, and 'The Platonist' is last; 'The Sceptic' is as long as the other three essays put together. There may be some significance to this fact, and the priority Hume gives to the respective views of each sect.

and employment, renders us sensible to the social passions, steels the heart against the assaults of fortune, reduces the affections to a just moderation, makes our own thoughts an entertainment to us, and inclines us rather to the pleasures of society and conversation, than to those of the senses' (E SC, p. 168). Here is the 'medicine of the mind' that Hume offers in the voice of the Sceptic whose scepticism is that of a moderate, not a Pyrrhonian. Considering Hume's contemporary world, this medicine is a tough pill to swallow. The restriction of philosophical knowledge to so narrow a range by implication cast doubt on reason and rationalism (not to mention revelation), the props of Latitudinarian philosophical theism (Cf. E SC, pp. 177-179n).<sup>28</sup> Though Hume aimed to criticize the Cartesian *cogito*, he was not content merely to deconstruct. The Sceptic was a man of moderation and virtue. For the 'chief triumph of art and philosophy' was that it 'refines the temper, and it points out to us those dispositions which we should endeavour to attain, by constant *bent* of mind, and by repeated *habit*' (E SC, p. 171). Anything beyond this correction of common life passes into the vale of doubt. The Sceptic joins the Stoic in vanquishing vain speculation on other-worldly things, preferring to enjoy the present pleasure of worldly goods, conversation, and virtue (E SC, p. 180).

Stringing the statements of the various philosophical sects together, as Hume sees them, the consistent theme is one of action, virtue, and moderation centred on the present world. The Stoic and the Sceptic agree in this judgment most strongly; and if we can regard these essays as being dialogic in demeanour, Hume's point of pressing home

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<sup>28</sup> Some potential Humean targets: William Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (London, 1759); William Warburton, *The Devine Legation of Moses Demonstrated* (London, 1755); *idem*, *The Alliance Between Church and State: or, the Necessity and Equity of an Established Religion and a Test Law Demonstrated* (London, 1748); Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (London, 1767).

his interpretation of human happiness can scarcely be misread. Readers were sure to understand that the philosophical disposition which embraced the enlightened tetralogy of characteristics was sure to benefit modern society most. In other words, the citizens of polite society, who were really reading philosophy in polite form *via* essays such as Hume's, were being instructed on the good life and virtue for the modern body politic.<sup>29</sup>

### §III. PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS IN THE *TREATISE*

Considerations such as those discussed in the previous section were those of the more mature Hume, writing for a wider audience. Yet the groundwork for his science of politics, found in the *Treatise*, bears remarkable affinity to his later views. Since Hume first articulates his political theory within the pages of his philosophical *Treatise*, it makes sense to begin detailed analysis in this work. I will also loosely follow Hume's order of exposition in 'Of Morals', Book III of the *Treatise*, which can be suitably labelled a philosophical prolegomena to the *Essays*.

Perhaps a good place to begin is with Hume's rather infamous dictum that 'reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions' (T 2.3.3.4, p. 266). Reason, according to Hume, is responsible for matters of fact and truth; this, the analytic form of reason, is primarily concerned with the relations of ideas, such as the properties of triangles and circles. Analytic reason is appropriately concerned with the abstract, whose content is largely mathematical.<sup>30</sup> The other type of reason, the synthetic, is involved in the realm of morals and taste. Hume argues that questions of morals and taste are not matters of fact

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<sup>29</sup> Phillipson, 'Towards a Definition'; Robertson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment'.

<sup>30</sup> This is the source of Hume's famous ending found in the EHU, p. 211; understanding Hume's distinction regarding reason dampens such rhetorical flare.

but matters of sense; therefore Hume is rightly considered a philosopher of sentiment, though this is but one intellectual and discursive context in which to locate his thought. This ‘sentimental’ assertion is a direct challenge to the classical conceptualisation most famously associated with Plato and Aristotle and the modern rationalists such as Descartes, Hobbes, Locke and Clarke. According to Hume reason plays an instrumental role in human psychology, not an architectonic one.<sup>31</sup>

There are several thinkers who anticipate Hume in the controversy over the origin and foundation of morals. Some notable predecessors whom Hume drew from or from whom he distinguished himself were: Locke, Shaftesbury, Bishops Berkeley and Butler, as well as William Wollaston and Samuel Clarke.<sup>32</sup> Francis Hutcheson wrote *An Inquiry in the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) where, apparently defending Shaftesbury against Bernard Mandeville, he posited the existence of a moral sense in man.<sup>33</sup> In defending Shaftesbury, Hutcheson contributed to the development and articulation of a ‘moral sense’ philosophy. Hutcheson, who had himself been in contact with other philosophers like the Cambridge Platonists and Latitudinarian divines such as Gilbert Burnet, gave currency to the moral sense school of thought by drawing upon the

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<sup>31</sup> Hume constantly refers to reason’s importance in human nature, though as a mitigated sceptic he does not accept reason as the means of establishing moral facts; rather he recognises reason’s importance in decision-making. Cf. Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 8-9; Owen, *Hume’s Reason*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>32</sup> In general see: Schneewind, *Invention of Autonomy*, chaps. 15 and 16, pp. 310-353; Stewart, *Opinion and Reform*, chap. 2, pp. 47-108; John P. Wright, ‘Butler and Hume on habit and moral character’, *Hume and Hume’s Connexions*, pp. 105-118.

<sup>33</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry in the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, (ed.) Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis, 2004), esp. pp. 89-100. The subtitle to the first edition of the inquiry reads: ‘IN WHICH The Principles of the Late Earl of Shaftesbury are Explain’d and Defended, against the author of the *Fable of the Bees*.’

respected Natural Law tradition aimed at justifying morality against its early-modern adversaries.

Hume draws upon this line of thought in Part i of Book III of the *Treatise* where, following Hutcheson, he outlines the moral implication of a sentimental moral philosophy.<sup>34</sup> Hume continues to build upon what he had established in the previous two Books of the *Treatise*, setting up the rationalist case for the understanding of morals as follows.

Those who affirm that virtue is nothing but a conformity to reason; that there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being that considers them; that the immutable measures of right and wrong impose an obligation, not only on human creatures, but also on the deity himself: All these systems concur in the opinion, that morality, like truth, is discern'd merely by ideas, and by their juxtaposition and comparison. In order, therefore, to judge of these systems, we need only consider, whether it be possible, from reason alone, to distinguish betwixt moral good and evil, or whether there must concur some other principles to enable us to make that distinction. (T 3.1.1.4, p. 294)

Hume with Hutcheson evidently rejects this rational account of morality as articulated by the likes of Wollaston and Clarke. His reasons for so doing are detailed and complex but can be adequately summarized in his own words.

Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already prov'd, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason. (T 3.1.1.6, p. 294)

Hume then restates in miniature various arguments as to why reason is not the arbiter of morality. Hume follows Hutcheson's work in positing the existence of a moral sense. In

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<sup>34</sup> Hume modestly criticised Hutcheson's system because of its dependence on Providence. Hume, a secular man in a religious environment, could not accept this account, and told Hutcheson as much: L, I, pp. 32-35. Cf. Moore, 'Hume and Hutcheson', *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, pp. 23-57; Norton, *David Hume*, chap. 2, pp. 55-93.

this vein Hume argues that morality 'is more properly felt than judg'd of' (T 3.1.2.1, p. 302).<sup>35</sup> To grasp virtue 'is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind'.

The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no farther; nor do we enquire into the cause of the satisfaction. We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. The case is the same as in our judgements concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is imply'd in the immediate pleasure they convey to us. (T 3.1.2.3, p. 303)

This is Hume's teaching in Part i of Book III. It serves as the foundation upon which the rest of Book III stands. It also serves as a kind of summary for Books I and II, culminating in a moral philosophy based on sentiment. Hume's account of justice, property, government, and allegiance all rest on this philosophy of sentiment. As the core of Hume's (political) thought, these issues also lay the foundation for Hume's science of politics and his critical historical judgements. From Part ii of Book III we can obtain a preliminary understanding of political stability as enunciated by Hume *en philosophe*.<sup>36</sup>

Classical political philosophy began by considering the question, what is justice? Hume's answer to this all-important question is very different from the standard classical one. In keeping with certain assumptions and conventions of Hanoverian society, Hume explained justice in terms of property. Aside from being in tune with changing social conventions, Hume's treatment of justice follows from his conclusions reached in Part i of Book III, and from his philosophical psychology developed in Books I and II. For Hume there was nothing to be gained in speaking of a human soul, and so justice cannot be

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<sup>35</sup> Roger Emerson, 'Science and moral philosophy in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Studies in Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 11-36; Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, chap. 1, pp. 3-58; Luigi Turco, 'Moral sense and the foundations of morals', *Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 136-156.

<sup>36</sup> Hume's understanding was derived, interestingly enough, from a series of philosophical Whigs: Locke's associationist psychology, Shaftesbury's politeness, Hutcheson's moral sense.

caught up with a harmony among its parts. This provided a sharp contrast with what Plato's *Republic* (Bk III, 401d-402a) argued, along with its English disciples – the so-called Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury, Wollaston and Clarke.

In morals Hume makes a distinction between the 'natural' and the 'artificial'. He asserts that justice falls under the latter heading. What distinguishes the two? To answer this question clearly it will be useful to employ Hume's own terminology. Natural virtues are those which are 'common to the species', they arise from the condition of man *in* nature (T 3.2.1.19, p. 311). Hume gives an example of the natural affection a parent has for his or her child. When such affection is lacking, we morally disapprove; it is the (natural) duty of the parent to care for the child (T 3.2.1.5, p. 309).<sup>37</sup>

Justice is an artificial virtue because it does not exist as a virtue in mankind. It stems from the formation of society and is wholly bound up with property and what Hume calls 'laws of equity' (T 3.2.1.17, p. 310). According to Hume there is no natural motive to justice: 'if public benevolence therefore, or a regard to the interests of mankind, cannot be the original motive to justice, much less can *private benevolence*, or a regard to the interests of the party concern'd, be this motive' (T 3.2.1.13, p. 310). Hume is also at pains to show that because justice is artificial it is not, therefore, 'arbitrary'. For, 'in another sense of the word; as no principle of the human mind is more natural than a sense of virtue; so no virtue is more natural than justice.' From such a portrayal it is not 'improper' to call some artificial virtues '*laws of nature*' (T 3.2.1.19, p. 311). Hume begins

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<sup>37</sup> Henry David Aiken, 'The Originality of Hume's Theory of Obligation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 42 (1982), pp. 374-383; Stephen Darwall, 'Motive and obligation in Hume's Ethics', *Nous* 28 (1993), pp. 415-448; Bernard Wand, 'Hume's Account of Obligation', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1956), pp. 155-168; Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy*, pp. 108, 137; *idem*, *Opinion and Reform*, pp. 124-125.

his discussion of justice in Section 2, Part ii of Book III by making this distinction between the natural and the artificial. From there he moves on to examine 'the manner, in which the rules of justice are established' (T 3.2.2.1, p. 311). The very title of this section gives away Hume's position: 'Of the origin of justice and property'. The two are for him wholly interrelated.

In order to remedy the defects of man's natural condition, society is formed. Within society, the mutual advantage of specialisation is made abundantly clear. Hume argues that 'in order to form society, 'tis requisite not only that it be advantageous, but also that men be sensible of its advantages; and 'tis impossible, in their wild and uncultivated state, that by study and reflection alone, they shou'd ever be able to attain this knowledge' (T 3.2.2.4, p. 312). Like many of his predecessors Hume outlines sex and the family as the 'first and original principle of human society' (T 3.2.2.4, p. 312). 'Custom and habit' then maintain the advantages of society. Hume joined Hutcheson and Butler in repudiating the 'selfish' systems of morals associated with Hobbes and Mandeville. Hobbes had famously contended that, lacking the peace imposed by Leviathan, the interests of man left each an 'Enemy to every man' thereby rendering the 'life of man solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short'; the Commonwealth was created to provide a way out of the state of war for man's 'own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby'.<sup>38</sup> Mandeville, inverting Shaftesbury's conception of society's good, suggested that writers stop telling readers what they should be, and rather describe them as they are; for Mandeville this meant that man was '(besides Skin, Flesh, Bones,

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (ed.) Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 89, 117; Daniel E. Flage, 'Hume's Hobbism and His Anti-Hobbism', *Hume Studies* 23 (1992), pp. 369-382.

&c. that are obvious to the Eye) to be a compound of various Passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no.’

According to Mandeville the importance of these characteristics, the real ‘Support of flourishing Society’, was his reason for writing the scandalous and scurrilous poem, *The Grumbling Hive; or Knaves turn’d Honest*.<sup>39</sup> A poem dedicated to showing how man’s selfish vices paved the way for Hanoverian prosperity was hardly to Hume’s liking, who instead noted that selfishness was being over-indulged.

I am sensible, that, generally speaking, the representations of this quality [selfishness] have been carry’d much to far, and that the descriptions, which certain philosophers delight so much to form of mankind in this particular, are as wide of nature as any accounts of monsters, which we meet with in fables and romances. So far from thinking, that men have no affection for any thing beyond themselves, I am of opinion, that tho’ it be rare to meet with one, who loves any single person better than himself; yet ’tis as rare to meet with one, in whom all the kind affections, taken together, do not over-balance all the selfish. (T 3.2.2.5, p. 313)

Hume steers a course between what modern social scientists would describe as the egoist and altruist accounts of human nature. This path still allows him to recognise the validity of society, for he quickly outlines three species of goods which human beings possess: ‘the internal satisfaction of our mind, the external advantages of our body, and the enjoyment of such possessions as we have acquir’d by our industry and good fortune.’ It is this last form, property, which is ‘expos’d to the violence of others’. The chief advantage of society is the ‘improvement of these goods’, while their ‘instability’ and ‘scarcity’ are their ‘chief impediment’ (T 3.2.2.7, p. 313).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, (ed.) F. B. Kaye (Oxford, 1926), pp. 39, 40; M. M. Goldsmith, ‘Regulating Anew the Moral and Political Sentiments of Mankind: Bernard Mandeville and the Scottish Enlightenment’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1980), pp. 587-606; Luigi Turco, ‘Sympathy and the Moral Sense: 1725-1740’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7 (1999), pp. 79-101.

<sup>40</sup> On nature and progress see: Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 295-319, 424-445.

Echoing Hobbes and Locke, Hume noted that there is no principle in human nature to protect property in the ‘uncultivated state’. Hume proposed that the ‘idea of justice can never serve to this purpose, or be taken for a natural principle, capable of inspiring men with an equitable conduct towards each other. That virtue, as it is now understood, wou’d never have been dream’d of among rude and savage men’ (T 3.2.2.8, pp. 313-314). Our partiality in this state renders us incapable of embracing the idea of justice, which in Hume’s terminology is a synonym for equity, especially in terms of property.<sup>41</sup> Justice, then, is an ‘artifice’.<sup>42</sup> It is a virtue based upon the foundation of society, the chief interest of which is ‘advantage’, especially regarding ‘external goods’ such as property. When societies have become sensible of this advantage, ‘and have besides acquired a new affection to company and conversation’, they realise that ‘disturbance in society arises from those goods, which we call external, and from their looseness and easy transition ... they must seek for a remedy’ (T 3.2.2.9, p. 314). Hume’s supposed remedy is a ‘convention’, Lockean in tone, entered into by all for the mutual protection of property, based upon the ‘general sense of common interest’ (T 3.2.2.10, p. 315). Though in contrast to Locke, Hume likens this process to two men simultaneously pulling the oars of a boat without invoking a promise: it is conventionally undertaken.<sup>43</sup>

After the convention of society is formed, justice, property, right and obligation are established. These are initially and finally instituted for the protection of property,

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<sup>41</sup> Pocock, ‘Authority and property’, p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Annette Baier, ‘Hume’s Account of Social Artifice – Its Origins and Originality’, *Ethics* 98 (1998), pp. 757-778; Charles E. Cottle, ‘Justice as an Artificial Virtue in Hume’s *Treatise*’, *Journal for the History of Ideas* 40 (1979), pp. 457-466; Miller, pp. 62, 78; Whelan, *Order and Artifice*, pp. 192, 237, 286.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Francis Snare, *Morals, Motivation and Convention: Hume’s Influential Doctrines* (Cambridge, 2002).

including self-preservation. Property and justice are inevitably intertwined: 'property is nothing but those goods, whose constant possession is establish'd by the laws of society; that is, the laws of justice.' Hume argues that a man's property is an object related to him not naturally but morally: 'the origin of justice explains that of property' (T 3.2.2.11, p. 315). However Locke's 'labour theory of value' may have been intended, Hume understood it in its Whig form to be a natural relation, one implanted in the natural law tradition and based on natural right, in that respect like Hobbes' conception. Hume shuns this kind of language, preferring to keep his relation tied to an artificial conception of property, based on an artificial conception of civil society because it is congruent with moral man as he described him.

In sum, the primary reason for the establishment of society is due to 'advantage' or 'general interest' in property. The convention of society is responsible for the 'artificial' genesis of justice and, in turn, both right and obligation. One of the chief reasons for the convention is to stabilise property and its relations. It follows, then, that the 'laws of justice' – i.e. political society – are the cornerstone upon which government will eventually be built. 'Political stability' is in large part constituted by the protection and stabilisation of property. This, as we shall see, was an important interpretive tool Hume made extensive use of in his subsequent political and historical enquiries.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: the Tory Party, 1714-1760* (Cambridge, 1985); J. B. Owen, *The Rise of the Pelhams* (London, 1957); D. A. Baugh (ed.), *Aristocratic Government and Society in Eighteenth-century England: the Foundations of Political Stability* (New York, 1974); G. Holmes, 'The achievement of stability: the social context of politics from the 1680s to the age of Walpole', *Whig Ascendancy*, (ed.) J. Cannon (London, 1981), pp. 1-27; R. Connors, *Pelham, Parliament and Public Policy, 1746-1754* (University of Cambridge, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, 1993).

After having dealt with the ‘idle fiction’ of the state of nature thesis, Hume draws a summary of Part ii, Book III which that fiction illuminates: ‘justice takes its rise from human conventions; and that these are intended to remedy some inconveniences, which proceed from the concurrence of certain *qualities* of the human mind with the *situation* of external objects. The qualities of the mind are *selfishness* and *limited generosity*’ while the external objects are subject to ‘*easy change*’ and ‘*scarcity*’ (T 3.2.2.16, p. 316; italics in text). The latter part of Section 2 is largely a restatement of the artificial nature of justice, displayed through three points outlined by Hume (T 3.2.2.18-21, pp. 318-319). The second point argues against the Platonic and rationalist conception of justice, because justice is, for Hume, primarily concerned with property and not with the internal harmony of the soul or immutable innate ideas. The third point reaffirms justice as artificial, for it is based upon Hume’s conclusion that men would not need rules of justice if they naturally regarded ‘particular interests’: as he noted, ‘Without such a convention, no one wou’d ever have dream’d, that there was such a virtue as justice’ (T 3.2.2.21, p. 320).

Why is justice a virtue and injustice a vice? Hume answers, initially, that there is a ‘natural’ obligation in ‘interest’; analysis of the ‘moral’ component is postponed until the natural virtues and vices are first dealt with (T 3.2.2.23, p.320). At first, when society is small, ‘interest’ is ‘sufficiently strong and forcible’; when ‘society becomes numerous ... this interest is more remote’. Under these conditions, it is only through ‘sympathy’ that justice is conceptualised; justice pleases while injustice, no matter how remote, displeases.

The *general rule* reaches beyond those instances, from which it arose; while at the same time we naturally *sympathize* with others in the sentiments they entertain of us. Thus *self-interest* is the original motive to the *establishment* of justice: But a *sympathy* with *public* interest is the source of the *moral* approbation, which attends that virtue. This latter principle of sympathy is too weak to

controul our passions; but has sufficient force to influence our taste, and gives us the sentiments of approbation or blame. (T 3.2.2.24, pp. 320-321)

The ‘artifice’ of justice is also reinforced or ‘extended’ by the efforts of politicians or through education, while a reputation for justice is an interest ‘firmly established among mankind’ (T 3.2.2.27, p. 321). These are Hume’s preliminary thoughts on the moral approbation given to justice. Moral approbation is a product of society, where natural interest is remote, and sympathy facilitates the conceptualisation of justice and right.

Section 3 of part ii Book III is dedicated to the rules which determine property. It is worth stressing once again that the philosophical underpinning of Hume’s political thought is crucial to understanding his broader science of politics as expressed in the *Essays* and his historical judgements found in the *History*. To establish that one of Hume’s central concerns was to moderate politics and provide an *apologia* for the Hanoverian state requires this level of attention to the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*. For example, if justice is ‘artificial’, and if one has a Humean understanding of it, it becomes readily understandable why Hume characterises the Revolution of 1688-9 in the way that he does. Property, as we shall see, is an important facet of the *History*’s narrative. It is also the key component to political enfranchisement. The Lords and the Commons, being land-holders, enjoyed the right to participate in politics because of their land. It could be argued, and it has been, that both the Civil War and the Revolution were at heart about property – something both Whig and Tory could in some sense agree on.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *The British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, 1980); Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government: 1572-1651* (Cambridge, 1993).

Hume's first observation concerning the rules of property regards distribution. He eschews the classical-scholastic-cum-rationalist accounts of justice as distribution based on the fitness of things, as these are 'occasions of discord and contention' for man is a partial and passionate being (T 3.2.3.2, p. 322). From the 'savage and solitary' condition of the state of nature, men enter the above mentioned civil convention. The question of distribution is settled quickly and a rule is laid down, '*that every one continue to enjoy what he is at present master of*' (T 3.2.3.3, p. 322, italics in text).

This deals with the question of the origin of property. Hume realises that this treatment is insufficient to deal with property in society so he then proceeds to lay down four rules of property along the lines of his psychological and epistemological associationism. These four rules are: occupation, prescription, accession and succession. Occupation is nearly synonymous with first possession and receives quick treatment. Hume defines a possession as that which, 'when we immediately touch it, but also when we are so situated with respect to it, as to have it in our power to use it; and may move, alter, or destroy it, according to our present pleasure or advantage'. Possession is declared to be 'a species of cause and effect', property being 'nothing but a stable possession, deriv'd from the rules of justice' (T 3.2.3.7, pp. 324-325). Prescription is equivalent with 'long possession', where 'first possession becomes obscure thro' time' (T 3.2.3.9, p. 326). Accession is the acquisition of property through connections of an 'intimate manner' with objects already our property, such as the fruit of our garden (T 3.2.3.10, p. 327). Lastly, succession is the transference of property based on a relation, from parents to children. And in order to supplement these four rules on property, Hume writes that for the state of flexibility – 'some medium betwixt a rigid stability, and this changeable uncertain

judgement' – property is also transferred through consent, 'when the proprietor agrees to bestow them on some other person' (T 3.2.4.1, p. 330).

Hume concludes his discussion of 'the three fundamental laws of nature' by arguing that a promise is both artificial and conventional. Section 5, part ii, Book III presents Hume's argument in full. For our purposes, it is most important to note the consequence of this particular aspect of Hume's thought. Like his analysis of justice, promise-keeping is only understandable in relation to the formation of society and is intimately bound up with the idea of property. Hume's three laws of nature – 'that of the stability of possession, of its transference by consent, and of the performance of promises' – are responsible for the 'peace and security' of society (T 3.2.6.1, p. 337). In other words, the stability of society rests on these principles.

Section 6 bridges the gap between the theoretical beginnings of 'natural' society and the theoretical beginnings of 'political' society, which Hume holds as distinct, both theoretically and historically. The first 5 Sections of Part ii Book III are foundational; they set the stage for Hume's account of government. So far we have established that justice is both artificial and virtuous because of human nature and man's natural condition; justice is artificial because it is conceived only after man has entered society, and it is virtuous because it gives man a feeling of approbation or pleasure based on interest. It is in man's interests to form society and observe justice. Property is given a similar treatment by Hume and is intimately related to justice. It too exists only in society and is artificial; its institution and the rules which govern it are based on interest and utility. Accompanied by the additional 'law' of promise-keeping, these laws and their observation provide the basis for stable society.

Thus, society is entered into because of interest. Yet how is it to be maintained? On Hume's analysis we naturally 'prefer the contiguous to the remote'. His is as much a psychological principle as a moral and political one. This situation is naturally corrected by appointing magistrates to enforce the rules of justice and equity.<sup>46</sup> Such persons are at a distance from particular situations and are able to adjudicate impartially: 'being indifferent persons to the greatest part of the state, [they] have no interest, or but a very remote one, in any act of injustice'. The flip side of this equation is also true, because magistrates are satisfied with 'their part in society, [they] have an immediate interest in every execution of justice, which is so necessary to the upholding of society' (T 3.2.7.6, p. 344). The virtue of this characterisation, so far as Hume is concerned, is that it does not require the alteration of human nature; instead it uses a change in circumstance to achieve justice. This is the principal advantage of government. Moreover, because magistrates are 'indifferent to the greatest part of society, [they] will decide [cases] more equitably than every one wou'd in their own case.' This twofold advantage – 'the execution and decision of justice' – allows man to 'taste at ease the sweets of society and mutual assistance' (T 3.2.2.7-8, pp. 344-345).

Hume then subsumes the analysis of moral obligation or duty under the realm of politics. The particular interest of individuals is rendered moot by the imposition of governors or magistrates who are disinterested, having little or no interest in seeing acts of injustice go unpunished: 'government extends farther its beneficial influence; and not contented to protect men in those conventions they make for their mutual interest, it often obliges them to make such conventions, and forces them to seek their own

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. N. Landau, *The Justices of the Peace, 1679-1760* (Berkeley, 1984); E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: the Origin of the Black Act* (London, 1975).

advantage, by a concurrence in some common end or purpose' (T 3.2.7.7, p. 345). The historical origin of government was for Hume an interesting and problematic idea.<sup>47</sup> What is important about the origins of government, both conjecturally and historically, is the lack of an obligatory basis for allegiance to government as typically described by Whig and Tory political theorists. Hume recognised that moral obligation to government was initially ascribed on alleged promises based upon utility (T pp. 346-347). However, he also holds that the obligation of allegiance and the obligation of promise-keeping are distinct. While providing the justification for this differentiation, he makes clear several important ideas about both government and promise-keeping worth quoting at length:

The same self-love, therefore, which renders men so incommodious to each other, taking a new and more convenient direction, produces the rules of justice, and is the *first* motive of their observance. But when men have observ'd, that tho' the rules of justice be sufficient to maintain any society, yet 'tis impossible for them, of themselves, to observe those rules, in large and polish'd societies; they establish government, as a new invention to attain their ends, and preserve the old, or procure new advantages, by a more strict execution of justice. So far, therefore, our *civil* duties are connected with our *natural*, that the former are invented chiefly for the sake of the latter; and that the principle object of government is to constrain men to observe the laws of nature. In this respect, however, that law of nature, concerning the performance of promises, is only compriz'd along with the rest; and its exact observance is to be consider'd as an effect of the institution of government, and not the obedience to government as an effect of the obligation of a promise. Tho' the object of our civil duties be the enforcing of our natural, yet the *first* motive of the invention, as well as the performance of both, is nothing but self-interest: And since there is a separate interest in the obedience to government, from that in the performance of promises, we must also allow of a separate obligation. To obey the civil magistrate is requisite to preserve order and concord in society. To perform promises is requisite to beget mutual trust and confidence in the common offices of life. The ends, as well as the means, are perfectly distinct; nor is the one subordinate to the other. (T 3.2.8.5, p. 348; EPM, 4.1-2, p. 99)

Man constructs the convention of government for the sake of private interest; public interest is then enforced by government through the disinterested magistrate. The moral obligation of obedience or allegiance to government is an approbatory ascription of what is conducive to man's interest. This interest is served by a government concerned to

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*, pp. 112-114; Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy*, pp. 123-7.

maintain order and justice. For man 'so urgent an interest quickly retains their actions, and imposes an obligation to observe those rules, which we call the *laws of justice*. This obligation of interest rests not here; but by the necessary course of the passions and sentiments, gives rise to the moral obligation of duty; while we approve of such actions as tend to the peace of society, and disapprove of such as tend to its disturbance' (T pp. 363, 394; EPM, 3.34-40, pp. 93-96). This, then, is the source of moral obligation under political society: the order and maintenance of justice enforced by a disinterested magistrate is in our interest.<sup>48</sup>

Once political society and government is established it does not take long for the advantages to be keenly felt. Indeed, it is only upon the foundation of political society that civilisation can exist at all. Only in this way could the 'polite and commercial people' of eighteenth-century Britain be accounted for. The 'savage', the 'rude', and the 'barbarous' lack the foundations which constitute modern civilisation: commerce and civility, politeness and philosophy, these questions demarcate the era of 'barbarism and religion' from the 'modern'.<sup>49</sup>

Hume took up the enlightened argument that society existed without government, or at least the possibility of this pre-political state (T 3.2.8.1, p. 346). In this respect he once again diverges from the canon of classical, medieval, and Renaissance

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<sup>48</sup> This is not strictly a selfish sentiment, benevolence and a regard for the public are aspects of human nature, cf. EPM, 5.16-18, pp. 108-110, 114; cf. Haakonssen, *Science of a Legislator*, pp. 4-44.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Brewer, *Sinews of Power*; P. G. M. Dickinson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (London, 1967); Thomas Horne, *The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1978).

political theory which held, *pace* Aristotle, that man was by nature a political animal.<sup>50</sup> He also distances himself from Hobbes, Locke and their disciples by emphasizing the fictional status of the state of nature, and what Hume saw as the absurd political conclusions they drew from that idea. Instead Hume asserts in Machiavellian terms that conflict between primitive societies prompted the formation of government.<sup>51</sup> Such conflict arises from competition over goods. This is also why he argues ‘pure monarchies’ are the first form of so many governments: ‘Camps are the true mother of cities; and as war cannot be administered, by reason of the suddenness of every exigency, without some authority in a single person, the same kind of authority naturally takes place in that civil government, which succeeds the military’ (T 3.2.8.2, p. 346). Sir Robert Filmer had, of course, suggested that the origin of government was the family, itself an old tradition in political thought, but modified to fit with a certain understanding of Scripture. This High-Tory political thought proved long lived in Hanoverian discourse.<sup>52</sup> Locke wrote a refutation of Filmer’s theory, arguing that the source of government was the consent of men. Hume differed from both of them in accepting a certain historical version of government’s origin, through necessity and war, while subtly differing from Locke’s contractual account, positing its natural occurrence rather than an explicitly rational-volition one.

After implicitly criticising Locke’s account of promise and allegiance, Hume asserts that obedience and duty are derived from promise-keeping (artificial), and from

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1253<sup>a</sup>3; Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, I, pp. xiv, 40, 44, 47, 49-51, 55-57, etc.

<sup>51</sup> Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli*, pp. 59-83.

<sup>52</sup> Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property*, chap 4: ‘The Spectre at the Feast: The Persistence of High-Tory Ideas’, pp. 120-193.

the advantages reaped from government (artificial).<sup>53</sup> These are distinct (in nearly all cases) sources of obligation, and as such provide distinct criteria for the source of obedience, and, more importantly, for resistance as well (T 3.2.8.3-4, pp. 347-348). All of Section 8, 'Of the source of allegiance', is given over to demonstrating that allegiance is not based on consent *via* promise-keeping, in contrast to Locke. Instead, promise-making as a source for allegiance (consent) is distinct from honour based on interest (advantage). The former may, and in most cases does, enhance the sense of allegiance, but the two should not be conflated. Nor, to be sure, should promise-keeping be taken as the basis of social formation; according to Hume, promises are only intelligible in the context of society itself.

Section 9, 'Of the measures of allegiance', outlines the implications of Hume's teaching thus far. It is a robust revision of Locke's contractual theory:

I seek, therefore, some such interest more immediately connected with government, and which may be at once the original motive to its institution, and the source of our obedience to it. This interest I find to consist in the security and protection, which we enjoy in political society, and which we can never attain, when perfectly free and independent. As interest, therefore, is the immediate sanction of government, the one can have no longer being than the other; and whenever the civil magistrate carries his oppression so far as to render his authority perfectly intolerable, we are no longer bound to submit to it. The cause ceases; the effect must cease also. (T 3.2.9.2, p. 352)

Resistance to government, then, is not based on a breach of some 'original contract', but is legitimised on a more secure and logical footing: interest. This shift in the source of legitimate resistance is ultimately connected with property and its stability: this is the 'interest' for which government is established in the first place, and it is the lowest

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<sup>53</sup> For Locke's conception of allegiance, see Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics*; Dunn, *Locke's Political Thought*, pp. 120-147; Tully, *Approach to Political Philosophy*, pp. 281-314. Hume agrees with Locke insofar as the purpose of government is to protect property, which prompts the formation of political society, which in turn is responsible for individual prosperity and the modern conception of propriety.

common denominator. 'Our general knowledge of human nature, our observation of the past history of mankind, our experience of present times; all these causes must induce us to open the door to exceptions, and must make us conclude, that we may resist the more violent effects of supreme power, without any crime or injustice' (T 3.2.9.3, 3.2.9.4, pp. 353, 354). There is a legitimate and proprietary place for rebellion: when the purpose for which government was convened has been violated.

Such a statement is quickly followed by serious qualification. While it may be just to resist tyranny, 'in the ordinary course of human affairs nothing can be more pernicious and criminal' if constantly threatened; government is 'entirely useless without exact obedience' (T 3.2.10.1, p. 354). In other words, exceptions to the rule are rare. If a norm of rebellion is established, 'anarchy' and perpetual 'convulsions' are bound to follow. This too contravenes the reason for which government exists. A prescriptive right of resistance would obviate altogether the possibility of proprietary politics.

This is where the moral obligation of obedience originates. According to Hume, before political society existed there was only natural obligation; moral obligation is a derivative of the '*advantage* reap from government, which gives us a repugnance to practise resistance ourselves, and makes us displeas'd with any instance of it in others' (T 3.2.10.3, p. 355). This is the first answer that Hume gives to the question, who ought to rule? Magistrates are determined at the time of society's first formation, based on 'promise' but 'without having in view any particular advantage from the choice' (T 3.2.10.3, p. 356). This lack of discernment, however, is assiduously augmented through five 'principles of right'. The first principle of right is long possession; loyalty, or moral obligation, is the 'general tendency': "'Tis interest which gives the general instinct; but 'tis

custom which gives the particular direction.’ Secondly, although present possession is less forceful, it closely resembles long possession: ‘Right to authority is nothing but the constant possession of authority’ (T 3.2.10.4, 3.2.10.5, p. 356). Third, right based on conquest: it resembles present possession but has ‘a superior force, being seconded by the notions of glory and honour’. ‘Succession’, which needs no elaboration, and ‘positive laws’ are the fourth and fifth principles of right respectively (T 3.2.10.9, 3.2.10.14, pp. 347-348, 349). Hume gives an example of positive law in this context: a legislature determining the form of government and its succession, a particularly British concern. While these five rights retain a measure of flexibility, they are ‘justly regarded as sacred and inviolable’. This, however, is contrasted by the fact that ‘history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy; which, showing the original qualities of human nature, teaches us to regard the controversies in politics as incapable of any decision in most cases, and as entirely subordinate to the interests of peace and liberty’ (T 3.2.10.15, p. 359). In other words, ‘sceptical philosophy’ reveals the inherent ambiguity in political practice, calling for moderation instead of dogmatism. I shall deal more extensively with Hume’s treatment of history below. For now, it seems clear that resistance, such as that offered in 1688, can only be justified (retrospectively?) by excessive tyranny, with due regard for the normative formulation of that concept.

While this does not provide an exhaustive account of the philosophical genesis of Hume’s political thought, it does provide a preliminary sketch of the relevant material in terms of moderation and stability. The origin and purpose of government is clear, the nature of justice and property explained. From the vantage point of 1739-40 some of Hume’s preoccupations gain a more weighty significance. Although ‘1688’ was a

ubiquitous trope of eighteenth-century British political discourse, in the throes of Walpole's Whig ascendancy, it was still a vehemently contested moment. In addressing arguments derived from such standard figures as Locke and Hobbes, Hume developed his critique of political theories that lacked a foundation in the science of man, and which lent themselves to the various political disputes in which Hanoverian Britain was embroiled. Were the 'revolution principles' being overturned by corrupt Whig patricians and placemen, as Commonwealthmen, Viscount Bolingbroke and the Opposition had argued?<sup>54</sup> We now have a theoretical grasp of how Hume might answer these challenges, and we shall pursue his response in his *Essays* and the *History* below. Aside from Hume's genuine philosophical interest, it is readily understandable why a discussion of 1688-89 appeared in Book III of the *Treatise*; justifications and denunciations of that episode often entailed epistemological entanglements enlightened minds thrived on investigating. Hume connected the events of English history as many of his contemporaries did, but to different ends and for different reasons.<sup>55</sup> This is, in part, why the first volumes of the *History* covered the Tudors and Stuarts, and why these volumes followed the publication of Hume's popular *Essays*, where the politics of the Civil War and Revolution figured significantly.

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthmen* (Indianapolis, 2004); Quentin Skinner, 'Augustan party politics and Renaissance constitutional thought', *Visions of Politics*, III, pp. 344-367, which originally appeared as 'The Principles and Practice of Opposition: the Case of Bolingbroke Versus Walpole', *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society in honour of J. H. Plumb*, (ed.) Neil McKendrick (London, 1974), pp. 93-128; David Armitage, 'Introduction', *Bolingbroke: Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. vii-xxiv.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. J. P. Kenyon, *Revolution Principles: The Politics of Party, 1689-1720* (Cambridge, 1977).

Hume followed his *Treatise* account of government, justice, and property, with a brief analysis of the ‘laws of nations’, what we might call international law today. Here Hume pungently applies the domestic principles of political stability to the international realm. It is a concise reiteration of the philosophical underpinnings previously put forward. ‘Where possession has no stability there must be perpetual war. Where property is not transferr’d by consent, there can be no commerce. Where promises are not observ’d, there can be no leagues nor alliances. The advantage, therefore, of peace, commerce, and mutual succour, make us extend to different kingdoms the same notions of justice, which take place among individuals’ (T 3.2.11.2, p. 363). A proper philosophical understanding of politics will reveal how political society is maintained while undercutting the justifications of political polemicists.

#### §IV. TOWARDS MODERATION AND STABILITY

Thus far, it has been established that Hume’s political thought is best understood when placed within a philosophically articulated web of his science of man. This integrated approach has suggested that Hume’s science of politics was undertaken in a vein of ‘mitigated scepticism’. Hume was a ‘sceptical’ or ‘establishment Whig’ in the sense that his scepticism lead him to acquiesce in the search for an originally legitimate regime (morally or politically). Most regimes, if not all, were founded on violence and conquest, as Hume recognized: ‘Time and custom give authority to all forms of government, and all successions of princes; and that power, which at first was founded only on injustice and violence, becomes in time legal and obligatory’ (T p. 362; E OG, pp. 39-40). This placed

Hume in opposition to Locke and Filmer and their adherents, who sought the ultimately legitimate regimes based on abstract principles, making them prone to politics of excess.

Moderate political thought encouraged consideration of the merit of both sides via sympathetic understanding, and managed to displease no one (E CP, p. 494; E PS, p. 507).<sup>56</sup> Like Bolingbroke, Hume analysed the nature of the Hanoverian state with his philosophical perspective in hand. Scepticism recommended caution philosophically, and this was carried over into the science of politics. He concluded that the ‘world is still too young to fix many general truths in politics, which will remain true to the latest posterity’ (E CL, p. 82). This did not, however, prevent him from praising the merit of Britain’s established mixed constitution (E PR, p. 18). It did lead him to criticise ardent party factionalism, accompanied by immoderate religious or philosophical zeal that was capable of toppling the balance of the constitution and the state (E PR, pp. 26, 30-31; E BG, p 53; E PG, p. 55). This would be followed by an unbeneficial calamity hardly in tune with the interests of society. One thing that Hume singled out as a strong deterrent to political upheaval was the establishment of ‘good laws’ (E PR, p. 25; E CL, p. 94; ERP, p. 118).<sup>57</sup> Where there was a balance or moderation between order and liberty, under the rule of law, good government generally followed. This balance – for Hume based on propriety – was one that appreciated the merits of both Whig and Tory ideologies, but cautioned against the dominance of one or the other.

In both the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* Hume (conjecturally) recognized that government was instituted upon interest for the utilitarian purpose of maintaining order

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<sup>56</sup> Herdt, *Religion and Faction*, pp. 168-181; Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, pp. 35-37; Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 172-3, 193.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*, pp. 117-120.

and justice. He also admitted that as a (historical) explanation for the origins of government, this was insufficient. Instead of some ‘ancient constitution’ or original contract or divine right, Hume suggested that (most) governments were founded on violence and maintained continued legitimacy based on opinion. It is ‘on opinion only that government is founded’ (E FP, p. 32).<sup>58</sup> After government was founded, habit, custom and utility reconcile society to obedience. So long as government fulfils its function of maintaining order and justice, despite its original foundation, it secures our allegiance and duty, even above our ‘fellow-citizens’ (E OG, pp. 38, 39). This predominately moderate, cautious and rigorously philosophical approach to the origins of political society supports the proposition that Hume was an ‘establishment Whig’. This does not mean that Hume was uncritical of the Whigs or the Hanoverian polity. He recognized its faults and merits – particularly later in life, when the spectre of excessive liberty and oppressive debt loomed ominously over-head. However, he viewed any visionary change in politics under the rubric of ‘enthusiasm’ or ‘fanaticism’.<sup>59</sup> Instead of radical change – advocated by antinomian Levellers, republican Commonwealthmen and the Old Whig-Tory Opposition – Hume advocated moderate reform: ‘all general maxims in politics ought to be established with great caution; and that irregular and extraordinary appearances are frequently discovered in the moral, as well as the physical world’ (E RC, p. 366). This type

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<sup>58</sup> Cottle, ‘Justice as an Artificial Virtue’; Robertson, ‘Scottish Enlightenment and the civic tradition’, pp. 151-177.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. E IC, p. 514: ‘All plans of government, which suppose great reformation in the manners of mankind, are plainly imaginary.’ Though this is a clear enough statement, it does not warrant writing off this work as an impractical or fanciful work, as some scholars have done. Robertson, correctly I think, places this essay in the debate surrounding republics and their possibility in modernity, ‘Scottish Enlightenment and the civic tradition’. For some remarks regarding Hume’s essays and the views of his contemporaries, see: Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics*, pp. 193, 219-22.

of political irregularity, manifested most potently through the English Civil War and the Jacobite uprisings, advises politicians to take ‘mankind as they find them’. They should not ‘introduce any violent change in their principles and ways of thinking’; instead, it is the best ‘policy to comply with the common bent of mankind, and give it all the improvements of which it is susceptible’ (E CO, p. 260). This became concrete when Hume tells his readers not to ‘let the establishment of the Revolution deceive’ them. Instead, he admonishes them to consider it in a disinterested light. If such a ‘spectator’ perspective is taken, it becomes possible to realize that the Revolution was not a total transformation as was often claimed, but the working of ‘some seven hundred, who determined that change for near ten millions’ (E OC, pp. 472, 474-475). Hume would have cautiously considered the merit of the Revolution at its inception; however, some 50 years afterwards under the admirable, though far from perfect, rule of the Hanoverians, he argued that political and moral allegiance was due to the established regime.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics*, pp. 94-100.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Politics, religion and the history of the Stuarts*

#### §I. THE POLITE AND PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF SUPERSTITION AND ENTHUSIASM

Hume reserved some of his most venomous attacks in the *History of England* for periods of religious ‘superstition’, ‘enthusiasm’, ‘fanaticism’, and ‘zeal’. This antagonistic position towards what he regarded as ‘flights of fancy’, common to both the Puritan and the Platonist, was originally developed in the *Treatise* under the auspices of philosophical scepticism and the ‘science of man’. The philosophical and psychological critique of superstition and enthusiasm also received direct attention in the *Essays*, and scattered yet forceful treatment in the first and second *Enquiry*. In order to understand the implications of Hume’s analysis of religion’s role in politics we must grasp the nature of his general philosophical critique.

Hume was not operating in an intellectual vacuum when he put pen to paper and lambasted religious and philosophical ‘enthusiasts’.<sup>1</sup> The initial articulations by Hobbes, the Cambridge Platonists, and Locke on reason and the dangers of enthusiasm ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge, 1992); Michael Heyd, *‘Be Sober and Reasonable’: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995); Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 599-627; Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 96-129.

received systematic and sentimental endorsement from the Third Earl of Shaftesbury.<sup>2</sup> In 'A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to My Lord \*\*\*\*\*' Shaftesbury subjected enthusiasm to enlightened investigation and polished ridicule.<sup>3</sup> Just as important was the Restoration – post-1660 – articulation of Latitudinarian theology which played an important role in subverting the claims of religious zealots from the standpoint of Anglican conviction.<sup>4</sup> Shaftesbury was also crucial in the articulation of 'politeness' as a consideration of cultural importance. These ideas were taken on board by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison immortalized by their judicious 'Spectator' who promoted a polity where philosophical understanding was disseminated through coffeehouse conversation. Even Hume's arch philosophical adversary Bolingbroke railed against both superstition and enthusiasm, though his quest for political power invited accusations of hypocrisy, because of his early flirtations with Jacobitism and the Pretender.<sup>5</sup> This was their means of spreading enlightenment, thereby eliminating some of the maladies that plagued English

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: moral discourse and culture politics in early eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994); *idem*, 'Politeness in the British eighteenth century'; Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 22-23. (See also above p. 3, n. 3).

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, (ed.) Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 4-28.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Richard Ashcraft, 'Latitudinarianism and toleration: historical myth versus political history', *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England, 1640-1700*, (eds.) Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, and Perez Zagorin (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 151-177; John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment: Science, Religion, and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1988); Mark Goldie, 'The Political Thought of the Anglican Revolution', *The Revolutions of 1688*, (ed.) Robert Beddard (Oxford, 1991), pp. 102-136; Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (New York, 1976); Peter Harrison (ed.), *'Religion' and the religions in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1990) Peter Lund (ed.), *The margins of orthodoxy: heterodox writing and cultural response, 1660-1750* (Cambridge, 1995); Porter, *Enlightenment*, chap 5, pp. 96-129.

<sup>5</sup> Bolingbroke, *Letters on History*, pp. 22, 54.

society and government.<sup>6</sup> Hume was an inheritor of this tradition, and while he did not always agree with the narrower arguments of the polite authors, he certainly endorsed their means; dispersing philosophical understanding through the polite medium, whether printed or oral, was a laudable, if not necessary, Enlightenment endeavour.

Interestingly enough, Hume's critique of both superstition and enthusiasm ends where his essay on history, written largely for a polite female reading audience, begins.<sup>7</sup>

Therein Hume recommended four advantages to the study of history: 'it amuses the fancy', 'it improves the understanding', and 'it strengthens virtue' (E SH, p. 565).

Moreover, it 'keeps in a just medium betwixt ... extremes, and places the objects in their true point of view' (E SH, p. 568; E RW, pp. 474-476). This constellation of characteristics – amusement, understanding, virtue, moderation – is precisely that most likely to dispel the ghosts of superstition and enthusiasm. As we shall see below, Hume attempted to put his principles into practice by writing an enlightened narrative that contained precisely these four characteristics.<sup>8</sup> It will also be argued that the *Essays* and each *Enquiry* also advocate this Humean scale of values. Hume's attempt to disseminate these enlightened virtues presented him with some interesting challenges. As an inheritor of both Whig and Tory political philosophy and historiography Hume had to be careful, clear and selective in both his terminology and methodology if he wished his position to be understood. His

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 2000); Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Towns, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1991); T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe, 1660-1789* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Wootton, 'Hume "the historian"', *Cambridge Companion to Hume*, pp. 281-285; Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 132-141.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 56-92; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, II; Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*; Hicks, *Neoclassical History*.

interpretation of English history, at times historiographically reminiscent of the Huguenot Whig Rapin de Thoryas and the Tory Dr. Robert Brady, contained aspects both familiar and innovative.<sup>9</sup> His decision to write an establishment history was based on a set of innovative reasons; he had argued that politics was fundamentally based on artifice and opinion, which lead him to important interpretive differences over 1688, the Civil Wars, as well as the Norman Conquest. These historical arguments exercised an important influence on Hume's political and historical investigations, especially regarding the constitution.<sup>10</sup>

Hume's pioneering conception of English history – especially its secular thrust – is not so far removed from the critique of superstition and enthusiasm as one might think. Hume's critique of enthusiasm was familiar because it was not necessarily new. There was a long philosophical/ideological pedigree maintained from antiquity which praised moderation. Hume's favourite philosopher of moderation was Cicero, and Ciceronian moral and political philosophy had undergone a revival during the Renaissance.<sup>11</sup> This had given renewed currency to moderation in early modern state theory, where the threat of political faction and the importance maintaining the state, were of particular importance. Furthermore, the Augustan age had seen its literary *lumières* re-articulate,

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. M. G. Sullivan 'Rapin, Hume and the identity of the historian in eighteenth century England', *History of European Ideas* 28 (2002), pp. 145-162; J. G. A. Pocock, 'Robert Brady, 1637-1700. A Cambridge Historian of the Restoration', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 10 (1951), pp. 186-204.

<sup>10</sup> Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 264, 265; Stewart, *Moral and Political Philosophy*, pp. 224, 298; Miller, *Ideology in Hume's Political Philosophy*, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. for the Renaissance: Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, I, pp. 39-40, 47, 54-55, 195-6; for the eighteenth-century: Miller, *Defining the Common Good*, pp. 21-87; Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, pp. 11-28; Jones, *Hume's Sentiments*, pp. 29-43.

for a burgeoning literate and commercial culture, the values of moderation and philosophical understanding.<sup>12</sup>

Hume's critique of enthusiasm was unique because the nature of his criticisms laid special emphasis on the destructive role that religion could play in the body politic.<sup>13</sup> Hume claimed that religious and philosophical enthusiasm was liable to unravel the fabric of social and political society. As a self-proclaimed philosophical sceptic Hume was perhaps bound to lay a heavier emphasis on the fragility of epistemology than many in his day were willing to concede.<sup>14</sup> This of course earned him some unfavourable epithets from intellectual and religious corners alike. And though we have covered the connection between philosophical scepticism and Hume's political thought on a theoretical level, the more specific connection between enthusiasm and politics needs further elucidation.

In Part iv of Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume makes his first systematic attempt to defend scepticism.<sup>15</sup> This concluding section has the ostensible aim of dealing with the variety of philosophies while laying particular emphasis on scepticism. In the first section Hume jettisons the notion, as we have already seen, that reason can or ought to be the reliable guide for human knowledge. First, he concludes that all knowledge 'resolves itself

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (London, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Criticism of the mixture of religion was quite obviously not new. In the immediate context of England Shaftesbury's criticisms of 'enthusiasm' and 'superstition' and the priestcraft which accompanied these phenomena (*Characteristics*, pp. 358-65) is pertinent. See also p. 52 n. 1 above. For the extended history of the secularisation of the modern concept of the State see Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, II, pp. 347-348, 349-350.

<sup>14</sup> David Fate Norton, *David Hume*; Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, among others, argue that Hume's scepticism has been largely misunderstood.

<sup>15</sup> On Hume's scepticism in general, see: Robert J. Fogelin, 'Hume's Scepticism', *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 90-116; Norton, *David Hume*, chap. 5, pp. 192-238; Schmidt, chap. 5, pp. 137-160.

into probability'. Second, he introduces the inherent uncertainty which the science of probability is susceptible to, thus arriving at the Cartesian position of epistemological doubt (T 1.4.1.1-6, pp. 121-122). Hume quickly allays any fear that he is one of the 'total sceptics', typically associated with Pyrrho, saying that such persons are 'fantastic', dupes of self-deception. 'Neither I', Hume writes, 'nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion.' The point of 'displaying so carefully the arguments' of scepticism, is to demonstrate that reasoning concerning cause and effect is in fact based on custom, and is properly regarded as a 'sensitive' rather than a 'cogitative' act (T 1.4.1.7-8, p. 123; EHU, 5.5, p. 121). In other words, Hume aligns himself more closely to the 'sentimentalist' philosophical tradition than the 'rationalist'. The first *Enquiry* stressed the importance of scepticism limiting the scope of appropriate inquiry, while noting that sceptical philosophy 'should never undermine the reasonings of common life' (EHU, 5.2, p. 120). We come to believe what we do because it is based on custom or habit; our ontological predicament renders epistemological certainty illusory. Hume's alliance of scepticism and sentimentalism provides the platform from which he launches his critique of enthusiasm.

In the *Treatise*, Hume does not take on either superstition or enthusiasm directly. This does not mean, however, that the *Treatise* fails to anticipate Hume's appreciation for the scale of values native to the study of history. At the conclusion of Book I Hume stresses the importance of doubt and its relationship to philosophy. Healthy doubt, or 'mitigated scepticism', facilitated by philosophical enquiry undermines enthusiasm as well as the dogmatism and the intolerance it is prone to inducing (cf. T 1.4.7.12-13, p. 176; EHU, 12.24-27, pp. 207-209). Of course dogmatism and intolerance stand in need of

explanation, not necessarily considered vices in the Hanoverian world.<sup>16</sup> Hume treated them as vices because they disrupted both society and government. Moreover, superstition and enthusiasm, like belief and what was often touted as knowledge, were based on nothing foundational; they were, like Hume's investigations into external existence and personal identity, not beyond the reach of doubt: 'In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism' (T 1.4.7.11, p. 176). And, as Hume goes on to make clear, he feels a strong propensity to carry on with his philosophical investigations despite the possibility of arriving at a set of melancholy conclusions. He argues that this philosophical disposition is both an alternative guide and antidote to superstition. True philosophy 'can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments'. By its very nature true philosophy promotes understanding and tolerance.<sup>17</sup> Generally speaking, 'the errors in religion are dangerous', while the errors made in philosophy are 'only ridiculous' (T 1.4.7.13, p. 177). In the first *Enquiry* Hume argued that the 'natural result' of a Pyrrhonian scepticism was the reaffirmation of common sense; in turn, this process led to the limiting of philosophical inquiry into 'subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding' (EHU, 12.25, p. 208). The way to deal with the sombre speculation of 'enthusiasts' and 'zealots' was either Shaftesburian ridicule or, as Hume here suggests, to see them off the stage of serious inquiry altogether.

In the *Essays* Hume turns his attention more directly to both superstition and enthusiasm. As Roy Porter has observed, Shaftesbury's 'psychologization' of enthusiasm

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<sup>16</sup> Johnson defined 'dogmatism' and related words positively, lacking any pejorative hint. Cf. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (2 vols., London, 1756), I, p. 314. Addison had used it similarly, *Spectator*, no. 253: 'Those criticks who write in a positive and dogmatick way'.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Livingston, *Melancholy and Delirium*, pp. 17-52, for an interpretation of Hume's philosophy as focusing on the distinction between 'true' and 'false' philosophy.

was one Hume drew upon, as the following quotation makes clear. Shaftesbury had written that enthusiasm was a ‘motion, when unguided and left wholly to itself, is in its nature turbulent and incentive. It disjoins the natural frame and relaxes the ordinary and tenor of the mind. In this disposition the reins are let loose to all passion which arises, and the mind, as far as it is able to act or think in such a state, approves the riot and justifies the wild effects by the supposed sacredness of the cause.’<sup>18</sup> A polite audience, familiar with Shaftesbury’s works, was meant to understand that enthusiasm, along with the ‘extraordinary movements of the human mind’ was capable of transporting men ‘to the neglect of all order and public good’ (E IC, pp. 528-529). Hume’s most explicit statement on this subject is found in the essay ‘Of superstition and enthusiasm’. With both Scotland and England clearly in mind, this essay provides a tripartite analysis of how these two characteristics have had an impact on ‘government and society’ (E SE, p. 75).

Hume first of all endeavours, tongue firmly in cheek, to define enthusiasm and superstition as ‘species of false religion’.<sup>19</sup> He cites the cliché that the corruption of the best things produces the worst as a testimony to the corruption of ‘true religion’. Before outlining how superstition and enthusiasm corrupt religion and civil society, Hume attempts to pin down these two traits in exact terms. Superstition has as its sources ‘Weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance’; while enthusiasm is derived from ‘Hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance’.<sup>20</sup> Each of

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<sup>18</sup> Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, pp. 355-6.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume’s Philosophy of Religion* (London, 1978), pp. 143-158; Christopher Bernard, ‘Hume and the madness of religion’, *Hume and Hume’s Connexions*, (eds.) M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright (University Park, Penn., 1995), pp. 224-238.

<sup>20</sup> This account should be read in light of Hume’s account of the passions in Book II of the *Treatise* and the *Dissertation on the Passions*. For an important interpretation on Book II

these temperaments is contextually described: superstition is the result of the mind's being susceptible to 'unaccountable terrors and apprehensions'; while enthusiasm is the result of the mind's being subject to 'elevation and presumption' (E SE, pp. 73-74). Superstition is based on fear and the existence of melancholy circumstances, while enthusiasm is based on hope and particularly fortunate conditions. Hume provides his readers with both a philosophical and a psychological explanation for what might be anachronistically called the 'varieties of religious experience'.

This analysis leads Hume into three general reflections on the effects of superstition and enthusiasm for government and society. First, superstition is favourable to 'priestly power' while enthusiasm, like 'sound philosophy', is contrary to it; second, religion imbued with enthusiasm, unlike those partaking of superstition, are upon their inception 'furious and violent' and eventually become 'moderate' and 'gentile'; third, that '*superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it*' (E SE, pp. 75, 76, 78; italics in text). These maxims affect both society and the government that rules over it. And it is important to recognise that these are fundamentally *historical* observations. At the conclusion of this essay Hume points to English history as an example of enthusiasm and superstition at work (E SE, pp. 78-79). Having outlined the ways in which superstition and enthusiasm arise, it is not difficult to see how Hume derives his 'maxims' from his historical inquiry.

Hume's brief essay lays bare the sources of both enthusiasm and superstition. The effect of Hume's analysis is to explain how and why it is that these characteristics arise. It

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see Páll Árdal, *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Edinburgh, 1989); see also Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).

also has the effect of explaining their influence on the course of history. As with the reading of history, the reading of this polite philosophical essay not only amuses (in the spirit of Shaftesbury and the *Spectator*), but clearly promotes understanding and moderation. It has been argued recently by Hume scholars that one of Hume's aims was to provide a secular means of supporting social peace through the philosophical articulation of sympathy (or humanity). Embodying enlightened characteristics, this conception of sympathy, attempted to dispel one of the threats of religious extremism for politics.<sup>21</sup> Hume went on to argue, echoed later by Edmund Burke, that the Hanoverian world was one which saw the rage of opinion replace the rage of religion.

Both the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* entrenched Hume's critique further. Both works furthered the currency of Hume's critique and continued to undermine religious enthusiasm. In the context of discussing the philosophy of belief in the first *Enquiry* (Section 10, 'Of miracles') Hume reveals how and why religious adherents were prone to fits of enthusiasm.<sup>22</sup> First, where 'the love of wonder' joins itself to 'the spirit of religion', Hume avers that 'common-sense' is abandoned. Hume argues that in such cases any and all authority for a supposed miracle is thereby forfeit. And equally important, 'A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality' (EHU, 10.2.17, p. 175). He may even go so far as to teach or propound a 'false narrative' because he is involved in a 'holy cause': the enthusiast has fallen victim to self-deception. The 'vanity' of such enthusiasts tempts them, along with self-interest, to make bold claims in these most

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<sup>21</sup> Herdt, *Religion and Faction*, pp. 168-218.

<sup>22</sup> Enthusiasm was more potent because England was a reformed religious state. Though superstition was still associated with the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, in post-1660 England enthusiasm was the more genuine threat.

serious and sublime of subjects. Unfortunately, too often the judges of these disputes fail to apply the rules of judgement in the same manner as they would in other circumstances. Moreover, the influence of eloquence often ‘leaves little room for reason or reflection’ (cf. E EL, pp. 97-110). Instead, it placates its audience, ‘captivates its willing hearers, and subdues their understanding.’ The truly frightening prospect being that such speakers are capable of capturing the ‘generality of mankind’ by manipulating the ‘gross and vulgar passions’ (EHU, 10.2.18, p. 175). And, especially where such currents are expected, the ‘gazing populace, receive greedily, without examination, whatever soothes superstition, and promotes wonder’ (EHU, 10.30, p. 183).

Hume was certainly aware that enthusiasm was not solely to be found among the religious. When religious dogma and philosophical enthusiasm coincide, Hume does not spare from labelling such ‘bigotry’ as the ‘offspring’ of philosophy and superstition (EHU, 11.3, p. 188). He does so because religious dogma, assisted by philosophy, is capable of co-opting philosophical arguments and language.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the fervour for philosophy is akin to that of religion; for, ‘though it aims at the correction of our manners, and extirpation of our vices, it may only serve, by imprudent management, to foster a predominant inclination, and push the mind, with more determined resolution, towards that side, which already *draws* too much’ (EHU, 5.1.1, p. 119). There can be little doubt that Hume had philosophical theists such as Warburton, Wollaston, and Clarke if not Malebranche and Descartes in mind. The solution to this problem is a sceptical

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<sup>23</sup> This had become a somewhat familiar claim, though Shaftesbury had given it greater currency, *Characteristics*, pp. 371-373. Hume may also be aiming at the early modern philosophical theism of Latitudinarian theology, especially that of the Cambridge Platonists (i.e. Ralph Cudworth and Henry More), along with William Wollaston, William Warburton and Samuel Clarke.

philosophy; such a philosophy spreads enlightenment by mixing ‘profound enquiry’ with ‘clearness’ which would undermine the foundations of ‘abstruse philosophy’, a mere ‘shelter to superstition’ (EHU, 1.7, p. 95).

In the context of a discussion about providence and heaven Hume claims that ‘There is no enthusiasm amongst philosophers’ (EHU, 11.29, p. 198). Or, to put it another way, the ‘genius of philosophy’ is that it provides a corrective to both enthusiasm and superstition. True philosophy, it seems, has the effect of conferring ‘correctness on every art and calling.’ As a result the ‘politician will acquire greater foresight and subtlety, in the subdividing and balancing of power’; what is more, ‘the stability of modern governments above the ancient, and the accuracy of modern philosophy, have improved, and probably will still improve, by similar gradations’ (EHU, 1.9, pp. 90-91). Clearly a point of major importance for Hume is the fact that philosophy, especially the sceptical variety, promotes understanding and moderation which ‘improves’ both society and government. This is, then, the very purpose of Hume’s other essays, especially as they related to politics and even to aesthetics: he hoped to improve the understanding of these important subjects.

Of course the improvement of society is no easy task. Most significantly, Hume chooses a metaphor of war to convey the conflict between religious enthusiasm and philosophy.<sup>24</sup> When the enthusiasts have been ‘Chaced from the open country’, they then ‘lie in wait to break in upon every unguarded avenue of the mind, and overwhelm it with

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, II. Hume might regard the reign of barbarism as not yet fully over, potentially one generation away. One might, in this way, modestly endorse Livingston’s argument that Hume attempted to distinguish between ‘false’ and ‘true philosophy’, though I should like to emphasize that Hume did so in his political writings by endorsing an enlightened scale of values.

religious fears and prejudices' (EHU, 1.11, p. 91). Those left on the field to fight are the metaphysicians, who, because of the tenuous nature of their inquiries, are forced to do constant battle with the religious zealots. Hume argues that he has 'discovered an argument' that will 'be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion' making it 'useful as long as the world endures' (EHU, 10.1.2, p. 169). What is important for our purposes is the fact that Hume regards his philosophy as useful and good, promoting a set of virtues and values that will uphold society and government, rather than pull at its frayed threads.<sup>25</sup>

Shifting from the first *Enquiry* to the second, Hume's critique shifts from one based on epistemology to one based on moral philosophy. His main concern is to show how the virtues held up by superstition and enthusiasm are essentially useless if not dangerous to society and government (EPM, 3.38, p. 94). After giving a brief description of the character or 'model of perfect virtue', Hume lambastes 'the whole train of monkish virtues': 'Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude'. They are rejected by 'men of sense' because they 'serve no manner of purpose'; they 'neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor encrease his power of self-enjoyment'. Rather, 'they cross all these desirable ends; stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper' (EPM, 9.3, pp. 146-147). These 'monkish virtues' stand in opposition to Hume's outlined virtues associated with reading

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<sup>25</sup> For detailed discussion of Hume's argument against miracles see: J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 105-125; M. A. Stewart, 'Hume's historical view of miracles', *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, pp. 171-200.

history or sceptical philosophy.<sup>26</sup> Whereas one set of values is detrimental or at best useless for society and government, the other is positively useful, beneficial and stabilising.

At the end of 'A Dialogue' Hume concludes by emphasising the disruption religious enthusiasts expose society; such men 'are in a different element from the rest of mankind' (i.e. Diogenes or Pascal). They 'depart from the maxims of common reason, and affect these *artificial* lives'; there is no telling 'what will please or displease them.' The 'natural principles of their mind play not with the same regularity, as if left to themselves, free from the illusions of religious superstition or philosophical enthusiasm' (EPM, D.57, p. 199). This is not just some imaginary fear: 'That there were *religious* fanatics of this kind in ENGLAND, during the civil wars, we learn from history'. Such religious fanatics brought with them 'a kind of *political* fanatics, which arose from the religious species' (EPM, 3.24, p. 90). Such 'fanatics' were not, at least for Burke, going away any time soon.

We are left, then, with the understanding that the standards of religious enthusiasm were improper for the cultivation of a stable civil society. Instead, a nation should adopt the principle of moderation, and an enlightened scale of virtues. Only then, by taking man as he is, will a stable, tolerant and virtuous society be conceivable.

## §II. RELIGION AND POLITICS TO THE CIVIL WARS

The *History of England* continues to develop and extend Hume's erudite critique of superstition and enthusiasm. Moreover, the *History* attempts to demonstrate 'the use of history': promoting understanding, virtue, and moderation while simultaneously entertaining the reader. Hume's narrative of the Civil Wars, encompassing the reign of

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. William Davie, 'Hume on Monkish Virtue', *Hume Studies* 25 (1999), pp. 139-154.

the Stuarts and stretching back to the accession of Henry VII, is a sustained attempt to historically analyse England's constitution, the progress of civilisation in England, and to reveal the inherent dangers of religious fanaticism to government and society.<sup>27</sup> Hume's incisive philosophical venom is primarily directed towards the skulduggery of religious fanatics. A 'civilised' and 'modern' polity needed to recognise the hazards that religious zeal presented to civil society, no matter what form it took or however sacrosanct its pretensions.

Hume describes and analyses in neo-classical style the English Civil Wars as a series of lessons in history – lessons that needed to be learned in order to avoid their pitfalls or repetition.<sup>28</sup> Hume employs the full range of his sceptical powers to this end, while at the same time shoring up a reasonable and moderate political discourse. First, this section will lay out what Hume regarded as the malady of the English body politic through an examination of his *comments* on the long and short term symptoms of the seventeenth-century's principal internecine struggle; second, it will identify what Hume takes these long and short term *causes* of the Civil Wars to be; thirdly, it suggests that Hume's enlightened narrative of the *conduct* of the Civil Wars exemplifies his general pedagogical point regarding moderation and political stability.

For Hume the warning signs of disruptive change in the English/British body politic go back to the accession of the Tudors to the English throne.<sup>29</sup> These signs range

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<sup>27</sup> Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, p. 298; *idem*, 'Introduction', in David Hume, *The History of Great Britain: The Reigns of James I and Charles I*, (ed.) Duncan Forbes (London, 1970), p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, chap1: 'David Hume and the Vocabularies of British Historiography', pp. 33-59.

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Hume's interpretation has been recently reasserted, though of course with modern scholarly technique, by several historians. Cf. Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the*

from the changes in the constitution and liberty to changes in religion.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, these signs eventually manifest themselves as causes under Charles I. And lastly, some of Hume's causes figure prominently in his analysis of the conduct of the Civil Wars, revealing how religious enthusiasm directly undermined the stability of society and government. Such a fragile environment as that which existed under the early Stuarts was one hostile to moderation and understanding, as Hume strives to make clear. Achieving any pragmatic solutions to the interstitial conflicts native to the political world were put beyond reach; the body politic was possessed by the flights of human fancy.

As mentioned, Hume argues that the symptoms of disorder go back at least as far as the Tudor accession to the English throne. This is the point at which the story of both the 'modern' English constitution and 'modern' English history begins, an enlightened distinction in contrast to other historical conceptions like those of Viscount Bolingbroke or Rapin for whom English history was a series of constitutional corruptions and renewals. Hume argued that English history until Henry Tudor's accession (1485) was nothing but a 'series of barbarous ages'. The narrative after the conclusion of the War of the Roses becomes 'more worthy of [the reader's] attention', when the 'dawn' of 'civility and sciences' is at last reached (H, II, p. 518). In the medieval 'darks ages' prior to the Tudors, liberty was nearly nonexistent. Slowly, however, the growth of personal liberty in England managed to open the way for civil liberty. Until Henry VII, the constitution of England did not permit the balance of power to be concentrated in the hands of the

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*British Monarchies, 1637-1642* (Oxford, 1991); *idem, The Causes of the English Civil Wars* (Oxford, 1990); *idem, The Crisis of Parliaments: English History, 1509-1660* (Oxford, 1971); Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529-1642* (London, 1972); *idem, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965).

<sup>30</sup> Eugene F. Miller, 'Hume on the Development of English Liberty', *The Political Science Reviewer* 16 (1986), pp. 153-158.

King. The constitution also witnessed considerable fluctuation between its parts. From the Norman conquest of 1066 to the establishment of Magna Carta to the ‘Polish Aristocracy’, England’s constitution underwent several successive revisions. In summing up his discussion of medieval and ancient English history, Hume cautions against appealing to this pre-modern era, as Bolingbroke, Rapin and countless others had done, for the best or proper forms of society and government (H, II, pp. 522-525).<sup>31</sup>

Above all, a civilized nation, like the English, who have happily established the most perfect and most accurate system of liberty that was ever found compatible with government, ought to be cautious in appealing to the practice of their ancestors, or regarding the maxims of uncultivated ages as certain rules for their present conduct. An acquaintance with the ancient periods of their government is chiefly useful by instructing them to cherish their present constitution, from a comparison or contrast with the condition of those distant times. And it is also curious, by shewing them the remote, and most commonly faint and disfigured originals of the most finished and most noble institutions, and by instructing them in the great mixture of accident, which commonly concurs with a small ingredient of wisdom and foresight, in erecting the complicated fabric of the most perfect government. (H, II, p. 525)

The dramatic shift in events came of course when Henry VII began to curtail the power of the nobles – a plan carried out to completion by his successor – and centralized power in his own hands. This placed civil liberty in a perilous position, where ‘so considerable an addition of prerogative’ rendered Henry’s reign ‘a kind of epoch in the English constitution’. Scarcely was the king’s power ever so ‘absolute’ as in this reign (H, III, pp. 73-74). The monarch’s power had reached its zenith under the Tudors. Henry VIII’s ‘absolute’ and ‘uncontroled’ power is witnessed by his ability to seize control of the state through centralization – expropriating church lands represents for Hume the near pinnacle of royal power (H, III, pp. 320, 323). The most significant political development for Hume was the reclassification of prerogative under monarchical purview. The changes in princely power and the state of liberty wrought under the early Tudors were

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<sup>31</sup> Bolingbroke, *Remarks on History*, p. 178; Paul de Rapin-Thoryas, *The History of England*, (trans.) N. Tindal, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (2 vols., London, 1743) I, p. 147, 152-5, 156.

to play a significant role in the English Civil Wars. Hume labours to point out that prerogative and liberty were the very sources of contention between the Court and Commons under the early Stuarts.<sup>32</sup> He also argues that the Stuarts inherited the Tudor *mentalité* of governance, but to their misfortune; unbeknown to them, the context of politics had altered since Tudor rule. Strict adherence to the Tudor political ideal was risky and ultimately fatal for the Stuarts. For Hume, then, the character of the Tudor monarchy plays a direct, though long-term, role in the Civil Wars.<sup>33</sup>

### *The history of James I*

Hume's more immediate causes for the English Civil Wars begin with James Stuart's accession to the English throne. Put briefly, the views and policies James pursued led to the direct conflict with Parliament under Charles I. This was partially because Charles I shared many of the presumptions of his father. These two reigns are marked by their similar conflicts: about the constitution, about liberty, about the mixing of theology and politics, and about religious fanaticism. These are the ingredients which, for Hume, appeared to lead inexorably to violent conflict with Parliament in the middle of the seventeenth century. While Hume admits that James did in fact encroach upon the liberties of Englishmen, it was not, as Bolingbroke put it, 'transgressing' some pristine constitutional arrangement.<sup>34</sup>

One of Hume's primary indictments of James I and his reign had to do with James' mixture of religion and politics. Such claims, again, were not new; Rapin had

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<sup>32</sup> Eugene F. Miller, 'Hume on Liberty in the Successive English Constitutions', *Liberty in Hume's History*, pp. 82-101.

<sup>33</sup> Forbes, 'Introduction', pp. 24-38.

<sup>34</sup> Bolingbroke, *Remarks on History*, p. 280.

jibbed at James by claiming his religious pretensions were nothing but a mask covering his pursuit of prerogative.<sup>35</sup> And, as Hume well knew, religion, politics, church and state had since the Reformation been intimately intertwined. But what Hume objected to most strenuously was how religious questions, largely over theological disputes, came to threaten the nation's political character, infusing the political discourse with a fury only fully realised when violence broke out. Hume accuses James of mistaking theological questions for political ones. James differed in this respect from Elizabeth by becoming directly involved in theological disputes himself, while at the same time lacking any of Elizabeth's prudence, charm, or charisma.

Though justly sensible, that no part of civil administration required greater care or a nicer judgment than the conduct of religious parties; [James] had not perceived, that, in the same proportion as this practical knowledge of theology is requisite, the speculative refinements in it are mean, and even dangerous in a monarch. By entering zealously into frivolous disputes, James gave them an air of importance and dignity, which they could not otherwise have acquired; and being himself inlisted in the quarrel, he could no longer have recourse to contempt and ridicule, the only proper method of appeasing it. (H, V, pp. 11-2)

In essence James lacked the pragmatic skill to avoid lending religious quarrels a weight that could crush the political establishment, or at least fail to bring the contradictions of the English constitution into the open. James' preference for the established church was explicit, and is famously captured in his retort 'no bishop, no king'. Hume notes that both parties in the dispute regarding the ecclesiology of the English church under James were left dissatisfied by a few slight liturgical alterations; sarcastically he reports that 'the archbishop of Canterbury said, *that undoubtedly his majesty spake by the special assistances of God's spirit*' (H, V, p. 12). James had made the mistake of setting English politics on a footing where religious dispute became political dispute.

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<sup>35</sup> Rapin, II, p. 797.

Such religious disputes as there were, and which James I involved the crown in – The Hampton Court Conference (1604) for example – were dangerous especially because of the view which James took of his own kingship. This, as Hume shows in the ancient and medieval volumes of the *History*, was the inheritance of Tudor absolutism. James regarded himself as an ‘absolute king’; Hume adds that though this tag was somewhat grating on English ears, it had been heard often enough during Elizabeth’s reign (H, V, p. 17). However, James was unable to carry out Elizabeth’s *via media* while also being altogether ignorant of the changes which were happening around him; he was unable to realise that his pontificating on kingship was increasingly out of touch with the political community he inhabited.<sup>36</sup>

Happily this prince possessed neither sufficient capacity to perceive the alteration, nor sufficient art and vigour to check it in its early advances. Jealous of regal, because conscious of little personal authority, he had established within his own mind a speculative system of absolute government, which few of his subjects, he believed, and none but traitors and rebels, would make any scruple to admit. On which-ever side he cast his eye, everything concurred to encourage his prejudices. (H, V, p. 19)

This is another example, similar to those of the Middle Ages and antiquity prior to Tudor kingship, of a constitution in flux. The tragedy was that James was unable to perceive this change, or the fact that the constitution was itself a mutable concept (H, V, p. 17). This was of course a theme Hume would continue to develop in the *History* until the constitution received its clearest enunciation in 1688-9.

The combination of political and theological disputes under James I is one of Hume’s necessary though not sufficient causes of the English Civil Wars. Hume also narrows in on the kinds of theological questions that were being raised in this particular setting. As a lightning-rod for Hume’s more acerbic comments, the Puritans come in for

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Phillipson, *Hume*, chap. 6: ‘The Tudors and the Early History of England: Context of a History of Modern Britain’, pp. 109-138.

near constant criticism in the Stuart volumes of the *History*. As we have seen already, Hume regarded the 'serious' and 'zealous' nature of the 'godly' as a source of philosophical contempt. In his more strictly political and historical considerations, the Puritans are specifically censured for their civil and social blunders. Hume overtly acknowledges the fact that James I was raised in the staunchly Calvinist setting of late sixteenth-century Scotland.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the ambiance of early seventeenth-century England was one preoccupied with religious disputes. Though Hume lays a significant portion of responsibility for the Civil Wars at the feet of the early Stuart kings, he places equal responsibility on the contributors to English and Scottish political culture and the accompanying 'puritanical' discourse (cf. H, V, pp. 10, 12, 129, 159 241, 301).

Hume's history of the early Stuarts is in some sense a litany of abuses; several of the more notorious affairs are highlighted to draw out Hume's political lessons regarding moderation and zeal. The story of the Gunpowder Plot is told as 'an event, one of the most memorable, that history has conveyed to posterity and containing at once a singular proof both of the strength and weakness of the human mind; its widest departure from morals, and most steady attachment to religious prejudices' (H, V, p. 25). 'It was' according to Hume, 'bigoted zeal alone, the most absurd of prejudices masqued with reason, the most criminal passions covered with the appearance of duty, which seduced them into measures, that were fatal to themselves, and had so nearly proved fatal to their country' (H, V, p. 31). Within this brief analysis of one episode in English history lies much of what Hume would come to criticise. In the case of the Gunpowder Plot religious

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830* (London, 1969); Margo Todd, *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern Scotland* (London, 1995); T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation, 1700-2000* (London, 1999).

enthusiasm figures prominently. Such 'bigotry' and 'prejudice' was a poison to the body politic which eventually proved fatal. The (self-)deceiving part of religious zeal was its capability of taking on the appearance of reason, even moral duty.<sup>38</sup> It was not the King alone who confused theological questions for political ones; it was, tragically in Hume's eyes, a widespread prejudice of Stuart social and political thought.

It was not Hume's only concern to point out the deleterious effects of religious zeal on political affairs. Rather, Hume situates his investigation of religion in politics alongside a series of other analyses. The others that are examined here are constitutional change and the fate of liberty. In turn, constitutional change was itself linked to broader social and political changes in England, which had long lineages, but contributed immensely to the conflicting pressures under which James I ruled.

While the barons possessed their former immense property and extensive jurisdictions, they were apt, at every disgust, to endanger the monarch and throw the whole government into confusion: But this confusion often, in its turn, proved favourable to the monarch, and made the nation again submit to him, in order to re-establish justice and tranquillity. After the power of alienations, as well as the encrease of commerce had thrown the balance of property into the hands of the commons, the situation of affairs and the dispositions of men became susceptible of a more regular plan of liberty; and the laws were not supported singly by the authority of the sovereign. And though in that interval, after the decline of the peers and before the people had yet experienced their force, the princes assumed an exorbitant power, and had almost annihilated the constitution under the weight of their prerogative; as soon as the commons recovered from their lethargy, they seem to have been astonished at the danger, and were resolved to secure liberty by firmer barriers, than their ancestors had hitherto provided for it. (H, V, p. 40)

Hume argues in this historical gloss that the 'modern' constitution and its accompanying 'modern' liberty begin to make their first appearances under James I's reign. Though the roots of this arrangement were traced by Hume back to the end of the War of the Roses, it was only in the House of Commons of James' reign that 'the spirit of liberty' had 'taken possession of the house'. The most vocal and substantial leaders were 'men of

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, II, pp. 237-238, 240-241.

independent genius and large views' who 'began to regulate opinions, more by the future consequences which they foresaw, than by the former precedents which were set before them; and they less aspired at maintaining the ancient constitution, than at establishing a new one, and a freer, and a better' (H, V, p. 42).<sup>39</sup> This situation rang a foreboding note. This 'spirit of liberty' was one with which Hume showed a great deal of sympathy.<sup>40</sup> After all, he was living in the midst of a regime whose foundation for liberty was the Bill of Rights, the *History's* significant endpoint. This somewhat sympathetic tone is, however, laced with caution. Hume provides several key episodes where the implications of liberty for the Stuart kingship are played out in national politics (H, V, pp. 58-64). He stresses that 'the constitution of England' under the Stuarts was 'an inconsistent fabric, whose jarring and discordant parts must soon destroy each other, and from the dissolution of the old, beget some new form of civil government, more uniform and consistent' (H, V, p.59).<sup>41</sup>

From the early sixteenth century onwards the combination of constitutional change and religious fervour radically altered the political realm and, thereby, the nature of the English monarchy. This process had its origins in the Tudor accession and the Protestant Reformation. Nowhere does Hume make it clearer that this is the case than in the reigns of James I and Charles I. Hume focused on the 'theological politics' of James' reign in particular; and what Hume abhors most is not that such theological debates

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Pocock, *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, chaps. 6 and 7, pp. 124-181; Ellis Sandoz (ed.), *The Roots of Liberty: Magna Carta, Ancient Constitution, and the Anglo-American Tradition of Rule of Law* (Columbia, MO, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Donald Livingston, 'Hume's Historical Conception of Liberty', *Liberty in Hume's History of England*, (eds.) Nicholas Capaldi and Donald Livingston (Dordrecht, 1990), pp. 105-154.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, II, pp. 199-221; O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 56-92.

existed, but that the king allowed himself – and thus the monarchy in general – to become directly involved. This process reached a climax when James I attempted ‘to introduce into Scotland some of the ceremonies of the church of England’. Hume portrays the adamant opposition of the Scottish reformers enthusiastically inflamed with ‘the fire of devotion’.

A mode of worship was established, the most naked and most simple imaginable; one that borrowed nothing from the sense; but reposed itself entirely on the contemplation of that divine Essence, which discovers itself to the understanding only. This species of devotion, so worthy of the supreme Being, but so little suitable to human frailty, was observed to occasion great disturbances in the breast, and in many respects to confound all rational principles of conduct and behaviour. The mind, straining for these extraordinary raptures, reaching them by short glances, sinking again under its own weakness, rejecting all exterior aid of pomp and ceremony, was so occupied in this inward life, that it fled from every intercourse of society, and from every cheerful amusement, which could soften or humanize the character. (H, V, p. 68)

Not only is Hume’s psychology of the mind clear here, but so too is his polite critique of both superstition and enthusiasm.<sup>42</sup> This topic was of personal importance to Hume, where considerable affinity existed between the staunchly Calvinist society of seventeenth-century Scotland and the Scotland of Hume’s upbringing.<sup>43</sup> In this passage Hume sides with James’ attempt to moderate the ‘sombre’ culture of Scottish Calvinism with a ‘tincture’ of ceremony. Hume claims that James recognised the ‘prevalence of fanaticism’ and that ‘a gloomy and sullen disposition [had] established itself among the people’ of Scotland. It was a spirit ‘obstinate and dangerous; independent and disorderly; animated equally with a contempt of authority, and a hatred of every other mode of religion, particularly the catholic’ (H, V, p. 68). James’ failure to adequately face this challenge,

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Treatise*, Book II, ‘Of the Passions’, and also the *Dissertation on the Passions*.

<sup>43</sup> Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, p. 34; the young Hume evidently took his moral progress seriously, testing it against the popular Episcopalian devotional *The Whole Duty of Man*.

leaving it as an inheritance for his son, is one of Hume's contributing causes of the Civil War.

In the case of Calvinist Scotland under James VI, Hume's philosophy of religion and his philosophical psychology are in agreement. Both determine that in the case of these stringent Calvinists, enthusiasm is the source of political instability. It was the somewhat unavoidable mistake of James I to have confronted the religious fanatics. In so doing James managed to legitimise on a political level the inherent incomprehensibility of the Calvinist demands, along with their opposition to the king. James' attempt to 'mellow' the 'humours' of the Scots landed him in an unenviable political position.

In this vein of thought, Hume outlines what he perceives to be 'one of the most early and most infallible symptoms of a regular established liberty.' The King appointed Sir John Savile, 'a zealous opponent of the court', comptroller of the King's household, privy councillor and a baron. Hume avers that this represents the first time 'in the whole history of England' that someone was advanced 'on account of parliamentary interests, and of opposition to his [James'] measures.' Hume claims that the King in effect 'tore off that sacred veil, which had hitherto covered the English constitution'. The consequence was that 'every man began to indulge himself in political reasonings and enquiries' which propagated division throughout the nation as it existed in Parliament (H, V, p. 93). The nation of England was politicized in a way it had never been before because of the awkward position James I had placed himself in. Moreover, James had stooped so low as to make the Stuart political predicament one that involved airy theological dispute. There is a sense in which Hume seems to understand that James inherited the mantle of the Reformation king, and thus had little room for manoeuvre. At the same time, James'

reign is one of failed pragmatism; the King lacked the perspicacity that such an intricate political milieu called for and passed on a series of political and cultural problems which his son would be unable to cope with.

A king bereft of the philosophical and political insight required under the circumstances in which James operated was not likely to be much of a prop to moderation. In keeping with his neo-classical form, Hume outlines both the side of royalty and liberty with respect to the constitution under James. In the midst of the struggles he declares that 'the wise and moderate' were thrown into confusion. Hume notes that these moderates venerated the mixed constitution and its regard for liberty, even if attended by the fury of party faction; on the other hand, moderates understood the position of the monarchy with its exorbitant prerogatives established from 'long practice'. Such men ostensibly understood that 'it could not but happen, that the prince, however just and moderate, would endeavour to repress his opponents; and, as he stood upon the very brink of arbitrary power, it was to be feared that he would, hastily and unknowingly, pass those limits, which were not precisely marked by the constitution.' With there being valid arguments for both 'privilege and prerogative', Hume declares that the 'people must be divided' on so important an issue. Because the 'arms of the state were still in [the Commons'] hands', a 'civil war must ensue'. In such an event, 'no party or both parties would justly bear the blame' (H, V, pp. 95-96).

Part of the process of securing the regular plan of liberty was having the politics of James I mirrored in that of the political nation; the body politic, like James himself, was given to 'extremes'. Hume argues that James' character was prone to 'calumny and

flattery' and of 'satire and panegyric' (H, V, p. 121). It is clear from Hume's appraisal that he regards the political body at large culpable of these same kinds of extremes.

The gloss that Hume put on the whole of James' reign attempts to draw out at some length why the conflict between the monarchy and liberty took place when it did and why. Hume makes repeated reference to the way in which James acted in accordance with monarchical principles, yet at the same time grated on the growing cause of liberty (H, V, pp. 121, 124, 126-128). And, quite significantly, it should not be surprising that the Stuart kings were jealous of their authority and the way it was constituted.

Upon the whole, we must conceive that monarchy, on the accession of the house of Stuart, was possessed of a very extensive authority; An authority, in the judgment of all, not exactly limited; in the judgment of some, not limitable. But, at the same time, this authority was founded merely on the opinion of the people, influenced by ancient precedent and example. It was not supported either by money or force of arms. And, for this reason, we need not wonder, that the princes of that line were so extremely jealous of their prerogative. (H, V, p. 128)

There is in Hume's analysis a sense that the emerging conflict between the King and Commons was inevitable, especially if the Commons was made up of men equally enthusiastic for their religion as for their liberty. And before moving on to the character sketches Hume supplies at the conclusion of major eras in English history, he cannot bring himself to exclude a devastating blow to 'the coherence [of] the systems of modern theology'. Hume draws out the central paradox of both the person of the King and the political culture of the period, noting that James' 'Calvinistic education had riveted him in the doctrine of absolute decrees' while also 'embracing the milder theology of Arminius'. Charles was to carry this process to its logical and unfortunate conclusion, as we will see below. Hume observes that the only thing which solved this theological inconsistency – and a positive outcome in Hume's eyes – was the Civil Wars. The Restoration Church of England had embraced 'speculative doctrines' which were 'more suitable to the genius of

her discipline and worship' (H, V, pp. 131-132). There was no actual resolution of the theological difficulties; instead, calm was brought by force of arms and the necessity of circumstance.

*The history of Charles I*

Hume traces the same set of conflicts and characteristics that had become prevalent in James I's reign with a heightened sense of urgency when he turns to Charles I. One way monarchical prerogative was ubiquitously questioned under Charles I was through matters of finance. Charles, like his predecessors, was strapped for supply, which Hume draws upon as one source of civil discord under the Stuart kings.<sup>44</sup>

Englishmen, Hume declares, were 'very little accustomed' to the 'burden of taxes'. He notes that Elizabeth wisely avoided the issue of taxes, choosing instead to live in 'frugality' and 'vigor'. Parliament would not be swayed from its customary course either. Moreover, Hume reminds us of the prudence in recognising that 'Habits, more than reason' are in fact 'the governing principle of mankind' (H, V, p. 159). The Stuarts of course failed to appreciate this point. The question of supply eventually became one of utmost importance and a necessary component leading to the Civil Wars. Charles' misfortune was that the House of Commons 'was almost entirely governed by a set of men of the most uncommon capacity and the biggest views'. Moreover, such men were 'resolved to seize the opportunity, which the king's necessities afforded them' in order to reduce his prerogative to a 'more reasonable compass' (H, V, p. 160).

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven, 1992).

And while the Commons was so constituted, Charles' disposition was not favourable to compromise either. Aside from the fact that his fellow monarchs held 'absolutist' views of their own position, the 'ambiguous' English constitution was easily interpreted by Charles as 'certain and uncontroversial'. For him, the 'ancient laws and constitution' were more like 'lines to direct his conduct' than any sort of 'barrier' to his prerogatives or power. When this understanding was challenged by Parliament, Hume argues that to Charles this 'appeared but one degree removed from open sedition and rebellion' (H, V, p. 161). Such divergent understandings of the nature of the English constitution, and the English monarchy reveal the dichotomy which had been developing between the King and Commons, prerogative and liberty. Of course Hume was implicitly countering the view that Charles entertained any concerted effort to usurp prerogatives, as Rapin and his Whig acolytes suggested.<sup>45</sup> On Hume's reading Charles was not sufficiently aware of the constitutional or political change overwhelming him, so any claim to Charles' will to power can be safely laid aside.

One particularly noteworthy moment in the history of the constitution under Charles was the formation of the Petition of Right. Hume recounts that no one had openly 'set himself in opposition to regal power' while claiming 'the protection of the constitution' until the reign of Charles I. In order for this situation to transpire it required 'the spirit of liberty' to be 'universally diffused'; in the process 'the principles of government were nearly reduced to a system'. This 'more civilized' age was apparently less inclined to suffer the 'violent exertions of prerogative' (H, V, p. 179). When Charles called his third Parliament (1628-1629) the Houses passed a bill of supply but did not

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<sup>45</sup> Rapin, II, p. 798.

commit it to law before the Petition of Right was issued. Hume argues that Charles placed the idea of monarchical prerogative on the line with the question of supply, thus committing an egregious error in judgment.

Forced loans, benevolences, taxes without consent of parliament, arbitrary imprisonments, the billeting of soldiers, martial law; these were the grievances complained of, and against these an eternal remedy was to be prepared. The commons pretended not, as they affirmed, to any unusual powers or privileges: They aimed only at securing those which had been transmitted them from their ancestors: And their law they resolved to call a PETITION OF RIGHT; as implying that it contained a corroboration or explanation of the ancient constitution, not any infringement of royal prerogative, or acquisition of new liberties. (H, V, p. 192)

The King's eventual assent to the Petition of Right, according to Hume, 'produced such a change' as to be 'almost equivalent to a revolution'. The effect was to circumscribe the King's prerogative while simultaneously giving 'additional security to the liberties of the subject' (H, V, p. 200). Hume saw in the Petition a simulacrum of the fate of liberty in England. Because the 'progression' of liberty, as Hume calls it, was anything but perfunctory, he expresses reservation about the means to that end. Hume was hardly the staunch Machiavellian willing to justify ends by whatever means.<sup>46</sup> Instead he describes how the coming of liberty in England was marred by its ironic contingency on religious zeal; the irony being that enthusiasm secured a measure of liberty which was integral to the Hanoverian state and Britain's mixed constitution.

Such zeal for liberty, not altogether inseparable from religious enthusiasm, was, however, liable to give way to continued dissatisfaction. Hume confessed that both sides in the dispute – King versus the Commons, prerogative versus liberty – had merit. Yet, at the same time, he censures both sides for their cupidity; enthusiasm, the bane of the body

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<sup>46</sup> There is of course some debate over the status of what Machiavelli can be said to 'teach'. Cf. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, I, pp. 128-138, 180-186; *idem*, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1981).

politic's existence, was a heady cocktail of which the royalist and constitutionalist party both drank deep. In this sense Hume distinguishes himself from Bolingbroke, Rapin and their Whig counterparts who uncritically praised the unbounded progress of English liberty. Bolingbroke had clearly favoured the friends of liberty in his historical writings, yet, lacked a sophisticated conception of how liberty and human nature were related; Hume steers clear of this partisanship, noting that the means by which liberty was secured under Charles was by no means one disposed to political stability.<sup>47</sup> After the debacle of 'tonnage and poundage' it came as no surprise 'that the king had entertained a very different idea of the constitution, from that which began, in general, to prevail among his subjects' (H, V, p. 236).

Hume thus anticipates some of the direct religious confrontation of the latter portion of Charles' reign. He observes, for example, Archbishop Laud's ascendancy over Charles in matters of religion. And with bitter irony he notes Charles' order to prevent some of the very men who were to play major roles in the Civil Wars – Arthur Hazelrigg, John Hambden, John Pym, Oliver Cromwell – from embarking for the New World. Such undercurrents are further 'sparks' which would eventually 'set the whole nation in combustion' (H, V, p. 213). Once Hambden's trial had awakened the people to liberty it was a short step to direct and open conflict (H, V, pp. 245-248).

Of course the location of most of the conflict surrounded religion. As a significant factor leading directly to war, Hume takes special interest in the source of religious conflict, Scotland, and its famous Covenant – 'fitted to inflame the minds of men against

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<sup>47</sup> Bolingbroke, *Letters on History*, pp. 5, 121; *idem*, *Remarks on History*, 166, 276, 337.

their fellow creatures' (H, V, p. 258).<sup>48</sup> First, however, it is important to cite Hume's judgement on the matter of England's alleged 'grievances'. Hume makes it clear that when these grievances are 'considered in themselves' they 'scarcely deserve the name'. He argues that everything from 'peace' to 'commerce' to 'justice and lenity' was enjoyed by the English along with 'every other blessing'. The notable exception being liberty, 'or rather the present exercise of liberty, and its proper security' (H, V, pp. 249-250). It seemed like affairs would proceed along the established and familiar course had not the quarrels of Scotland – 'a country more turbulent, and less disposed to submission and obedience' – intervened.<sup>49</sup>

For Hume, the Covenanters epitomized the near fatal and odious mixture of political and religious enthusiasm, marking an inauspicious step towards anarchy. Calvinist Scotland summoned the orgulous powers of religious zeal; rather than taming men, the religion of the Scots nourished a bold spirit, cultivated 'the highest raptures and ecstasies of devotion, it consecrated, in a manner, every individual, and in his own eyes, bestowed a character on him, much superior to what forms and ceremonious institutions could alone confer.' The *History* links this manifestation of enthusiasm to the initial violence that led to war with Scotland. The persistent influence of religious enthusiasm dramatically altered both Scotland and England's political landscape. Hume begins sketching the aforementioned link *via* the course of constitutional change within Charles' reign:

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Russell, *Crisis of Parliaments*, pp. 323-350, 353-373.

<sup>49</sup> Hume (H, IV, pp. 263-264) relishes ridiculing in ironist fashion the so-called prophecies of the Scottish Covenanters, and attempts to gain the readers support for his views by demonstrating the deleterious effects on society such perturbations have.

The causes of disgust, which, for above thirty years, had daily been multiplying in England, were now come to full maturity, and threatened the kingdom with some great revolution or convulsion. The uncertain and undefined limits of prerogative and in every controversy between prince and people, the question, however doubtful, had always been decided, by each party, in favour of its own pretensions. Too lightly, perhaps, moved by the appearance of necessity, the king had even assumed powers incompatible with the principles of limited government, and had rendered it impossible for his most zealous partisans entirely to justify conduct, except by topics so unpopular, that they were more fitted, in the present dispositions of men's minds, to inflame, than appease, the general discontent. Those great supporters of public authority, law and religion, had likewise, by the unbounded compliance of judges and prelates, lost much of their influence over the people; or rather had in a great measure gone over to the side of faction, and authorized the spirit of opposition and rebellion. The nobility, also, whom the king had no means of retaining by offices and preferments suitable to their rank, had been seized with the general discontent, and unwarily threw themselves in the scale, which already began too much to preponderate. Sensible of some encroachments, which had been made by royal authority, men entertained no jealousy of the commons, whose enterprises, for the acquisition of power, had ever been covered with the appearance of public good, and had hitherto gone no farther than some disappointed efforts and endeavours.

Hume then reveals how the affairs of Scotland had a direct influence on those of England.

The progress of the Scottish malcontents reduced the crown to an entire dependence for supply: Their union with the popular party in England brought great accession of authority to the latter: The near prospect of success roused all latent murmurs and pretensions, which had hitherto been held in such violent constraint: And the torrent of general inclination and opinion ran so strongly against court, that the king was in no situation to refuse any reasonable demands of the popular leaders, either for defining or limiting the powers of his prerogative. Even many exorbitant claims, in his present situation, would probably be made, and must necessarily be complied with. (H, V, pp. 283-284)

Calvinist Scotland cornered the English monarchy, forcing a crisis and then subsequent alteration to the constitutional arrangement itself. At the same time it made possible the pretension of 'the rule of the saints'.<sup>50</sup>

Once Charles had been reduced through necessity, heightened by war with Scotland, the Commons assumed a great deal more power. Hume relates this transfer in the balance of power by describing the vulnerability of the King's ministers, brought to

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, II, pp. 339-340. For 'Fifth Monarchists', who advocated this kind of millenarianism, see B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth Century English Millenarianism* (London, 1972).

trial by the Commons in 1641. Hume rashly declares that the 'whole sovereign power' was 'transferred to the commons, and the government, without any seeming violence or disorder, [was] changed, in a moment, from a monarchy almost absolute, to a popular democracy' (H, V, p. 293). Charles' powers of protection were stripped from him. Hume drives home the point that this was tantamount to a revolution in the powers of prerogative, dramatically altering the nature of the English constitution. Despite Hume's exaggerated comments to the contrary, he recognized that under Charles a *gradual* alteration of the English state was underway. Hume even goes so far as to make a general appeal to the reading public and to other historians to validate this interpretation. First and foremost, 'all historians' and 'all authors' who have discussed this period of history have chalked up the 'civil disorders and convulsions' to 'religious controversy'. Moreover, such 'political disputes as there were', were 'entirely subordinate' to questions of religion. Charles would have been able to avert the calamities of his reign, had he maintained the support of government; but because he had been entirely subjugated this was no longer the case.

Disuse of parliaments, imprisonments and prosecution of members, ship-money, an arbitrary administration; these were loudly complained of: But the grievances, which tended chiefly to inflame the parliament and the nation, especially the latter, were, the surplice, the rails placed about the altar, the bows exacted on approaching it, the liturgy, the breach of the Sabbath, embroidered copes, lawn sleeves, the use of the ring in marriage, and of the cross in baptism. On account of these, were the popular leaders content to throw the government into such violent convulsions; and to the disgrace of that age and of this island, it must be acknowledged, that the disorders in Scotland entirely, and those in England mostly, proceeded from so mean and contemptible an origin. (H, V, p. 303)

The violent convulsions which overtook the Three Kingdoms were avoidable were it not for the 'theological hatred' that possessed the island.<sup>51</sup> Once the mixture of theology and

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill (eds.), *The British Problem, c. 1534-1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (New York, 1996); J. C. D. Clark,

politics was so intimate and inscrutable it seemed almost destined to lead to the extremes of bloodshed.

One of the ways which Hume judges this period of history is by decrying any comparison of the ‘great men’ of Charles’ reign with those of antiquity. This analysis reaffirms the kinds of virtues Hume thinks valuable for political stability and simultaneously reveals the profound differences between the scales of modern and ancient political virtue.

Some persons, partial to the patriots of this age, have ventured to put them in a balance with the most illustrious characters of antiquity; and mentioned the names of Pym, Hambden, Vane, as a just parallel to those of Cato, Brutus, Cassius. Profound capacity indeed, undaunted courage, extensive enterprise; in these particulars, perhaps the Roman do not much surpass the English worthies: But what a difference, when the discourse, conduct, conversation, and private as well as public behaviour, of both are inspected! Compare only one circumstance, and consider its consequences. The leisure of those noble ancients was totally employed in the study of Grecian eloquence and philosophy; in the cultivation of polite letters and civilized society: The whole discourse and language of the moderns were polluted with mysterious jargon, and full of the lowest and most vulgar hypocrisy. (H, V, 304)

In the differences between the ‘leisure’ of the ancients and moderns lies the heart of Hume’s message. The study of philosophy and rhetoric had a stabilizing effect and moderated both the political discourse and the political world of antiquity; the controversies of religion and the accompanying ‘theological hatred’ did nothing but expose England to extremes in both settings, and was the reason Hobbes railed at men steeped in ancient learning. It was not too much to expect that this extremity would lead to some form of tragedy.

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*Revolution and Rebellion: State and society in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Cambridge, 1986); *idem, Our Shadowed Present: Modernism, Postmodernism and History* (London, 2003), chap. 2, pp. 59-86; Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (eds.), *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650 – c.1850* (Cambridge, 1998); Brendan Bradshaw (ed.), *British Consciousness and Identity: the Making of Britain, 1533-1707* (Cambridge, 1998); Stephen G. Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds.), *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State, 1485-1725* (London, 1995).

The troubles with Scotland did nothing to vindicate the name of ‘true religion’; with God being claimed on all sides, Hume divulges how religion contributed to the enthusiastic cataclysm ending only in sectarian violence (H, V, pp. 343, 348). When Hume finally works his way to the Commons’ famous Grand Remonstrance of 1641, ‘wild enthusiasm’ had seized the body politic, intermixing ‘gross falsehoods’ and ‘some evident untruths’. From this point the Commons published its accusations stretching back to the beginning of Charles’ reign (H, V, pp. 351-352). After observing the reasons and arguments of both sides in this dispute in good neo-classical fashion, Hume observes that the enthusiasm of the Commons knew no bounds: ‘they still more openly passed all bounds of moderation; as supposing, no doubt, that the sacredness of the cause would sufficiently atone for employing means the most irregular and unprecedented’ (H, V, p. 360). Hume quickly opines the ‘regular plan’ of the Commons to reduce the monarchy. Once the ‘fanatical spirit, let loose’ it ‘confounded all regards to ease, safety, interest; and dissolved every moral and civil obligation’ (H, V, p. 380).

As with James I, this enthusiastic blunder of the political nation was reflected in the person of King Charles. Charles’ ‘mixed character’ contributed directly to the nation’s calamity: ‘His political errors, or rather weaknesses, had raised him inveterate enemies: His eminent moral virtues had procured him zealous partisans: And between the hatred of one, and the affections of the other, was the nation agitated with the most violent convulsions’ (H, V, p. 384). When the two parts of the government, ‘so sacred in the English constitution as those of King and Parliament’ were steadfast in their opposition, ‘the people were divided in their choice, and were agitated with most violent animosities and factions’ (H, V, p. 386).

One of Hume's particular aversions was the eschatological furies to which the enthusiasts of Charles' reign were predisposed. Of course, Hume himself paints a dark eschatological picture with rather foreboding undertones. He had argued that 'religion...interwoven with politics' was responsible for pulling the body politic apart: 'each county, each town, each family almost, was divided within itself; the most violent convulsions shook the whole kingdom' (H, V, pp. 387, 400). England had become Leviathan, and the polity descended into the Hobbesian state of nature. This was the state of war of all against all, brought on by the intolerance, bigotry, and hypocrisy of religious enthusiasm.

Once war had begun, little else could be expected but more of the same accompanied by a heightened pitch and a newfound sense of urgency. The pace of the *History* picks up, moving swiftly from one significant action to another, often highlighting the culpability of religion. Various descriptions of the action of the Civil Wars demonstrate how a moderate peace was thwarted on several key occasions (H, V, pp. 414, 422, 450-456; H, VI, pp. 5, 28-29, 41, 55-110). The tone of the narrative becomes one which frequently dwells on death, darkness, and despair. The rule of law – as in Hobbes' state of nature – was abandoned and subjugated to the enthusiast's antinomian Spirit. However, the enthusiast was soon a victim of his own demise: 'No sooner had they subdued their sovereign, than their own servants rose against them, and tumbled them from their slippery throne. The sacred boundaries of the laws being once violated, nothing remained to confine the wild projects of zeal and ambition. And every successive revolution became a precedent for that which followed it' (H, V, p. 492). The synthesis of this process of enthusiastic dialectic for Hume is found in the person of Oliver Cromwell.

On one level, Volume V (originally the first volume) of the *History* provides Hume with the material to portray Cromwell as a foil for his moderate politics. This theme reaches a climax at the end of the volume and is carried over to the final volume's narration of the Interregnum. Not only is Cromwell an arch-hypocrite, he represents the complete incarnation of self-deceptively enthusiastic politics (H, V, pp. 444-445, 489-490, 510). This enthusiastic spirit of religion came to replace the prudence necessary for practical politics manifested by the change in the character of the army.

These motives of interest acquired additional influence, and became more dangerous to the parliament, from the religious spirit, by which the army was universally actuated. Among the generality of men, educated in regular, civilized societies, the sentiments of shame, duty, honour, have considerable authority, and serve to counterbalance and direct the motives, derived from private advantage: But, by the predominancy of enthusiasm among the parliamentary forces, these salutary principles lost their credit, and were regarded as mere human inventions, yea moral institutions, fitter for heathens than for christians. The saint, resigned over to superior guidance, was at full liberty to gratify all his appetites, disguised under the appearance of pious zeal. And, besides the strange corruptions engendered by this spirit, it eluded and loosened all the ties of morality, and gave entire scope, and even sanction, to the selfishness and ambition, which naturally adhere to the human mind.

Thus, everyone was prone to political speculations, especially about the formation of state and government. This tumultuousness, spurred on by the spirit of enthusiasm, had given way to the self-imposed hypocrisy of the saints who seized the reins of power for themselves. Thus the English state went from a stable, limited monarchy to the anarchic state of nature to military tyranny. Though, as we shall see below, the inheritance of 'the godly' was not lost on Restoration England.

Concluding his discussion of the origins of the English Civil Wars, Hume drew another political and philosophical lesson. Never one to let a moment of historical instruction to pass him by, he provides his own version of Socrates' 'noble lie' found in Plato's *Republic*.

If ever, on any occasion, it were laudable to conceal truth from the populace; it must be confessed, that the doctrine of resistance affords such an example; and that all speculative reasoners ought to observe, with regard to this principle, the same cautious silence, which the laws, in every species of government, have ever prescribed to themselves. Government is instituted in order to restrain the fury and injustice of the people; and being always founded on opinion, not on force, it is dangerous to weaken, by these speculations, the reverence, which the multitude owe to authority, and to instruct them beforehand, that the case can never happen, when they may be freed from their duty of allegiance. (H, V, p. 554)

Religious enthusiasm was precisely the force that disrupted the ‘cautious silence’ of the Stuart Kings. Religious enthusiasm released the ‘fury and injustice’ of the people by giving license to the furies of fanaticism and wild speculation. And finally, religious enthusiasm ‘weakened’ the ‘duty of allegiance’ by altering the opinion and thus the discourse under the Stuart Kings.

### §III. RELIGION AND POLITICS TO THE RESTORATION

Hume closed off volume V of the *History* with an aphorism on the use of history: ‘History, the great mistress of wisdom, furnishes examples of all kinds; and every prudential, as well as moral precept, may be authorized by those events, which her enlarged mirror is able to present to us’ (H, V, p. 545; cf. T 2.2.5.21, p. 236).<sup>52</sup> Hume then draws two rather significant points. First, ‘it is dangerous for princes, even from the appearance of necessity, to assume more authority, than the laws have allowed them.’ Second, the events leading up to the Civil Wars ‘furnish us with another instruction, no less natural, and no less useful, concerning the madness of the people, the furies of fanaticism, and the danger

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<sup>52</sup> Hume’s thought was sufficiently sophisticated to compare nature and human thought to a mirror, something Richard Rorty has overlooked in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1981); *idem*, ‘Should Hume Be Answered or Bypassed?’, *Human Nature and Natural Knowledge*, (eds.) A. Donagan, A. N. Perovich, and M. V. Wedin (Dordrecht, 1986), pp. 341-352; and Schmidt, p. 424 n. 22.

of mercenary armies' (H, V, p. 544).<sup>53</sup> We have already learned that Clio, the historical Muse, is a source of enlightened amusement, understanding, virtue, and moderation. Both these pedagogical points fit within Hume's scale of Enlightenment values, driven home by his analysis of the Restoration.

Once the Civil Wars had begun and Charles I was executed there was little to restrain that which had played such a large part in bringing matters to a head. Religious enthusiasm flourished, lacking any sense of restraint or boundary: 'Every man had framed the model of a republic; and, however new it was, or fantastical, he was eager in recommending it to his fellow citizens, or even imposing it by force upon them.' This was paralleled in religion, where 'Every man had adjusted a system of religion, which, being derived from no traditional authority, was peculiar to himself; and being founded on supposed inspiration, not on any principles of human reason, had no means, besides cant and low rhetoric, by which it could recommend itself to others' (H, VI, p. 3). This state of chaos and confusion spread over the whole of England; for a small part of the English nation, the Independents, had 'usurped the whole', but faced an army that indulged 'every chimera in politics' (H, VI, p. 5). Such a combination was a recipe for revolt and revolution.

As volume V of the *History* sketched the outline of Cromwell as the arch-enthusiast, volume VI filled in his portrait.<sup>54</sup> Hume notes that when Cromwell pleaded with Fairfax about war with the Scots (June 1650), some of the characteristics which were

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Machiavelli, Harrington and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century', *Politics, Language, and Time*, pp. 104-147.

<sup>54</sup> For Hume's 'character sketch' of Cromwell at his death, see H, VI, pp. 107-110; Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli*, pp. 275-279; Jane L. McIntyre, 'Character: A Humean Account', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (1990), pp. 193-206; Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture*, pp. 178-181.

to make him Protector revealed themselves. Cromwell's 'warmth of temper' as 'a fanatic enthusiast' made him 'the most dangerous of hypocrites'; it was this, as much as 'his courage and capacity, that he owed all his wonderful successes.' Indeed, through the 'contagious ferment of his zeal, he engaged every one to co-operate with him in his measures; and entering easily and affectionately into every part, which he was disposed to act, he was enabled, even after multiplied deceits, to cover, under a tempest of passion, all his crooked schemes and profound artifices' (H, VI, pp. 28-29). This is an important realisation if, as Hume argues, the 'movements of great states are often directed by as slender springs as those of individuals' (H, VI, p. 46). Cromwell was even conscious of his strength, which, accompanied by the 'uncontrolable fury of his zeal' managed to push 'every thing to extremities' (H, VI, p. 57). And Hume deliberately parts from the host of writers who have either idolized or demonised Cromwell. He only wishes to dispel the 'marvellous' from Cromwell's characterization (H, VI, p. 108). Hume is even willing to give Cromwell credit for his moral qualities and his capabilities as a general and politician; this, however, does nothing to alleviate Cromwell's enthusiastic egoism or his flagrant self-deception (H, VI, pp. 109-110). In this sense Hume distinguishes his account from Bolingbroke and Rapin, who were content to praise Cromwell's allegiance to liberty and his abilities, if somewhat diffident of his religious stance.<sup>55</sup> Because he sought to reveal and thereby construct the principles of political stability, Hume could not let Cromwell's character remain one characterised as merely misguided, but instead to style him a synecdoche for how religion and self-deception can turn politics topsy-turvy, prey

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<sup>55</sup> Bolingbroke, *Letters on History*, p. 20; Rapin, II, p. 589.

to both tyranny and dictatorship.<sup>56</sup> It is significant that Hume sums up the disasters of the Interregnum as a forceful denunciation of fanaticism and religious enthusiasm in politics (H, VI, pp. 55-110). Though the body politic was capable of surviving this kind of political pestilence, there was no guarantee. Cromwell represents the personification of the politics of impropriety.

In contrast to Cromwell, General Monck comes off as moderate and politically prudent, largely responsible for the Restoration. Hume lavishes praise upon Monk for his felicitic foresight and his part in bringing stability back to English politics (H, VI, pp. 123-124). His life was ‘unexceptionable’ and responsible for the return of ‘antient’, ‘legal’, and ‘free government’ to a people ‘plunged in the most destructive anarchy’ (H, VI, p. 147 note g). Of course, as Hume later declares, it is difficult ‘to find in history a character either wholly bad or perfectly good’; and all too often the ‘the prejudices of party make writers run easily into the extremes both of panegyric and of satire’ (H, VI, p. 427). That said, Monk the moderate was responsible for restoring political stability to England, a point not lost on the *History*’s readers.

Aside from Cromwell and Monk, the ‘gloomy enthusiasm’ of the parliamentarians provided yet another enlightened elucidation of history as both ‘instructive’ and ‘entertaining to a philosophical mind’ (H, VI, p. 142). In this case Clio cleared away the rubbish of minds stooped in superstition (Catholics/Anglicans) or enamoured with enthusiasm (Puritans/Dissenters).<sup>57</sup> The post-Restoration world understood ‘that gravity was very distinct from wisdom, formality from virtue, and hypocrisy from religion.’ The ‘universal joy’ that accompanied the Restoration required the repudiation of ‘melancholy

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<sup>56</sup> Herdt, pp. 197-218.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 48-71.

austerity', the trademark of 'fanatics'. Their 'sour and malignant humours' were replaced, embodied by Charles II, with pleasure and politeness (H, VI, p. 157). Hume makes a point of noting that Charles himself visited the Lords in order to persuade them to accept the moderate political course of passing the 'act of general indemnity'. This pragmatic plea was dutifully received with 'applause and satisfaction' (H, VI, p. 158). The Restoration marks for Hume the beginning of the transition of a political discourse infused with enthusiasm to one of party politics. This transition was also accompanied by similar changes in the constitution and the state of liberty.

The story of constitutional change, liberty and religion is a complicated one from 1660 to 1688. One of the more important developments affecting both the constitution and liberty was the Act of Uniformity (1662).<sup>58</sup> This attempt at creating what has been called the 'confessional state' was crafted as a pillar of political stability.<sup>59</sup> Hume dutifully recounts this development, and notes its importance for the refining of the system of liberty in Britain (H, VI, p. 176). Through this measure a modicum of religious and political liberty was allowed. Moreover, it represented the 'systematising' Hume speaks of whereby liberty was more clearly defined and delineated.

Another key moment for Hume was Charles' declaration that he wished the Triennial Act to be repealed (1664).<sup>60</sup> Under the circumstances of the post-Restoration political world, Parliament acceded to Charles' wish 'without taking offence'. Hume

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<sup>58</sup> This act required the rites and ceremonies of the Book of Common Prayer (1662) to be used in church services.

<sup>59</sup> See Clark, *English Society*; *idem*, 'England's Ancien Regime'; *idem*, 'Reconceptualizing eighteenth-century England'; contrariwise see Porter, *English Society*; *idem*, 'Georgian Britain: an ancien regime?'.  
<sup>60</sup> This act repealed the Long Parliament's Triennial Act of 1641 and allowed Charles to summon Parliament at his prerogative, thus reasserting the monarchy's position in the constitution.

passes mild indictment on Parliament for this, since having 'raised itself to be a regular check and controul upon royal power', it should have 'preserved a regular security for their meeting'. Trusting to 'the good-will of the king' was dangerous because it might lead to Parliament's dissolution altogether; indeed, it was not long before 'the nation had occasion to feel very sensibly the effects of this repeal' (H, VI, p. 190-191). And while this fluctuation in the nature of the constitution was not one favourable to Parliament's liberty, there were other factors which tipped the scales in their direction. Hume was convinced of this, arguing that from the Restoration onwards 'England had attained a situation, which had never been experienced in any former period of her government, and which seemed the only one, that could fully ensure, at once, her tranquillity and her liberty'. This resulted from Charles' need of supply. But the difference between Charles I and Charles II was the latter's willingness 'to accommodate himself to that dependent situation.' He was not disposed to revive the 'claims of prerogative' made by his predecessors. Instead he 'strictly confined himself within the limits of the law, and had courted, by every art of popularity, the affections of his subjects.' Hume caustically censures Parliament for failing to supply Charles with the means of being a liberal King. Even now Parliament 'imitated too strictly the example of their predecessors in a rigid frugality of public money; and neither sufficiently considered the indigent condition of their prince, nor the general state of Europe; where every nation, by its increase both of magnificence and force, had made great additions to all public expenses' (H, VI, pp. 134-135).

One of the consequences of Parliament's penchant for denying adequate supply to Charles II was the 'modern' development of party in England. The growth of factional

division was a lineage which Hume had traced in the *Essays* back to the reign of James I. However, the more immediate pedigree of party was found in Restoration England. The history of the transformation of religious enthusiasm to party zeal can be broadly traced through Hume's discussion of the debate surrounding 'resistance', the Popish Plot, and the birth of the Whig and Tory parties in Restoration England.<sup>61</sup>

Hume introduces the question of 'passive obedience' in the *History* through the Lords' attempt to pass a bill requiring the swearing of an oath not to take up arms against the king (1675). The 'zeal' of both combatants in this dispute was such that it 'entered into the controversies of the old parties, cavalier and roundhead' (H, VI, p. 293). The whole nation was drawn to one side or the other; the few moderates that existed questioned the 'impolitic' nature of the feud, threatening, as it did, to again pull the nation apart. According to Hume, all that was required to avoid this political evil was to maintain the 'simplicity retained in the ancient laws of England'; they were 'best calculated to prevent the extremes on either side'. However, neither excluding nor admitting resistance into the constitution were options worth considering.

That even in mixt monarchies, where that supposition seemed most requisite, it was yet entirely superfluous; since no man, on the approach of extraordinary necessity, could be at a loss, though not directed by legal declarations, to find the proper remedy: That even those who might, at a distance, and by scholastic reasoning, exclude all resistance, would yet hearken to the voice of nature; when evident ruin, both to themselves and to the public, must attend a strict adherence, to their principles: That the question, as it ought thus to be entirely excluded from all determinations of the legislature, was, even among private reasoners, somewhat frivolous, and little better than a dispute of words: That the one party could not pretend, that resistance ought ever to become a familiar practice; the other would surely have recourse to it in great extremities: And thus the difference could only turn on the degrees of danger or oppression, which would warrant this irregular

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<sup>61</sup> Hume's interpretation differs from historians of our day in that they often trace the growth of party to the Exclusions Crisis of 1680-1681 specifically. And, the full maturity of modern party government is reserved for the late-eighteenth century, if then. Cf. Frank O'Gorman, *The Rise of Party in England: The Rockingham Whigs, 1760-1832* (London, 1975).

remedy; a difference, which, in a general question, it was impossible, by any language, precisely to fix or determine. (H, VI, pp. 293-294)

Such disputes, accompanied by Charles' uncertain motives and Parliament's general distrust and the conduct of foreign policy, easily transported the Commons into two parties, Court and Country. The Court party was made up of those naturally inclined to side with the King, and by men bribed and bought by patronage. Likewise, the Country part was made up of men trying to further their 'private views' and 'factions', but it also included men 'who had no other object than the public good.' The 'disinterested' men fluctuated back and forth between the cause of the King and the Commons.<sup>62</sup> However, because 'a general distrust of the king prevailed' the moderate men of both parties were apprehensive of granting the King sufficient supply (H, VI, pp. 307-308).<sup>63</sup> The debate revolving around 'resistance', originally related to supply and later to religion and Exclusion, divided the political nation into parties (cf. E PO, pp. 488-492; E PGB, pp. 64-72).

The Popish Plot, another instance of religion rearing its ugly head, also parted England politically.<sup>64</sup> When the 'cry of a *plot*' was heard, hysteria and hallucination ran rampant. Like 'men affrighted and in the dark, [they] took every figure for a spectre.' A 'universal panic' ensued: 'reason and argument and common sense and common humanity lost all influence'. Nothing but the fury, fear and fanaticism of men's mind was

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<sup>62</sup> J. R. Jones, *Court and Country: England, 1658-1714* (London, 1978); John Cannon (ed.), *The Whig Ascendancy: colloquies on Hanoverian England* (London, 1981).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Thomas P. Slaughter, 'Abdicate' and 'Contract' in the Glorious Revolution', *Historical Journal* 24 (1981), pp. 323-337; *idem*, 'Abdicate' and 'Contract' Restored', *Historical Journal* 28 (1985), pp. 399-403. Lois Schwoerer, *Declaration of Rights*.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. J. P. Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (London, 1972); Mark Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678-1681* (Cambridge, 1995); John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England 1660-1688* (Cambridge, 1973).

able to account for an event which was otherwise 'altogether inexplicable' (H, VI, p. 333). The Popish Plot was, in essence, a momentary relapse into the religious enthusiasm of the English Civil Wars. It demonstrated that 'Men reason more from their fears and their passions than from the evidence before them' (H, VI, p. 340). The tragicomedies of historical episodes such as the Popish Plot were the historical experiments from which Hume drew his aphorisms. The *History* clearly makes Titus Oates and William Bedloe appear ridiculous while chastising Charles II and Parliament for seriously entertaining such rogues at all (H, VI, pp. 332-355, 360-362). The whole debacle was retold as a historical lesson for an enlightened age. The mixture of politics and enthusiastic or superstitious religion spelt political instability.

The Exclusion Crisis or 'Cabal' as Hume calls it was the most formidable step in the development of party in England prior to the Revolution of 1688. Since the beginning of the Restoration, Hume argues that the Cavalier Parliament had dramatically changed shape. It went from a Royalist Parliament to a moderately independent one, which secured its dissolution. The first signs of Parliament's wavering resulted from alarm about royal relations with France. From this, Parliament went on 'to discover symptoms of the most refractory and most jealous disposition.' The likes of Oates and Bedloe pushed Parliament 'beyond all bounds of moderation'; and before Parliament's dissolution it 'seemed to be treading fast in the footsteps of the last long parliament, on whose conduct they threw at first such violent blame.' What distinguished the strife of the Civil Wars years from the Restoration crises was that Parliament was now enflamed with 'party-views', guilty of neglecting 'public interest' (H, VI, p. 353). The election that followed the Restoration Parliament's dissolution was, according to Hume, the first which saw its

battle lines drawn by party interest, 'and where the court interested itself, to a high degree, in the choice of the national representatives.' Much to the Court's dismay, the fear stoked by the supposed threat to 'Religion, liberty, property, and the lives of men' resulted in its resounding defeat. The currency of the Popish Plot in every corner of England had secured such a result (H, VI, p. 356).

The Exclusion Crisis and the results of the election that followed hard on its heels had an important impact on political liberty. Living in the midst of the Hanoverian regime accompanied by the partial rejection of the ideals of civic humanism, Hume's support for the limited role of placemen and pensions was almost automatic. Though the more sinister men in Parliament, secured through bribery, were a threat to the 'virtue and liberty of a nation', those who received honours for their service oiled the machine of state. This was not something appreciated by the Commons under Charles II. Jealous of the crown's influence, the Commons attempted to pass a bill against placemen (H, VI, p. 366). Such jealousy was carried over to the standing army which was 'voted to be illegal'. Hume recognised this 'new pretension' and its necessity for 'the full security of liberty and a limited constitution.' Though the Magna Carta had 'laid the foundation' of liberty, and the Petition of Right 'renewed and extended it', other aspects 'were still wanting' in order to 'render it complete'. This process reached a pinnacle when in 1679 Parliament passed the act of *habeus corpus* protecting against arbitrary imprisonment: 'a merit, which makes some atonement for the faction and violence, into which their prejudices had, in

other particulars, betrayed them' (H, VI, p. 366-367). By rendering liberty 'complete', however, the political nation was further fractured along party lines.<sup>65</sup>

The re-emergence of party faction after the Restoration was also a result of the King's loss of popularity. At the onset of his reign, Charles 'had endeavoured to abolish the distinction of parties', choosing his ministers from both. However, once his popularity waned he 'found it necessary to court the old cavalier party', being his natural allies (H, VI, pp. 375-376). 'A party, strongly attached to the monarchy,' Hume writes, 'will naturally be jealous of the right of succession, by which alone, they believe, stability to be preserved in the government, and a barrier fixed against the encroachments of popular assemblies.' Such a party was as such against Exclusion and against diminishing the powers of the King. They also regarded any dependence on popularity, in which the Commons placed much of their trust, as a dangerous step back towards a commonwealth. Because Charles looked to one party for his support, he played a pivotal role in the emergence of modern party politics. The division which Parliament found itself victim to, according to Hume, was less a result of 'religious than from party zeal'. By the end of the reign of Charles II the

spirit of enthusiasm had occasioned so much mischief, and had been so successfully exploded, that it was not possible, by any artifice, again to revive and support it. Cant had been ridiculed; hypocrisy detected; the pretensions to a more thorough reformation, and to greater purity, had become suspicious; and instead of denominating themselves the godly party, the appellation affected at the beginning of the civil wars, the present patriots were content with calling themselves the good and the honest party: A sure prognostic, that their measures were not to be so furious, nor their pretensions so exorbitant. (H, VI, p. 377)

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<sup>65</sup> The Habeus Corpus Amendment Act simply amended *habeus corpus*, which was already in existence in law, by preventing the officers of the Crown from evading the implications of the Habeus Corpus Writ.

This protracted series of events proved the crucible of the ‘modern’ parties in Britain; it was ‘the epoch of the well-known epithets of WHIG and TORY, by which, and sometimes without any material difference, this island has been so long divided’ (H, VI, p. 381). The struggle for liberty which had begun in the seventeenth century under the banner of religion, refashioned its standard with party colours towards the end of the reign of Charles II. In contrast to popular Whig abridgements like Rapin’s *Dissertation on the Rise, Progress, Views, Strengths, Interests, and Characters of the two Parties of the WHIGS and TORIES*, which had traced the origins of party to the ancient struggle between the constitution and the monarchy, Hume crafted a narrative which drew the lines of party to divisions based on modern opinion in politics; at first religious, as the cause of the Civil Wars, and then principled, as the cause of the Revolution.<sup>66</sup>

Hume considered the history of the Stuarts politically important for numerous reasons. However, he had begun with the history of the Stuarts because, as he had written, it was both amusing and instructive, since Stuart history gave the historian a broad canvass from which to draw moral and political Tacitean lessons. This chapter has argued that one of the principal aims of Hume’s philosophical, political and historical enterprise was the extirpation of enthusiasm. Such a history was highly entertaining but it also provided important political lessons which Hanoverian readers appreciated. The polite denunciation of ‘false’ religion, begun in the *Treatise and Essays*, and completed in the *History*, was one that elicited a variety of responses. Catherine Macaulay’s *History of England*, a republican refutation of Hume, shows how much of a ‘threat’ Hume’s philosophical politics could be, especially to those who wished not to heed his moderate

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<sup>14</sup> Rapin, II, pp. 796-801.

tale.<sup>67</sup> Hume's account of Stuart history from James I to James II and the Revolution of 1688, the subject we now turn to, was an enlightened narrative that managed to displease readers of all stripes.

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<sup>67</sup> Catherine Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Revolution* (8 vols., London 1765-1771).

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Revolution and the foundations of the Hanoverian regime*

The ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688-89 occupies a pre-eminent place in the history of the British Isles. Exactly what happened, and on what terms, has been an area of debate since the Revolution itself. In particular, the eighteenth century witnessed dizzying battle over the nature of the British polity where the Revolution figured significantly. It is not surprising, then, that Hume incorporated detailed analysis of the Revolution within his philosophical programme and his political science. Hume recognised the vital importance of 1688-89 for politics and for the Hanoverian state; it assumed and retained, therefore, a prominent place in his thought.

As we have seen, Hume began the ‘science of man’ by examining the principles of ‘human understanding’ and the ‘passions’, eventually extending his analysis to ‘morals’ as well. Equipped with the experimental method Hume completed his sceptical endeavour by throwing down the gauntlet of ‘reason’ and replacing it with ‘custom’. This methodology was carried over to the examination of politics first begun in the *Treatise*, where the Revolution is first discussed. After the *Treatise*’s dismal failure, Hume purposefully mimicked the polite essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Hume’s *Essays* are for the club and the coffeehouse; they are set-pieces meant to inspire commerce, conversation and civility. Hume’s historical tome, the *History of England*, narrates in neo-classical form the story of the Revolution as the foundation of the

Hanoverian political world.<sup>1</sup> The principles of politics, their application, and their historical context are each brought into focus by Hume's treatment of the Revolution. I shall continue to argue that Hume's synthesis is that of an 'establishment Whig' based on philosophical scepticism rendering his political thought a Hanoverian *apologia*. Hume maintained that it belongs 'to a philosopher alone, who is of neither party, to put all the circumstances in the scale, and assign to each of them its proper poise and influence. Such a one will readily, at first, acknowledge that all political questions are infinitely complicated, and that there scarcely ever occurs, in any deliberation, a choice, which is either purely good, or purely ill' (E PS, p. 507). If Hume is justly referred to as a 'philosophical historian' we may accept Duncan Forbes' observation that he was also a 'philosophical political scientist'.<sup>2</sup>

The amount of published material on the Revolution of 1688-89 is truly staggering, and the event continues to occupy an important place within the historiography of the period.<sup>3</sup> Such scholarly debate testifies to the significance of this event and its regime-changing effects. Many have interpreted the Revolution in constitutional terms, as an episode eventually leading to modern constitutional government. G. M. Trevelyan provides a representative Whig gloss:

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture*.

<sup>2</sup> Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*; G. J. Moses, 'David Hume as Philosophical Historian', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 35 (1989), pp. 80-91.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Beddard (ed.), *The Revolutions of 1688*; Eveline Cruickshanks, *The Glorious Revolution* (New York, 2000); J. R. Jones, *The Revolution of 1688 in England* (London, 1972); J. P. Kenyon, *Revolution Principles: The Politics of Party, 1689-1720* (Cambridge, 1977); John Miller, *Seeds of Liberty: 1688 and the Shaping of Modern Britain* (London, 1988); Plumb, *Growth of Political Stability*; Lois G. Schworer, *The Declaration of Rights, 1689* (Baltimore, 1981); *idem* (ed.), *The Revolution of 1688-1689: Changing perspectives* (Cambridge, 1992); W. A. Speck, *Reluctant Revolutionaries: Englishmen and the Revolution of 1688* (Oxford, 1988).

James [II] had tried to put the King above Parliament and above Law. The Revolution, while leaving the King the source of executive authority, subjected him to the Law, which was henceforth to be interpreted by independent and irremovable Judges, and could only be altered by Act of Parliament. At the same time, by the annual Mutiny Act that made the army dependent on Parliament, and by the refusal to grant to William for life the supplies that had been granted for the lives of Charles and James II, the House of Commons obtained a power of bargaining with Government that rendered it even more important than the House of Lords; indeed, from the Revolution onwards the Commons gradually gained a control even over the executive power of the King.<sup>4</sup>

Many historians have examined the Revolution as the seed leading to modern constitutional government in England. Scholars such as Jonathan Clark prefer to see this period not as the birthplace of modernity, but as a society that maintained ironclad connections with its past. Several strands of political discourse in Hanoverian Britain hailed the Revolution as the restoration of the ‘ancient constitution’; this is why the term ‘revolution’ appealed to them.<sup>5</sup> That momentous event reaffirmed the conflation of political and historical thought into one discourse, something both Tories and Whigs accepted.<sup>6</sup> In order to understand Hume’s thought and how he differentiated himself from this phenomenon, we must approach his analysis with such knowledge in mind.<sup>7</sup>

#### §I. PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, AND THE REVOLUTION

I left off analysis in chapter I where the first mention of the Revolution of 1688-89 occurs in Book III of the *Treatise*, under ‘Of the objects of allegiance’. There I observed that Book III, ‘Of Morals’, is dedicated to applying the metaphysical enquiries of Books I and II

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<sup>4</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *The English Revolution, 1688-1689* (London, 1939), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> For the historical etymology of ‘revolution’ in eighteenth-century see: Clark, *English Society*, ‘Keywords’; W. A. Speck, ‘Whigs and Tories dim their glories’, *Whig Ascendancy*, pp. 50-68; Shwoerer, *Declaration of Rights*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Viscount Bolingbroke, *Dissertation on Parties*, in *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*, (ed.) David Armitage (Cambridge, 1992) p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pocock, *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*.

to the realms of morals and politics. Specifically, the Revolution is discussed within the context of Part II, Book III, 'Of justice and injustice'.<sup>8</sup>

Preceding the *Treatise* account of 1688-89, Hume investigates the concept of political succession. The example he draws upon is that of Drusus and Germanicus, sons of the Roman emperor Tiberius. Drusus was adopted after Tiberius had become emperor; Germanicus was the natural son and elder of the two. Hume asks if Tiberius had died without naming a successor, upon what principles should governance descend? He despaired of resolving the question: 'I am afraid we shall never be able to satisfy an impartial enquirer, who adopts no party in political controversies, and will be satisfy'd with nothing but sound reason and philosophy' (T 3.2.10.15, p. 360). As a classical example set immediately before his account of the Revolution, Hume asserts that the principles of politics are beyond the scope of 'reason'. We now stand, after examining the philosophical genesis of Hume's political thought, in a position to appreciate how Hume reaches the sceptical conclusions regarding this Hanoverian historical shibboleth.

Perhaps the most innovative assertion in Book III was that political society was founded on 'artifice' (T 3.2.1, pp. 307-311).<sup>9</sup> This extends to all aspects of political society including the origin of justice and property, the rules and transference of property, obligations and promises, the origins of government, as well as allegiance.<sup>10</sup> The five principles of allegiance – long possession, present possession, conquest, succession and positive law – bear directly on the status of the Revolution. These principles confer legitimacy, where government was first instituted because of society's 'interest'. In order

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<sup>8</sup> For the relevant *Enquiry* redeployments on the same theme, see EPM, Sections 1, 3, 4, A3.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Whelan, *Order and Artifice*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*, pp. 100-128.

to protect property and justice, man appointed magistrates. This, however, should not be confused with an 'original contract'; it is more likely that political society arose from a state of war, where convenience placed sovereign power in the hands of an executive of some kind. In this setting, it is relevant to consider Locke's formulation, considering its currency in Hanoverian political discourse. In discussing the origin of political society, Locke noted that 'Men joyn and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst the other, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater Security against any that are not of it...When any number of Men have so *consented to make one Community* or Government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one Body Politick, wherein the Majority have a Right to act and conclude the rest.'<sup>11</sup> Aside from subtly disagreeing with Locke on how this consent was realised, Hume was not willing to base politics on either reason (Locke) or revelation (Filmer), but rather on 'opinion' and 'manners' (Shaftesbury). Politics can then be investigated along the lines of natural philosophy or science. The Revolution is a historical experiment, like that of Emperor Tiberius, where Hume can verify his philosophical conclusions: once again, 'the study of history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy' (T 3.2.10.15, p. 359). Hume's 'science of man' is experimental and in such a scheme political science and history prove the scientist and laboratory respectively.

Direct analysis of the Revolution begins with a restatement: 'We have already remark'd, that in the case of enormous tyranny and oppression, 'tis lawful to take arms even against the supreme power; and that as government is a mere human invention for mutual advantage and security, it no longer imposes any obligation, either natural or

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<sup>11</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, (ed.) Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988), II, §95, p. 331.

moral, when once it ceases to have this tendency.’ If all government rests on ‘opinion’ then there is no reason to endure despotic or tyrannical government. Hume followed this statement with an important qualifier; though the principle of resistance was one of common sense, revealed through the course of history, it is ‘certainly impossible for the laws, or even for philosophy, to establish any particular rules, by which we may know when resistance is lawful; and decide all controversies, which may arise on that subject’ (T 3.2.10.16, p. 360). In other words, there is no prescriptive basis for resistance to the sovereign power; the right of resistance is normative.<sup>12</sup> Opposing tyranny is ‘the practice of all ages’, yet there is no means of establishing when such resistance is justified; this depends on context. Hume agreed with Locke that the end of government was the preservation of property. They differed, however, on how an injustice in this regard was to be redressed. Locke asserted that resistance was legitimate in cases of tyranny, arguing that when a dispute arose between the people and the magistrate and no umpire could be found, ‘the Appeal then lies no where but to Heaven’.<sup>13</sup> Any sort of Lockean prescriptive right of resistance is pragmatically questionable for Hume.<sup>14</sup> Political stability would be at an end if any such right were allowed; Hume observes that ‘mix’d governments’ which contain a legal right of resistance are plagued by the indulgence such a law allows (T 3.2.10.16, p. 360). The ‘science of man’ is meant to dispel the ubiquitous causes of

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<sup>12</sup> On obligation and duty in Hume’s thought see: Mendel F. Cohen, ‘Obligation and human nature in Hume’s philosophy’, *Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (1990), pp. 316-341; Darwall, ‘Motive and Obligation in Hume’s Ethics’; Knud Haakonssen, ‘Hume’s obligations’, *Hume Studies* 4 (1978), pp. 7-17; Tito Magri, ‘Natural Obligation and Normative Motivation in Hume’s Treatise’, *Hume Studies* 22 (1996), pp. 231-254; Neil McArthur, ‘David Hume’s legal theory: the significance of general laws’, *History of European Ideas* 30 (2004), pp. 149-166.

<sup>13</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises*, II, §242, p. 427.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Political Thought of John Locke*, pp. 165-186; Aschcraft, *Revolutionary Politics*, pp. 291-312.

instability, a legal right of resistance being one of them. Although a legal prescription of resistance has deleterious effect on political stability, it does not follow that resistance can never be justified.<sup>15</sup>

According to Hume the ‘necessity of self-preservation’ and the ‘motive of public good, give [the people] the same liberty in one case as in the other’. While a right of resistance may cause instability, it allows for the ‘preservation of public liberty’. Government would be an ‘absurdity’ if it lacked the ‘power of resistance’ within it. Those who praise Britain’s ‘free government’ and also ‘deny the right of resistance’, like Filmer and his Tory disciples, have set aside ‘common sense, and do not merit a serious answer.’ Hume’s conclusion is that government, founded on ‘interest’ and based on ‘opinion’, can justifiably be resisted. Again, there is no prescriptive right of resistance nor should resistance be entertained lightly, the political consequences are weighty indeed; yet resistance of a normative kind is allowed based on the foundation of government’s institution (‘interest’).

Up until this point in the *Treatise* Hume’s analysis has been of a general character; it has not discussed the Revolution specifically. He provides an explanation for this:

It does not belong to my present purpose to show, that these general principles are applicable to the late *revolution*; and that all the rights and privileges, which ought to be sacred to a free nation, were at that time threaten’d with the utmost danger. I am better pleas’d to leave this controverted subject, if it really admits of controversy; and to indulge myself in some philosophical reflections, which naturally arise from that important event. (T 3.2.10.17, p. 361)

We may infer from this statement that the question of importance is not whether or not resistance at the Revolution was justified – especially when Hume’s contemporaries were

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Haakonssen, *Science of a Legislator*, pp. 4-44.

unable or unwilling to appreciate his nuanced contextual analysis.<sup>16</sup> Instead Hume shirks the obvious question for his contemporaries, entertaining in its place certain ‘philosophical reflections’. Enlightened political maxims were more important than adjudicating the Revolution’s merit, something that Hume may have had some difficulty doing if he were a contemporary of that momentous event.

Dethroning a king at the behest of the Lords or the Commons, Hume declared, was arbitrary and illegal; only when the king consistently acted in an unjust and tyrannical manner did it become ‘morally lawful and suitable to the nature of political society to dethrone him’. When such a king is dethroned ‘we are apt to think, that the remaining members of the constitution acquire a right of excluding his next heir, and of choosing whom they please for his successor.’ This, notes Hume, is a ‘very singular quality of our thought and imagination.’ If the king forfeits his right by his abuses, it ought to revert to his heir as if the king had died; there being no reasonable case to the contrary. Ironically, Hume observes, ‘we easily comply with the contrary opinion.’ While such an act of resistance is laudable for the public good, Hume thinks it plainly illegal. As we shall see, the determination of kingship, authority, and obligation are different for Stuart versus Hanoverian contexts. The only reason that the Revolution was justified derived from the ‘operations of the understanding’. When the laws are ‘transgress’d with approbation’ in the name of public good the ‘mind naturally runs on with any train of action, which it has begun; nor do we commonly make any scruple concerning our duty, after the first action of any kind, which we perform’ (T 3.2.10.18, p. 361). Here is one of

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<sup>16</sup> Hume regarded the systemizing of the constitution and of liberty as worthy ends, and James II had crossed the barrier most Englishmen were willing to tolerate. Both Tory and Whig participation in the Revolution made incessant questioning of the justification of that event a *non sequitor*.

Hume's political maxims made plain: if political authority is based on 'opinion', then the justification for acts of resistance – especially those perceived to be for the public good – are easily obtained.

Hume argues that if James II had been excluded and died soon after, his son would have been set up under a regency. Those who were inclined to monarchical principles were still loyal to the idea of hereditary right, even if James II had ruled in despotic form. On strictly technical grounds Hume seems to condemn the resistance proffered in 1688-89. That said, he quickly follows these observations with a highly pragmatic political principle: if 'the slightest properties of the imagination have an effect on the judgements of the people, it shows the wisdom of the laws and of parliament to take advantage of such properties, and to choose magistrates either in or out of a line, according as the vulgar most naturally attribute authority and right to them' (T 3.2.10.18, p. 362). Once again, if government is founded on 'opinion', then for society's 'interest' it is best to take such opinion into account when altering the polity. Unlike Bolingbroke, Hume was under no illusion that the Revolution was returning post-Revolutionary Britain to its pristine constitution. He was well aware of the constitution's mutable character, and advocated change that took account of the 'first principles of government'. In post-Union Britain it meant paying due homage to Parliament, property and especially Protestantism.<sup>17</sup>

The recognition of the mutability of the constitution allows Hume to analyse the Revolution without any hindrances of ideological commitment.<sup>18</sup> The accession of the Prince of Orange was contested, and his title doubtful, both during the Revolution and

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<sup>17</sup> Clark, *English Society*, pp. 74-83.

<sup>18</sup> Phillipson, *Hume*, pp. 61-4.

after; it had, according to Hume, ‘acquir’d a sufficient authority from those three princes, who have succeeded him upon that same title.’ This was a ‘natural’ political phenomenon; time accompanied by good rule had justified the rule of the Hanoverians, as it did for William III. Hume ignores entirely the question of right *de jure* versus *de facto* as being beside the point.<sup>19</sup> A king ‘who during his whole life-time might justly be deem’d an usurper, will be regarded by posterity as a lawful prince, because he has had the good fortune to settle his family on the throne, and entirely change the antient form of government.’ ‘Time and custom’, Hume asserts, ‘give authority to all forms of government, and all successions of princes; and that power, which at first was founded only on injustice and violence, becomes in time legal and obligatory.’ This conceptualisation anticipates the political thought of Edmund Burke, not overly surprising considering the two were contemporaries, respected each other’s work, and were both establishment Whigs. The common-law processes of legitimation is for both men carried on by extending it to ‘predecessors and ancestors’: the ‘present king of France makes Hugh Capet a more lawful prince than Cromwell’ (T 3.2.10.19, p. 362).<sup>20</sup> Here is an example, like that of the Revolution, where the principles of allegiance and property are made plain – in this case ‘present possession’.

The Revolution does not receive systematic treatment in Book III of the *Treatise*. It is a contextual episode within a largely metaphysical work. We can now appreciate how integrated Hume’s political thought was within the ‘science of man’. In Books I and II Hume had shown that the principles of the understanding were based on ‘custom’,

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kenyon, *Revolution Principles*, pp. 21-34.

<sup>20</sup> For Hume’s location in the civic humanist tradition see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, chaps 13 and 14.

‘utility’, and ‘interest’.<sup>21</sup> *Pace* Descartes and Hobbes, reason was not able to account for the operations of the understanding or the operations of government. This does not, however, automatically propel Hume into the arms of Whig political thought. Many historians and philosophers have contended that Hume was actually Tory.<sup>22</sup> Though this thesis has characterised Hume as an ‘establishment Whig’, it does not mean he automatically argued that the Revolution or the Whig polemic was justified. He had, after all, claimed in a personal letter to be ‘of no party’, having ‘no bias’ (L, I, p. 185). The principle of resistance was dubious at best:

But tho’, on some occasions, it may be justifiable, both in sound politics and morality, to resist supreme power, ’tis certain, that in the ordinary course of human affairs nothing can be more pernicious and criminal; and that besides the convulsions, which always attend revolutions, such a practice tends directly to the subversion of all government, and the causing an universal anarchy and confusion among mankind.

With such knowledge ‘We ought always to weigh the advantages, which we reap from authority, against the disadvantages; and by this means we shall become more scrupulous of putting in practice the doctrine of resistance. The common rule requires submission; and ’tis only in cases of grievous tyranny and oppression, that the exception can take place’ (T 3.2.10.1, p. 354). The simple fact of the matter was that the Hanoverian regime was now legitimate; the principles of allegiance conferred a level of legitimacy sufficient for political stability. Moreover, there were advantages to be had as a consequence of 1688-89.

The *Treatise* account of the Revolution is equivocal. There is no hearty endorsement of Whig apologetics; neither is there deep sympathy for the Tory principles.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Norton, ‘Hume, human nature’, pp. 148-176.

<sup>22</sup> James Coniff, ‘Hume on Political Parties: the Case for Hume as a Whig’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12 (1978-79), pp. 150-173; Majorie Grene, ‘Hume: Sceptic and Tory?’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1943), pp. 333-348; E. C. Mossner, ‘Was Hume a Tory? Facts and Reconsiderations’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (1941), pp. 225-236.

The 'science of man' revealed that government was founded on 'opinion'; party polemics of both stripes became superfluous and harmful, and as a result, the 'rage of party' politicised society, leaving it more vulnerable to Jacobitism.<sup>23</sup> Instead Hume suggests, political discourse should be dedicated to promoting moderation in a polite and increasingly commercial world. This gave the *Treatise* the ring of a sophisticated and sceptical *apologia* for the Hanoverian regime.

## §II. PHILOSOPHY, POLITENESS, AND THE REVOLUTION

Hume placed responsibility for the *Treatise*'s failure on its style; its poor reception 'proceeded more from the manner than the matter' (ML, pp. xxxiv, xxxv). With an avowed passion for a literary life he set out to revise and polish his work. This took the form of the *Essays, Moral and Political*, first appearing in 1741 and soon after it a second volume with corrections of the first. These post-Augustan essays received more attention than the *Treatise*, and it is to the *Essays* we must turn in order to understand the public message of Hume's political thought.<sup>24</sup> Once more, however, it is necessary to attend to Hume's political principles to grasp the Revolution's significance.

Hume held certain reservations about referring to the Revolution as 'glorious'. The liberty of the press, in part a consequence of the Revolution, was plagued by unreasonable polemic and licentiousness. The positive attributes of a free press were clear, such as the increased traffic in ideas, commerce, and conversation; yet this was

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<sup>23</sup> W. A. Speck, *Stability and Strife: England, 1714-1760* (London, 1977).

<sup>24</sup> Phillipson, 'Politics and Politeness in the Philosophy of David Hume', pp. 305-309; Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, pp. 31-78.

nearly outweighed by the effects of ‘fanatic’ literary zeal (E LP, pp. 9-13).<sup>25</sup> This kind of zeal, associated with the paper war between Walpole (the *Dunciad*) and his adversaries (Bolingbroke, Pope, etc), was also witnessed, much to Hume’s dismay, later in the century with the ‘Wilkes and Liberty’ phenomena. The source of the Revolution’s glory was to be found elsewhere. The Revolution, so it went, had confirmed and restored the balance of England’s ‘ancient’, ‘mixed’, and ‘matchless’ constitution. Hume would have agreed with such an appraisal insofar as such a form managed to avoid ‘the two extremes in government, liberty and slavery’ (E LP, p. 10). The best form of government was indeed mixed as we shall see shortly; England’s was not, however, either ‘matchless’ or ‘ancient’.

The forms of government preoccupied Hume as much as any good political theorist. This was first explored in ‘That Politics May be Reduced to a Science’. The essay begins with the question ‘whether there be any essential difference between one form of government and another? and, whether every form may not become good or bad, according as it is well or ill administered?’ Though a ‘friend to moderation’, Hume rejects the idea that form is irrelevant; he ‘cannot forbear condemning this sentiment, and should be sorry to think, that human affairs admit of no greater stability, than what they received from the casual humours and characters of particular men’ (E PR, pp. 14-15). As we might expect, Hume argues that the form of government *does* matter and that there are some forms better than others, depending on context.<sup>26</sup> ‘So great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men,’ he observes, ‘that consequences almost as general and

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<sup>25</sup> For the polite education that the reading of history provided women, see ‘Of the Study of History’ (E SH, pp. 563-568) and also Wootton, ‘David Hume, “the Historian”’, pp. 281-285.

<sup>26</sup> Dees, ‘Hume and the Context of Politics’.

certain may sometimes be deduced from them, as any which the mathematical sciences afford us' (E PR, p. 16). Hume explores the different forms of aristocracy as practised by Venice and Poland. The Venetian form is better: 'A nobility, who possess their power in common, will preserve peace and order' because they have a share in power 'as part of the whole body'. In this case, according to Hume, 'no member can have authority enough to controul the laws'; moreover, in this situation the 'nobles will preserve their authority over the people, but without grievous tyranny, or any breach of private property'. Moreover, this distribution of power prevents 'private feuds and animosities, which spread ruin and desolation everywhere' (E PR, pp. 16-17). Using Poland and Venice as 'ideal types', Hume praises a form of aristocracy that is remarkably similar to the one in which he lives, and which abides by his maxim regarding 'good laws'.<sup>27</sup>

Hume follows this discussion of aristocracy by demonstrating the vulnerability of elective monarchies. According to Hume such forms of government are subject to 'greater inconveniencies' than hereditary monarchs, whose principles are 'eternal and immutable'. After outlining the inconveniency of elective monarchy because of law's vulnerability in such a state, Hume establishes what he calls a universal maxim: 'That an hereditary prince, a nobility without vassals, and a people voting by their representatives, form the best MONARCHY, ARISTOCRACY, and DEMOCRACY' (E PR, p. 18). Here, in keeping with classical Whig political thought, Hume praises the Polybian mixed form of government; the form, according to both Whigs and Tories, of the Hanoverian state. If 'wise regulations in any commonwealth are the most valuable legacy that can be left to future ages' it follows that 'Good laws may beget order and moderation in

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<sup>27</sup> It is not surprising, then, that J. H. Plumb went on to label the Hanoverian regime as a 'Venetian oligarchy', *Growth of Political Stability*, chap 6, pp. 159-189.

government, where the manners and customs have instilled little humanity or justice into the tempers of men' (E PR, pp. 24, 25). Hume's Britain, of course, was just such a state; when the status of Britain's laws seemed threatened, with Wilkes or with the national debt, Hume became openly worrisome (cf. L, II, pp. 180, 191, 209; E BG, pp. 47-53).

The last part of the essay shifts from considerations of political maxims to the contemporary political situation. Hume returns to a ubiquitous theme in his corpus: 'promoting moderation' rather than 'zeal'. A 'fanatical' and 'enthusiastic' political polemic had grown out of factional divisions. This is specifically related to the ascendancy of Sir Robert Walpole.<sup>28</sup> There were, Hume notes, 'zealots on both sides who kindle up the passions of their partizans, and under pretence of public good, pursue the interests and ends of their particular faction.' Hume attempts 'to draw a lesson of moderation with regard to the parties, into which our country is at present divided' (E PR, p. 27). If the constitution was as sublime as claimed, it would 'never have suffered a wicked and weak minister to govern triumphantly for a course of twenty years'; moreover, if the ministers were so weak and wicked as often insisted by the likes of *Cato*,<sup>29</sup> 'the constitution must be faulty in its original principles, and he [Walpole] cannot consistently be charged with undermining the best form of government in the world.' This, Hume declares, was precisely what had happened at the Revolution. The English constitution contains within it the 'remedy against mal-administration'; it was most recently 'repaired by two such remarkable events, as the *Revolution* and *Accession*' (E PR, p. 29). The same types of criticisms apply to Walpole's apologists. If the constitution be so good, then a change in ministry would not be so bad as they protest; and if the constitution is so bad, then

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. 'A Character of Sir Robert Walpole', E RW, pp. 574-576.

<sup>29</sup> [Trenchard and Gordon], *Cato's Letters*, I, nos. 2-11, pp. 37-92.

‘jealously and apprehension’ of it is surely ‘ill placed’ (E PR, p. 30). In this case the Revolution is a ‘remedy’ and demonstrates the flexibility of the mixed constitution. Within an essay dedicated to the possibility and purpose of political science, the Revolution attests to Hume’s political maxims outlined in the *Treatise*. He shares in many of the assumptions of his day but is savvy enough, equipped with a critical approach, to thwart the ‘zealous’ polemic of Whig and Tory political thought.

Viscount Bolingbroke and the Opposition or ‘patriot’ party are implicitly coming under criticism here. Bolingbroke and his coterie, magnificent though their writings were, failed to meet Hume’s standards of political practice. Hume wanted to bring greater stability to politics by laying bare the foundation of politics as well as the faulty ideologies that were drawn by contemporary politicians.<sup>30</sup> Bolingbroke provided one of the more potent and lasting political vocabularies during Hume’s lifetime. For Bolingbroke the Revolution became the centre of his interpretive point. It was the place from which he launched his opposition to ‘the Robinocracy’ and the Whig ascendancy. As a magnetic political figure Bolingbroke managed to have a profound impact on politics even after the Act of Attainder was passed against him, debarring him from any official political participation in Britain. His political influence became a derivative of his opposition campaign waged through the press. *The Craftsman*, where Bolingbroke’s more influential works were first published, took its very name from the politics of opposition. Walpole was ‘the Craftsman’, and he corruptly manipulated in order to ply his variety of political domination. The longevity of Bolingbroke’s opposition campaign, in part a testament to his capabilities and to those of Walpole, represents one of the dominant strands of

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Armitage, ‘Introduction’.

political vocabulary during the Hanoverian regime. Hume was willing to concede some of what Bolingbroke had to say, though usually from a different philosophical footing, which lead him to disagree on several important points.

Bolingbroke did not regard the Revolution as marking an era 'entirely new', as Hume argued. Instead, he conceived it as a Machiavellian *ritorno*, a return to 'original' or 'first principles'. The Revolution of 1688-89 did not mark the genesis of liberty in England either; it was simply a 'renewal of our constitution'.<sup>31</sup> Like Hume, Bolingbroke was capable of seeing the Revolution as revolutionary, but for an entirely different set of reasons. Bolingbroke subscribed to the idea that England possessed an 'ancient constitution' which had been reaffirmed, perfected, and degenerated at various moments in history.<sup>32</sup> The Magna Carta was held to be an instance of this renewal (*ritorno*), and is part of another discursive context as classically outlined by Pocock.<sup>33</sup> Bolingbroke adopted this approach pragmatically, in order to hold the reins of power; yet his approach was not, I would argue, mere opportunism, it was a result of his own philosophical investigations as well.<sup>34</sup>

This is to argue that Bolingbroke's political writings are 'theory informed'. That is, they are propped up by his philosophical investigations, undertaken in earnest while an exile in France. Bolingbroke detested overly metaphysical political theory, saving his most venomous attacks for Plato and his Cambridge disciples. At the same time, Bolingbroke

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<sup>31</sup> Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>33</sup> Pocock, *Ancient Constitution*; Bolingbroke, *Remarks on History*, pp. 178-80, 231.

<sup>34</sup> I dissent from Quentin Skinner's contention that Bolingbroke was totally insincere and merely a man of ambition. If power was all Bolingbroke cared for, other equally insincere but more practical options were open to him and his circle. Skinner, 'Augustan party politics and Renaissance constitutional thought'; Armitage, 'Introduction'; H. T. Dickinson, *Bolingbroke* (London, 1970), pp. 173, 184, 197.

took up an empiricist posture derived from Locke and Newton while holding to certain rationalist philosophical principles. Like Hume, Bolingbroke's works are consistent in so far as they integrate his philosophical thought with his political polemic. This is not to say he was a consistent or systematic thinker on par with Hume; Bolingbroke, while thoughtful, did not write with the same kind of precision or holistic consistency that marks Hume's corpus.<sup>35</sup>

Why did Bolingbroke wish to return, politically speaking, to original principles? In eighteenth-century political thought, the mixed, matchless, and balanced constitution was the trope appealed to by nearly all writers. *Cato* recommended that, like the natural, the political body was capable of refinement through scrutiny, restoring balance to original principles which promoted health.<sup>36</sup> Bolingbroke viewed the Revolution as the 'foundation' of this principled system.<sup>37</sup> The constitution had, however, degenerated since that time due to corruption and manipulation in Parliament by Walpole. Bolingbroke was not alone in this protestation. *Cato* had also noted, in the context of religious dissent, that 'the Revolution is worse established than when it began.'<sup>38</sup> This was one of the pillars of the Country or Patriot programme, and part of what has been called the neo-Harringtonian or civic humanist critique of commercial society. The apparent loss of virtue through the pursuit of luxury was echoed by all those within Bolingbroke's circle; Pope, Swift, and Gay hammered on this point time and again, raising the ire of Walpole

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<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Hart, *Viscount Bolingbroke, Tory Humanist* (London, 1965); Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *Statesmanship and Part Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (Chicago, 1965); Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); Dickinson, *Bolingbroke*.

<sup>36</sup> [Trenchard and Gordon], II, pp. 497-498.

<sup>37</sup> Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> [Trenchard and Gordon], II, p. 920.

and his literary supporters.<sup>39</sup> According to Bolingbroke, writing in 1733, 'our constitution as far distant as it now is from the point of perfection' stands in the same light as before the Revolution. This is not the state the Revolution 'ought to have brought, might have brought it, and hath given the nation a right to expect that it should be brought'.<sup>40</sup>

Bolingbroke was claiming that the Whigs were the ones who had betrayed the principles of the Revolution. To support his historical claims Bolingbroke appealed to the venerable Whig interpretation of Rapin,<sup>41</sup> while Walpole and his coterie pilloried the Tory, Dr Brady. Bolingbroke marshalled Rapin in order to demonstrate that the first principles of the constitution had been thwarted by the Whigs and that the only way to avert disaster was through the Patriot programme.

Regarding the Revolution as a 'Machiavellian moment' in the history of the English constitution, Bolingbroke argued that it was not its genesis or its collapse. It was the closest thing to the perfected state the constitution had come since its Gothic conception, yet it had decayed quickly due to the pernicious influence of narrowly partisan interest. Hume disagreed. He had modestly defended the pragmatism of Walpole's machinations, and was even willing to transform the conception of virtue, property and justice to accommodate and even hail the emergence of the modern commercial state, especially in his displacement of Providence (E IC, pp. 512-529). Hume had argued that the constitution was a changing and changeable thing; the Revolution marked for him a new epoch in this change. And under the circumstances Hume viewed Walpole as a necessary evil. Walpole secured the compliance of Parliament and political

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<sup>39</sup> Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle*, pp. 56-83, 205-235.

<sup>40</sup> Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> Bolingbroke, *Letters on History*, pp. 124-5.

cooperation for the Hanoverians by the very ‘corruptions’ Bolingbroke deplored. Indeed, Hume feared the excess of liberty as Burke disparaged the fanaticism of the *philosophes* because both represented the spectre of (modern) antinomianism. In short, though Hume was no supporter of the great Duncce, he did not believe that Walpole threatened the balance between liberty and order that was necessary for political society to subsist.

Bolingbroke’s opposition has been attributed to many sources, from personal ambition to principled philosophic patriotism.<sup>42</sup> One source of his opposition, shared by other members of the Opposition, even those of a different ideological bent, was based on what he saw as the radical change in the financial world; he lamented what historians now refer to as the ‘financial revolution’ that accompanied William III’s ascension and the Nine Years War.<sup>43</sup> Bolingbroke perceived the advance of ‘monied men’ within the ranks of political power as administered by the Whigs. Such men, he argued, neither knew their place nor had any tangible interest in Britain’s well-being. Aside from lacking land – the undercarriage of patriotism – monied men obstructed the principles for which the Revolution had been undertaken. They contaminated ‘the freedom of elections’ as well as the ‘frequency, integrity and independency’ which were ‘the essentials of British liberty’.<sup>44</sup> Bolingbroke explicitly compared this new class of men with the subverters of liberty at the time of the Revolution itself. They ‘nibble, and know, and poison’ in order to ‘lay the country waste.’<sup>45</sup> The national debt and the costly land wars which only augmented the debt were seen as instruments of slavery. Bolingbroke argued that the Whigs made a

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Skinner, ‘Augustan party politics and Renaissance constitutional thought’; Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government*.

<sup>43</sup> Dickinson, *Financial Revolution in England*; Brewer, *Sinews of Power*.

<sup>44</sup> Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, p. 101; *idem*, *Remarks on the History of England*, p. 198.

<sup>45</sup> Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, p. 120.

private profit off of these dealings – through the Bank of England and East India Company – while at the same time corrupting the liberty of Parliament with placemen. Thus, Bolingbroke claimed that the Whigs were betraying the principles of the Revolution. Though Hume shared Bolingbroke’s hostility to the public debt, he did not share his nostalgic yearnings for the pre-Revolutionary financial order. Hume knew the merits of the new system of commerce, and praised its moderating influence. Hume also thought that commerce smoothed the functioning of politics while not depriving Britons of their cherished liberty, as Bolingbroke had claimed. Rather, the new financial order was a source of polished civility, the mark of a stable political society.<sup>46</sup>

Bolingbroke also argued that the Revolution signified the possibility of politics without party. ‘Men of all sides’ had participated, ‘it was not a party-cause’.<sup>47</sup> The ‘principles of the Revolution’ were both rational and patriotic; they were for the common good of Britons and not for any sectional or partisan interests. Bolingbroke appealed to a common English idiom when he deplored rule by faction or party, and it was for his overtly sectional interests accompanied by his mal-administration, for which he was removed.<sup>48</sup> Hume also lamented the deleterious affects of party, but for different reasons and he reserved his most severe criticisms for those based on enthusiasm and zeal – religious or principled. Such parties are like to destabilise the state with their fanaticism. Bolingbroke’s principled angst, a variety Hume lamented, is expressed consistently

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<sup>46</sup> For Hume’s economic analysis see, ‘Of Commerce’, ‘Of Money’, ‘Of Interest’, ‘Of the Balance of Trade’, ‘Of the Jealousy of Trade’, ‘Of Taxes’, ‘Of Public Credit’ all in Hume, *Essays*. For analysis of Hume’s thought on this subject see, Hont, ‘Rhapsody of Public Debt’; Andrew S. Skinner, ‘David Hume: Principles of political economy’.

<sup>47</sup> Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, pp. 172-3; *idem*, *Remarks on the History of England*, p. 208.

<sup>48</sup> Bolingbroke, *Letters on History*, pp. 19-20.

through his corpus, cryptically represented by 'Of the Spirit of Patriotism' (1736). Along with several other 'letters', it sets out a platform for the opposition to Walpole which derives much of its force from the Revolution. Within this platform he calls for the end to rule by party, calling on 'patriots' to come together and rule Britain for the common good.<sup>49</sup> Such 'patriotic' cries would create a context of political instability, according to Hume, who did not ask for a politics of principle but instead the sentiment of sympathy.

Bolingbroke contended that patriotism secured British liberty and, in turn, the public good. The Revolution re-established this liberty *via* the 'original contract'.<sup>50</sup> The king, on such a reading, could forfeit his right to allegiance as could the people their right to protection. Bolingbroke accepted the Lockean notion that government existed to protect property, though the relationship between a good political regime and property was different than that Hume put forward. Allegiance to the king was forfeit when he impugned the liberty of the people and invaded their property and James II was such a king. In the *Idea of a Patriot King* Bolingbroke asserted that – in keeping with the 'principles of the Revolution' – subjects 'may resist, no doubt, the prince who endeavours to ruin and enslave his people, and may push this resistance to the dethronement and exclusion of him and his race'.<sup>51</sup> Hume argued that resistance was only legitimate under grievous tyranny, and distinguished the kind of modification the constitution required in order to preserve its balance. Bolingbroke thought enslavement under the Hanoverians was being risked from a different source, Parliament. Corruption, he suggested, was destroying Parliament's independence and thwarting the constitution. By the middle of

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<sup>49</sup> Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government*, pp. 67-70; cf. Bolingbroke, *Remarks on History*, pp. 164, 174-5.

<sup>50</sup> Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, pp. 83, 123-4.

<sup>51</sup> Bolingbroke, *The Patriot King*, in *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*, p. 268.

the eighteenth century he thought that only a Patriot King, endowed with all his beloved principles and a sort of 'standing miracle', could restore Britain to its cherished liberty.<sup>52</sup> His Machiavellian mirror, perhaps intended for future monarchs such as the young King George III, would have found little sympathy from Hume. He had already repudiated the idea that good regimes were based on the character of their rulers. Instead, they ought to rely on good laws and a good constitution, both of which Britain possessed because of the Revolution. Bolingbroke, for Hume was a mere 'party man', unable to see clearly what modern man required politically in order to thrive (L, I, p. 208).

Most interestingly, Bolingbroke advocated both caution and moderation in terms of political opposition. Whether or not this could be squared with his actual political behaviour raises the question of sincerity. That aside, Bolingbroke in print argued that resistance should be measured in proportion to the danger of the threat to both liberty and the constitution.<sup>53</sup> While Bolingbroke seemingly paid lip-service to the idea of moderation when it came to resistance, only to be proffered in extreme situations like that of the Revolution, it was Hume who analysed the basis of politics by investigating human nature, offering a more careful analysis of why moderation in politics was both necessary and beneficial.

This foray into some of Bolingbroke's ideas reveals, in part, why Hume addresses some of the issues he does, and to what end. Hume could not fail to mention 'original principles' and their relationship to the constitution, and addressed this issue first in the *Treatise*, and redeployed it in several of the essays. One, 'Of the Origin of Government', argues that 'Man, born in a family, is compelled to maintain society, from necessity, from

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 251.

<sup>53</sup> Bolingbroke, *Remarks on History*, p. 318.

natural inclination, and from habit. The same creature, in his farther progress, is engaged to establish political society, in order to administer justice; without which there can be no peace among them, nor safety, nor mutual intercourse.' We quickly learn that government has no other 'object or purpose but the distribution of justice' (E OG, p. 37). A line of argument adopted from the *Treatise* reappears: the impartiality of magistrates are responsible for the distribution of justice and the protection of property; this arrangement prevents the natural selfishness of man from undoing political society; moreover, the moral obligations of obedience, justice and allegiance arise and confirm the utility of government through 'interest' (E OG, p. 38). This gloss is followed by the recognition that government probably arose historically from war and acquired its present legitimacy from principles outlined in the *Treatise*. Here Hume simply refers to 'long continuance' and the 'benefit sensibly felt' under a state of peace. The specific 'exertion of the [magistrate's] influence must have been particular', eventually reaching a point where 'submission was no longer a matter of choice', 'but was rigorously exacted' (E OG, p. 40). The 'artificial' nature of the origin of government is again asserted but in the polite idiom. Hume closes by suggesting that the permanence of government, and its function of providing justice and protecting property, should be protected over and above liberty, which 'contributes only to [the constitution's] perfection' (E OG, p. 40). We have already seen that Hume's sympathy lies with liberty, but the conclusion of his political science leads him to assert that political stability, especially the rule of law, is more important.

The Revolution was not to be justified on Lockean-contractarian principles, nor the reinvigoration of divine or hereditary right, in line with Filmer.<sup>54</sup> The Revolution, according to Hume, needed to be judged according to whether or not government fulfilled its function. The basis of this criticism is found in ‘Of the First Principles of Government’; it is ‘on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular’ (E FP, p. 32). Neither Whig contract nor Tory divine right had it correct – or entirely wrong, for that matter. The origins of government lay in society’s ‘interest’ and began under the auspices of war. If we ‘trace government to its first origin’ we learn that political society was formed tacitly. It is not to be found ‘written on parchment’ for it ‘preceded the use of writing and all other civilized arts of life’. Instead we seek the ‘original contract’ in ‘the nature of man’. In turn, the force of government ‘is founded on fleets and armies’: ‘the effect of established government’ (E OC, p. 468). The theoretical description of the origin of government is accompanied by a more historically appropriate assessment. ‘Almost all the governments, which exist at present’, he argues, ‘have been founded originally, either on usurpation or conquest, or both’. There was no ‘pretence of a fair consent, or voluntary subjection of the people’; indeed ‘this is all the *original contract*, which they have to boast of’ (E OC, p. 471). Therefore, both Whig and Tory interpretations of 1688-89 come under scrutiny, and both political ideologies are found wanting in their philosophical underpinning.

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<sup>54</sup> The scholarship on Locke and Filmer is voluminous. The classic ‘Introduction’ is that found in the edition cited above, p. 105 n. 11. See also Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics*; Dunn, *Political Thought of John Locke*; Tully, *An approach to political philosophy*; Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and other Political Writings*, (ed.) Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge, 1991); Gordon Schochet, *Patriarchalism and Political Thought* (Oxford, 1975).

‘Opinion’, upon which government rests, was of two kinds: ‘opinion of INTEREST, and opinion of RIGHT.’ The first is similarly explained in the *Treatise*, but with much less philosophical support. Opinion of interest confers legitimacy based on ‘the general advantage which is reaped from government’ accompanied by ‘the persuasion, that the particular government, which is established, is equally advantageous with any other that could easily be settled.’ Opinion of right, on the other hand, consists of a ‘right to POWER and right to PROPERTY.’ Hume allows the right to property as a first principle of government, but argues that it is ‘carrying the matter too far’ to make it the ‘whole foundation’ as Harrington does.<sup>55</sup> These ‘first principles’ of government – derivations of ‘opinion’, ‘interest’, and ‘custom’ – prove flexible. Though an ancient constitution may have set out an original arrangement regarding the exercise of power and the distribution of property, Hume argues that such arrangements are prone to alteration. In such an instance ‘where the original constitution allows any share of power, though small, to an order of men, who possess a large share of the property, it is easy for them gradually to stretch their authority, and bring this balance of power to coincide with that of property: ‘This had been the case with the house of commons in England’ (EFP, p. 35). Such an analysis is in keeping with the sociological explanation of neo-Harringtonian political theory.<sup>56</sup> Hume followed Harrington – as have some famous modern historians – in asserting that the men of property managed to increasingly work their way in to the machinery of government. In contrast to this ‘enthusiastic’ Whig doctrine, Hume argued

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<sup>55</sup> James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, p. 163: ‘Dominion is property real or personal; that is to say in lands, or in money and goods.’ in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, (ed.) J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Historical Introduction’ to *Political Works of James Harrington*, pp. 1-154; Pocock, *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, pp. 124-147.

that the Commons was not an absolutely representative body; if it became so, it would upset the balance of the constitution and turn it into a republic. While a friend to the possibility of a republic,<sup>57</sup> Hume recognised that in Britain such a form was unlikely to appear – though it might well take root in American soil; in any case, he suggests ‘improving’ the ‘ancient government’ as much as possible (E FP, p. 36). This is his recommended course in general. Rather than fall prey to the uncertainties of drastic change, it is better to improve and correct the defects of the present constitution as much as is reasonable.

This detour into the principles of government and the British constitution helps us to understand the stance that Hume took to the Revolution in the *Essays*. If all government was founded on ‘opinion’ and originally instituted based on ‘interest’, questions of divine and hereditary right as well as contract could be dispensed with.<sup>58</sup> Hume was in favour of normative government: the best form of polity depended on context. The Hanoverian world was one constructed around property, which, in turn, was being re-equated with aristocratic notions of civility and virtue.<sup>59</sup> Allowing certain concessions to both Tory and Whig political ideology, while remaining loyal to his normative framework, Hume argued that the ‘true rule of government is the present established practice of the age. That has most authority, because it is recent: It is also best known, for the same reason’ (E CP, pp. 498-499). He has no problem carrying this sentiment over to the Revolution itself. There has been ‘a sudden and sensible change in

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. ‘Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth’, E IC, pp. 512-529.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. ‘Of Passive Obedience’, E PO, pp. 488-492, where Hume destroys that Tory doctrine.

<sup>59</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, ‘The mobility of property and the rise of eighteenth-century sociology’, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, pp. 103-123.

the opinions of men within these last fifty years' as a result of 'the progress of learning and liberty'. No longer is there reverence for the king, priest or magistrate; and 'Had men been in the same disposition at the *revolution*, as they are at present, monarchy would have run a great risque of being entirely lost in this island (E BG, p. 51).' The change of opinion about government had followed a change in the make-up of government. The mixed, balanced constitution embodied a normative polity because it was flexible and therefore best in Hume's estimation. In a (retrospective) sense, the Revolution was a 'natural' political outcome.

Political opinion was also the source of divisions between parties in Britain, intimately related to the Revolution. Such divisions were a detrimental yet seemingly necessary evil in a mixed polity. One of the types of party that Hume outlines in 'Of Parties in General', is based on 'affection'. Such parties are founded on 'attachments of men towards particular families and persons, whom they desire to rule over them'. At this point Hume feigns incomprehension: 'I must own, it may seem unaccountable, that men should attach themselves so strongly to persons, with whom they are no wise acquainted, whom perhaps they never saw, and from whom they never received, nor can ever hope for any favour' (E PG, p. 63). This is a stinging criticism of Jacobites and Tories, though not inexplicable in light of chapter 2. Hume was well aware of the appeal of Tory political theory defined by Filmer and given a mystifying aura by Bolingbroke.<sup>60</sup> By this point we can readily appreciate Hume's dissimulation.

The principles outlined in 'Of Parties in General' account for both Whig and Tory political parties in general terms. Hume specifically applies these principles in 'Of

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<sup>60</sup> Clark, *English Society*, pp. 114-121.

the Parties of Great Britain'. So far as Hume is concerned the Tory position was more difficult to square with events:<sup>61</sup>

The TORIES, as men, were enemies to oppression; and also as ENGLISHMEN, they were enemies to arbitrary power. Their zeal for liberty, was, perhaps, less fervent than that of their antagonists; but was sufficient to make them forget all their general principles, when they saw themselves openly threatened with a subversion of the ancient government. From these sentiments arose the *revolution*; an event of mighty consequence, and the firmest foundation of BRITISH liberty. (E PGB, p. 70)

This did not necessarily resolve their position under William and Mary. The Tories had previously deferred to the Court, which cast doubt on their commitment to 'Revolution principles'. Such questionable commitment stemmed from 1688-89:

Neither [Tory] principles nor affections concurred, entirely or heartily, with the settlement made at the *revolution*, or with that which has since taken place. This part of their character may seem opposite to the former; since any other settlement, in those circumstances of the nation, must probably have been dangerous, if not fatal to liberty. But the heart of man is made to reconcile contradictions; and this contradiction is not greater than that between *passive obedience*, and the *resistance* employed at the *revolution*. A TORY, therefore, since the *revolution*, may be defined in a few words, to be *a lover of monarchy, though without abandoning liberty; and a partizan of the family of STUART*. As a WHIG may be defined to be *a lover of liberty though without renouncing monarchy; and a friend to the settlement in the PROTESTANT line*. (E PGB, p. 71)

Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the Revolution's justification: was it legitimate? This type of analysis is reserved for Hume's historical inquiry. Yet we are now equipped to account for this. Resistance, such as that offered in 1688, is justifiable only under 'extreme' circumstances such as tyranny. Hume bypassed the debate separating *de jure* from *de facto*, pushing instead the point that such questions were beyond resolution.

Hume goes on to argue that the Jacobites and Tories should 'acquiesce entirely to the present settlement of the constitution'. Under the Hanoverians the 'plan of liberty is settled; its happy effects are proved by experience; a long tract of time has given it stability; and whoever would attempt to overturn it, and to recall the past government or

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. John Robertson, 'Universal monarchy and the liberties of Europe: David Hume's critique of an English Whig doctrine', *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, (eds.) Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 349-373.

abdicated family, would, besides other more criminal imputations, be exposed, in their turn, to the reproach of faction and innovation.' Hume implores them to 'peruse the history of past events' and see that 'tyranny, and violence, and oppression' are the ills 'from which the established liberty of the constitution has now at last happily protected the people' (E CP, pp. 500-501). The Revolution had brought about a change whereby the 'people cherish monarchy, because protected by it: The monarchy favours liberty, because created by it. And thus every advantage is obtained by the new establishment, as far as human skill and wisdom can extend itself' (E PS, p. 506). In favour of the Union of 1707, Hume urged contemporaries to reconcile themselves to the Hanoverian state because it met all his requirements of legitimacy while allowing for a balance between law and liberty.<sup>62</sup>

Hume did not seek to extend a 'philosophical origin to government' in the context of the Revolution. He asserts only that the 'regal' part of government was changed:

it was only the majority of seven hundred, who determined that change for near ten millions. I doubt not, indeed, but the bulk of those ten millions acquiesced willingly in the determination: But was the matter left, in the least, to their choice? Was it not justly supposed to be, from that moment, decided, and every man punished, who refused to submit to the new sovereign? How otherwise could the matter have ever been brought to any issue or conclusion? (E OC, pp. 472-473)

Hume concedes that 'all governments are or should be, at first, founded on popular consent, as much as the necessity of human affairs will admit'. Yet, it seems, 'human affairs will never admit of this consent; seldom the appearance of it' (E OC, p. 73). The Revolution was not the renewal of contract. Governments, it is clear, are rarely if ever formed this way; nor should the alteration in one part of the polity be mistaken for a complete change. The Revolution did change the English polity, but not in the ways that

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<sup>62</sup> Phillipson, *Hume*, pp. 73-74.

either Tories or Whigs perceived. While Hume's sympathy is with the cause of reason, liberty, and justice, political changes in accordance with these principles should be considered with due caution: 'the science of politics affords few rules, which will not admit of some exception, and which may not sometimes be controuled by fortune and accident' (E OC, p. 473). This had been England's fate. Both Charles I and James II mistook the changing nature of the constitution rendering it 'necessary to oppose them with some vehemence; and even to deprive the latter formally of that authority, which he had used with such imprudence and indiscretion' (E OC, p. 492).<sup>63</sup> This criticism was extended to the *History*; both these kings were victims of a constitution in flux and were unable to adapt accordingly.

As the noted philosopher and historian R. G Collingwood has suggested, Hume's acute 'historical thought' sets the tone of his criticisms of precedent.<sup>64</sup> Hume claims that 'the present prerogatives of the crown' were established at 'the accession of the House of Tudors'; to defend the nature of the constitution based on a period one hundred and sixty years previous would be analogous to emperor Hadrian having 'talked of the republican constitution as the rule of government; or to have supposed, that the former rights of the senate, and consuls, and tribunes were still subsisting' (E CP, p. 496). Not only politically impracticable, this was clearly an absurd conclusion.

### §III. NARRATIVE, PROPRIETY, AND THE REVOLUTION

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<sup>63</sup> Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 263-271.

<sup>64</sup> Collingwood asserted – correctly I think – that Hume's philosophy was in part 'a reasoned defense of historical thought': Collingwood, *Idea of History*, p. 75.

The *History of England* presents the causes of the Revolution as both long- and short-term. Many of the problems of James II's reign were inherited from Charles II and from the Interregnum. On Hume's interpretation both Charles II and James II behaved within the bounds of the constitution as it then was, though they are indicted for their lack of perspicacity in realising the changed nature of politics. Their misfortune, like Charles I, arose from their inability to grasp that the constitution had changed. Hume's narrative ran counter to the current of historiography when he asserted the mutability of the constitution. Previous Whig historiography had attempted to reassert the 'ancient constitution' thesis as a legitimisation of the Revolution; previous Tory historiography had asserted that the changing nature of the constitution derived from the king's authority, especially in the medieval period.<sup>65</sup> Hume followed Tory historiography with its contextual approach and its insistence that constitutional authority stemmed from the magistrate; he followed Whig historiography with its acknowledgement of a contract and its insistence on the purpose for which government was instituted. His justification, however, was fundamentally different from both positions.<sup>66</sup>

Hume's 'enlightened narrative' allows for at least two possible readings of Stuart history. The 'long view' of the causes of the Revolution points towards developments in late-Tudor and early-Stuart history up to the Civil War. Hume looks to Tudor history

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<sup>65</sup> Pocock, *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, pp. 148-228; cf. Quentin Skinner, 'History and ideology in the English Revolution', *Visions of Politics: Hobbes and Civil Science*, III, pp. 238-263, originally published under the same title but in different form in the *Historical Journal* 8 (1965), pp. 151-178. The seventeenth-century historical interpretations were reversed in Hume's time, with the Whigs adopting the Tory Dr Brady's analysis and the Tories adopting the 'ancient constitution' thesis.

<sup>66</sup> Pocock argues that the *History of England* was the first history written 'entirely in the enlightened mode': J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Significance of 1688: Some Reflections on Whig History', *Revolutions of 1688*, pp. 271-291; *idem*, *Barbarism and Religion*, II, pp. 163-257.

because he believed the origins of the constitution, up to the Revolution, were to be found there. This narrative is summarily drawn at the point where Hume discusses the Exclusion Crisis.

It was not considered, that the present difficulty or seeming absurdity had proceeded from late innovations introduced into the government. Ever since the beginning of this century, the parliament, had, with a laudable zeal, been acquiring powers and establishing principles, favourable to law and liberty: The authority of the crown had been limited in many particulars: And penal statues were often calculated to secure the constitution against the attempts of ministers, as well as to preserve general peace, and repress crimes and immoralities. A prerogative however, derived from very ancient, and almost uniform in practice, the dispensing power, still remained, or was supposed to remain with the crown; sufficient in an instant to overturn this whole fabric, and to throw down all fences of the constitution. If this prerogative, which carries on the face of it, such strong symptoms of an absolute authority in the prince, had yet, in ancient times, subsisted with some degree of liberty in the subject; this fact only proves, that scarcely any human government, much less one erected in rude and barbarous times, is entirely and consistent and uniform in all its parts. But to expect, that the dispensing power could, in any degree, be rendered compatible with those accurate and regular limitations, which had of late been established, and which the people were determined to maintain, was a vain hope; and though men knew not upon what principles they could deny that prerogative, they saw, that, if they would preserve their laws and constitution, there was an absolute necessity for denying, at least for abolishing it. The revolution alone, which soon succeeded, happily put an end to all these disputes: By means of it, a more uniform edifice was at last erected: The monstrous inconsistency, so visible between the ancient Gothic parts of the fabric and the recent plans of liberty, was fully corrected: And to their mutual felicity, king and people were finally taught to know their proper boundaries. (H, VI, pp. 475-476)

To Hume's credit, that he was able to take both a 'long' and 'short view' of the Revolution. He balanced their respective effects and synthesized them into a polished narrative. Like Tacitus, Hume drew out the political lessons from history for his readers. In this particular case 'enthusiasm' and 'fanaticism' in politics was once again assaulted. But, more importantly, Hume drew out how the Revolution became possible through explanation by narrating the history of the constitution. In doing so he reaffirmed the principles set out in his *Essays* and originally in the *Treatise*. Opinion was the foundation

upon which government rested, and an 'enlightened narrative' was a history of opinion and manners.<sup>67</sup>

Most of the immediate causes of the Revolution Hume sought in Charles II's reign. The history of the 'cabal', or the Exclusion Crisis, provides him with ample material to wax on the evils of fanaticism, enthusiasm and party strife. For this period of the *History* Hume struck a balance between the innovations of the Commons and the modest assumptions of monarchical power that Charles II entertained (H, VI, pp 332-449). The 'short view' begins with James II who, Hume argues, sowed most of the seeds of his own undoing. From the 'first exercise of his authority' he demonstrated that he held 'so lofty an idea of his own legal power' that any profession of the love of liberty was of little account (H, VI, p. 450). His arbitrary behaviour was accented by his religion. James 'went openly, and with all the ensigns of his dignity, to mass, an illegal meeting: And by this imprudence he displayed at once his arbitrary disposition, and the bigotry of his principles: These two great characteristics of his reign, and bane of his administration' (H, VI, p. 451). He was also 'open in declaring' that he would 'retain no ministers, who did not practise an unreserved obedience to his commands.' James was apparently ruled by both Jesuits and his wife; policy, according to Hume, was taken from their suggestions and 'bore evident marks of their ignorance in government, and of the violence of their religious zeal (H, VI, p. 452). Following the suppression of Monmouth's rebellion Hume outlines James' continued haughtiness:

The king was so elated with this continued tide of prosperity that he began to undervalue even an English parliament, at all times formidable to his family; and from his speech to that assembly, which had assembled early in the winter, he seems to have thought himself exempted from all rules of prudence or necessity of dissimulation. He plainly told the two houses, that the militia, which had formerly been so much magnified, was now found, by

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<sup>67</sup>Cf. Horne, *Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville*.

experience in the last rebellion, to be altogether useless; and he required a new supply, in order to maintain those additional forces, which he had levied. He also took notice, that he had employed a great many catholic officers, and that he had, in their favour, dispensed with the law, requiring the test to be taken by every one that possessed any public office. And to cut short all opposition, he declared, that, having reaped the benefit of their service during such times of danger, he was determined, neither to expose them afterwards to disgrace, nor himself, in case of another rebellion, to the want of their assistance. (H, VI, pp. 467-468)

James not only proceeded to act as if Parliament was unnecessary, but he aroused Englishmen's fears by raising a standing army. Hume did not regard this as an irreconcilable state of affairs. No king of England 'possessed greater advantages than James'; yet 'by his own misconduct' he brought 'sudden ruin' upon himself. He might even have succeeded in surmounting the liberties of the English had he 'acted with common prudence and discretion'. Instead he alienated all sources of support – especially Parliament – and 'disgusted' his last notable source of power, the army (H, VI, p. 470).

This atmosphere set the backdrop for Hume's rendition of the familiar events leading up to James' flight. He revived the court of high commission with all its 'inquisitorial powers'; there was Tyrconnel and Ireland; the embassy to Rome; closeting of MPs; the imposition on Magdalene College; the petition of the seven bishops and their punishment; the invitation to William of Orange: all the narrative structures that we should expect in an account of the Revolution are present (H, VI, pp. 484-493).<sup>68</sup> The strained situation in England was not necessarily a catalyst for resistance and revolution. Hume places responsibility squarely on the shoulders of William of Orange. For 'such is the influence of established government; so averse are men from beginning hazardous enterprizes; that, had not an attack been made from abroad, affairs might long have remained in their present delicate situation, and James might at last have prevailed in his rash, and ill concerted projects' (H, VI, p. 497). The 'extreme' behaviour of James was not,

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Jones, *Revolution of 1688*; Kenyon, *Revolution Principles*.

of itself, sufficient for Hume to call resistance legitimate. Resistance was legitimate because the context of James' behaviour rendered it so. James set about, so the Whig story goes, undoing the Restoration Settlement.<sup>69</sup> James had threatened England's religion and in so doing, Hume allows, was justly opposed. Historians have, generally speaking, agreed with Hume on this point. Religious quarrel was a major cause of the Revolution and a stumbling block for the post-Revolution settlement.

William of Orange is James' foil in Hume's story. From the outset William had 'maintained a very prudent conduct'. He published a letter in response to James' policies that 'inspired great courage into the protestants' while also maintaining the established religion and religious toleration (H, VI, pp. 500-501).<sup>70</sup> The birth of the Prince of Wales was the spark that lit all these combustible materials, taking things to a new and inflammatory level. The English now had reason to fear the establishment of a stridently Catholic monarchy. William was 'easily engaged to yield to the applications of the English, and to embrace the defence of a nation, which, during its present fears and distresses, regarded him as its sole protector' (H, VI, p. 503). According to Hume, William regarded England as a means to further his ends on the Continent, and aimed to be established king from an early stage. William's courage was matched by James' temerity. Once James learned of the immanent Dutch invasion, he 'grew pale'; 'His eyes were now opened, and he found himself on the brink of a frightful precipice, which his delusions had hitherto concealed from him' (H, VI, p. 508). James' failure was contrasted with

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<sup>69</sup> Clark, *English Society*, pp. 69-79.

<sup>70</sup> For character sketches important to Hume's narrative see Potkay, *Passion for Happiness*, p. 129 n. 18.

William's success; while the army abandoned James, William met with 'universal approbation' (H, VI, p. 509).

Hume sweeps through all the standard features of 1688-89: William's declaration of intentions to redress James' motivations and remove his 'evil counsellors'; James' loss of nerve; his reversal of policy; his capture and second escape; the Convention; and the Bill of Rights (H, VI, pp. 509-522). The Scots, Hume is quick to point out, had no problem declaring that James had abdicated his throne and offered the crown to William;<sup>71</sup> the English case was fraught with difficulty. Offering the crown jointly to William and Mary was decided when William let it be known that 'he was determined not to be the regent, nor ever to engage, in a scheme, which, he knew, would be exposed to such insuperable difficulties.' While Englishmen were not exactly sure how to justify the Revolution in government that took place in 1688-89, they were sure that trouble would follow if William removed himself from English affairs.

Of James II Hume gave a critical yet even-handed assessment. James' error was that he ruled under false assumptions about the nature of the constitution and the character of his people, something he should have been aware of. Englishmen were 'justifiable in their resistance' because James had acted in an arbitrary and absolutist manner according to their standards (H, VI, pp. 520-521). By way of contrast, William's conduct in the elections following the Convention was perfectly impartial (H, VI, pp. 528-529). Hume provides both the Tory and Whig interpretation of James II's behaviour with notable concessions to both. Whether James 'forfeited', 'abdicated' or 'deserted' was of

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<sup>71</sup> This is because religion plays such a key factor there. With the acceptance of the Kirk, William is simply declared King and the throne declared vacant, simple as that.

obvious importance to contemporaries, but less so to Hume.<sup>72</sup> His conclusions on this matter are in keeping with his science of politics.

The Revolution was an episode that required contextualisation in the history of the constitution:

Thus have we seen, through the course of four reigns, a continual struggle maintained between the crown and the people: Privilege and prerogative were ever at variance: And both parties, beside the present object of dispute, had many latent claims, which, on a favourable occasion, they produced against their adversaries. Governments too steady and uniform, as they are seldom free, so are they, in the judgment of some, attended with another sensible inconvenience: They abate the active powers of men; depress courage, invention, and genius; and produce an universal lethargy in the people. Though this opinion may be just, the fluctuation and contest, it must be allowed, of the English government were, during these reigns, much too violent both for the repose and safety of the people. (H, VI, 530-531)

This analysis was carried right through to the Revolution itself, the culmination of his whole *History*. According to Hume

The *revolution* forms a new epoch in the constitution; and was probably attended with consequences more advantageous to the people, than barely freeing them from an exceptionable administration. By deciding many important questions in favour of liberty, and still more, by that great precedent of deposing one king, and establishing a new family, it gave such an ascendant to popular principles, as has put the nature of the English constitution beyond all controversy. And it may be affirmed, without any danger of exaggeration, that we, in this island, have ever since enjoyed, if not the best system of government, at least the most entire system of liberty, that ever was known amongst mankind.

There is a measure of determinism in Hume's argument. It seems that 'scarcely any thing could have prevented those events, but such vigour of genius in the sovereign, attended with such good fortune, as might have enabled him entirely to overpower the liberties of his people' (H, VI, p. 531).<sup>73</sup> While sympathetic to the Whig cause, because he was

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. Slaughter, 'Abdicate' and 'Contract' in the Glorious Revolution'; John Miller, 'The Glorious Revolution: 'Contract' and 'Abdication' Reconsidered', *Historical Journal* 25 (1982), 541-555; see also J. Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> J. P. Kenyon, *The History Men: the historical profession in England since the Renaissance* (rvsd. ed., London, 1993), pp. 44, 46.

sympathetic to the cause of liberty, Hume was well aware of the negative effects of such ideological hegemony.

But this event [Whig dominance], which, in some particulars has been advantageous to the state, has proved destructive to the truth of history, and has established many gross falsehoods, which it is unaccountable how any civilized nation could have embraced with regard to its domestic occurrences. Compositions the most despicable, both for style and matter, have been extolled, and propagated, and read, as if they had equalled the most celebrated remains of antiquity. (H, VI, p. 533)

In a note, Hume lists Rapin, Locke, Phillip Sydney and Benjamin Hoadly in this group.

Once again he asserted that the Revolution was not, as they imagined, a return to the ‘ancient constitution’ or a renewal of the political contract. It was a moment in the history of the constitution and of modern civilisation, one that had laid the foundation upon which the politics and stability of Hume’s own age rested.

William Blackstone, from his common-law perspective of ancient constitutionalism described Hanoverian society as ‘polite and commercial’, has had his sentiments echoed by modern historians – notably Paul Langford. Hume would have heartily agreed, keeping in mind that ‘polite and commercial’ was understood as an eighteenth-century description, not a modern one. It also mirrors nicely the nature of Hume’s political discourse: it was part reflection, part projection. While Hume continued to advocate political thought in polite form, he used that form to different ends than typical party rhetoric; the ‘sceptical Whig’ wrote an establishment history of the Revolution thereby supplying an important *apologia* for the Hanoverian regime.

## Conclusion

### *The politics of a mitigated sceptic*

Never go to excess, but let moderation be your guide.  
—Marcus Tullius Cicero

The fair man should be termed unfair, the wise unsound,  
If he seeks even virtue beyond the proper bound.  
—Horace

### §I. PHILOSOPHICAL AND PROPRIETARY POLITICS

Hume's sceptical politics centred on a cluster of characteristics, the most politically important of which, I have argued, is moderation. Moderation in politics is derived from both philosophical understanding and virtue, and from a proper science of man.

Understanding, in turn, required sympathy, and virtue now required property, which in turn upheld justice in civilised society and allowed for a liberty which was workable in the context of modern politics.

Chapter 1 argued that Hume's political thought was intimately connected with his philosophical investigation of the 'science of man'. This investigation was one which progressed through Pyrrhonian scepticism leading eventually to the affirmation of 'common life' and of moderation. A principle factor in this development was the articulation of sympathy and a philosophy of sentiment, consistent with, yet critical of, earlier philosophical traditions. Hume envisioned himself as conducting an epistemologically sound investigation, willing to admit that human knowledge, much of which was in fact better described as belief, was a 'leaky vessel' only overcome by custom, habit, and interest; this was common life 'methodized and corrected' (EHU, 12.25, p. 208).

This approach ultimately led to the adoption of moderation as a principle useful and necessary in both philosophy and politics.

This mitigated or moderate scepticism was accompanied by the early articulation of Hume's enlightened scale of values. In the earliest edition of the *Essays* (1741) he had included an essay, 'Of the Study of History', where amusement, virtue, understanding and moderation were put forward as pedagogically enlightening. In highlighting these values this thesis has suggested that Hume be considered an establishment thinker, connecting philosophical values to a political context where stability was a mainstay of debate. Notable scholars such as Duncan Forbes and John Pocock have argued along similar grounds, and this study has been an explicit continuation and development of these ideas. This line of interpretation has shown in detail how Hume's self-conceived revolution in philosophy ironically investigated revolution in political terms, but failed to give it any hearty endorsement.

In chapter 2 we saw how Hume turned his philosophical investigations to a broader audience and why an endorsement of political revolution was not to be found in that work. The *Treatise* did not address the question of political revolution directly, but instead was taken up in the *Essays* and the *History*. The *Essays* contained within them a critique of superstition and enthusiasm, both religious and political. This enlightened tradition of subjecting the flights of fancy to scrutiny was one which Hume viewed through political as well as moral spectacles. Not only did these dispositions deviate from a scientific understanding of human nature, they threatened the stability of state. In contrast, Hume suggested a Cicero-like posture, especially for those capable of philosophical conversation. The turbulent history of the Civil Wars was something to be

discussed and understood, but Calvinist cant was to be banished from both the coffeehouse and Westminster.

In chapter 3 Hume's application of his philosophical and political principles was viewed through the lens of the Revolution of 1688. This particular view of Hume revealed in practical terms how Hume hoped to render his political writings as acts. It has become a cliché of post-modernism that in order to deconstruct something, one needs simply to give a history of it. In a sense this was Hume's mission. The *History of England* had begun as the *History of Great Britain* – Hume changed the title of the work when the history of the Stuart constitution up to the Revolution shifted from a modern British story to a more past-oriented English one. This locutionary move was accompanied and supplemented by a series of essays that were in effect an exploration of British history since the Revolution. Hume addresses many of the standard topics for the shifts occurring in this period philosophically, historically, commercially, and even theologically. The tetralogy on philosophical sects outlined a modern philosophical outlook for the post-Cartesian world; a series of essays on the opinion, principles, and parties outlined a political outlook for the post-Revolutionary polite world; and a series of economic and aesthetic essays outlined a commercial, neo-classical, and critical outlook for a post-Reformation world.

In sum, this essay has argued that one important way to characterise and understand more fully Hume's thought is through the enlightened science of man, thereby peeling away at human nature to reveal 'man as he is'. This does not mean that Hume should only be viewed through such a lens, but suggests that this portrayal is both necessary and useful if this important Enlightenment thinker is to be understood both

holistically and historically. As such this thesis also echoes Sir Isaiah Berlin's insightful comments on categorizations of this kind. The case for Hume's politics of stability might, like Berlin's compelling Hedgehog/Fox distinction, prove artificial if pressed too far, for, 'like all distinctions which embody any degree of truth, it offers a point of view from which to look and compare, a starting-point for genuine investigation.'<sup>1</sup>

## §II. ENLIGHTENMENT AND MODERNITY: THE CASE OF DAVID HUME

The Enlightenment continues to occupy an important place in academic debate in nearly all disciplines of the liberal arts. This should come as no surprise, as we are frequently told that we have passed the threshold from the modern into the post-modern world. And if one characteristic of post-modernity is reflexivity, meditation upon the onset of modernity will figure significantly in the debate on how to identify what exactly modernity was/is. As a figure who bears remarkable affinity to much of secular-liberal society today, David Hume has been given pride of place in the study of modernity, and rightly so.

The changing historiography of the Enlightenment has reflected this heightened preoccupation with modernity and what it might mean to move into a post-modern world. This process, however, has seen the description of the Enlightenment as a monolithic entity – sometimes put forward by Lyotard and his ilk as a straw-man to be repudiated by its post-modern critics – change to one which highlights plurality, tension, and diversity in the midst of some common elements.<sup>2</sup> Scholars continue to talk about the Enlightenment as an epoch in history, though with the necessary caveat that this is

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'The Hedgehog and Fox', *Russian Thinkers*, (ed.) Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (London, 1979), p. 23. I should think that Hume was a Fox rather than a Hedgehog, knowing many things rather than One.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1995).

shorthand for analysing a very disperse and detailed set of themes. Though it may still be possible to talk of certain Enlightenment motifs, it is not possible to talk of *the* Enlightenment as a singularity with standard goals, convictions, or commitments. It is not my intention to here rehearse recent or past historiography of the Enlightenment in detail. I would, however, like to suggest a few avenues for further study and its relationship to the current predicament in Enlightenment scholarship. Debate about what constitutes Enlightenment involves fundamental questions of how we grasp the concept and onset of modernity, and forces us to engage with what has been suggested to be its end. Post-modernism, a word politicized beyond all use, has at the very least encouraged a re-evaluation of Enlightenment philosophy and history, ferreting out much that early interpretations considered less relevant. There can be few better examples of this than David Hume.

Older historiographies of the Enlightenment often place Hume's thought in juxtaposition to Leibniz or Kant. Hume's philosophy denied the ontological possibility of Leibniz's theodicy, while also providing, perhaps, some groundwork for Kant's articulation of the transcendental.<sup>3</sup> Peter Gay's narrative of the Enlightenment restricts itself, as has been noted by numerous commentators, to a 'little flock of philosophes'. In that work, Hume is portrayed as the 'favourite uncle' to this flock. As a sceptical atheist (better described as an agnostic) he seemingly fits well into the mainstream of 'the Enlightenment' heralding the dawn of modern philosophy: rational, secular, progressive.<sup>4</sup> Such approaches to this period have already been sufficiently criticised as to render any

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Anchor, *The Enlightenment Tradition*, (ed.) Hayden White (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 61-65. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, (trans.) Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, 1951), p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (2 vols., New York, 1966), I, p. 6.

repetition here superfluous.<sup>5</sup> Critics rightly point out the Whig nature of much writing on the Enlightenment, where modernity is born, bred, and baptised as the baby of liberal modernity. The more refined nature of present Enlightenment scholarship has, however, only heightened the problematic relationship between the Enlightenment and its past.

The Anglo-American tradition of analytical philosophy, especially that of the early twentieth century, was among the first, aside from Bertrand Russell's prejudiced and unsympathetic account, to claim Hume as one of their favoured philosophical ancestors.<sup>6</sup> The popularity of this branch of philosophy denigrated Hume's work by default and neglect. The Hume of this history was one who paved the way for Bentham and Mill, whose rational and scientific approach was endeared by this school. The onset of World War II, held by some to be the beginning of the end of modernity, was also a period of renewed Hume study. Hume's biographer, Ernest Mossner, put forward to a broader audience the Hume who begins to look recognisably of the eighteenth-century, rather than some stand-in precursor. In that work he is also the Ciceronian man of action inclined to moderate virtue rather than the fanaticisms of ideological extremes. The battle that waged in universities across the Western world over the origins of capitalism and the historical applicability of Marxism, in which the Enlightenment figured prominently, saw Hume figure into liberal interpretations highlighting Hume's writings on economics and his influence on Adam Smith. From a concern to rescue Hume from Marxist categorization, his works have also been re-valued by literary and aesthetic scholars and by those interested in the history of historical writing. Hume's career in the halls of

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<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 4, n. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (New York, 1945), pp. 659-674.

academia in the twentieth century, connected I think to modernity's zenith and perhaps its nadir, neatly mirrors all the aspects of Hume's broad philosophical programme.

If Hume studies may prove surrogate for explaining why studying the past is important, they may also stand in for why studying the Enlightenment, in all its contours and colours, is especially important in the twenty-first century. The case for Hume may be particularly important if we agree to understand his thought as fundamentally informed by historical knowledge. Herbert Butterfield once observed that the 'framework which people give to their general history – the notion they have of man in time and of the processes of time – may do much to determine the rest of their outlook.'<sup>7</sup> Aside from the dignity of studying the past for its own sake and on its own terms, the importance of studying the past for its part in our modern/post-modern predicament is no less important. Ironically, Hume the sceptic would have heartily agreed with Butterfield, Regius professor of history at Cambridge University, master of Peterhouse, and lay Methodist minister.

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *Man On His Past* (Cambridge, 1955), p. 30.

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