THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHILOSOPHY, POLITENESS, AND PARTY:

DAVID HUME AND THE CONSTITUTION OF A MODERN SOCIAL ORDER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
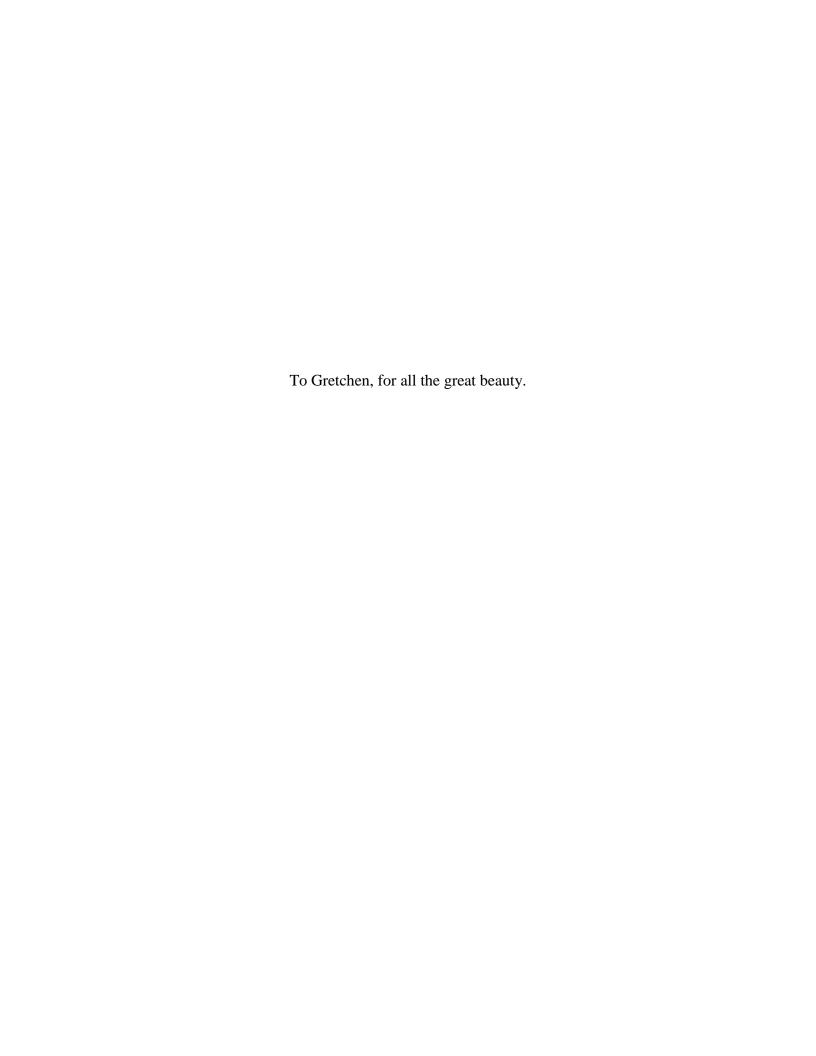
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

DAVID PATRICK LYONS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2017

To Gretchen, for all the great beauty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Allison Gray has been the younger sister I never knew I needed; wiser and kinder than a single soul has a right to be, she has been an unyielding advocate for my abilities when I wondered if they were up to the task I had placed before them. James Vaughn has been the unofficial fourth member of my dissertation committee. A paragon of generosity and collegiality, he has read every page of this dissertation and has enriched it with his mastery of eighteenth-century British history and his unrelenting demand for serious thought. Beyond his immediate and obvious contributions to this project, James is a treasured, if sometimes infuriating, conversation partner and the truest of friends.

There is a long list of family members and old friends whom I carried with me to Chicago in spirit, and one who was here in the flesh. I would not have had the courage to leave the practice of law and return to and then continue with graduate study had it not been for the advice and encouragement of Anne Rutter, Kerry Hartkopf, Bryan Nester, Fr. William Stevenson, Mira Getzinger Ringler, Greg Pemberton, Tim Byars, Paul Magreta, Karen Gaides, Jim Keniff, Ketan Patel, Jeff and Ann Whitley, Rob Baker, Greg Stanton, Charlie Contrada, Brian and Nikki Selden, Norman Beck, Bob Burpee, Gib Bickel, J. B. Hadden, Geoff Moul, and John, Ann, and Tom Schoger.

I doubt I shall ever have more vocal or tender supporters than my paternal grandparents, the late Tom and Agnes Lyons. In addition to showering me with affection, they taught me the values of humility and simplicity at an age when I was still too stupid to see these virtues' great worth. My mother, Carla Kaser, made me a skeptic long before I knew the word, and her good sense, support, and love have given me the confidence and courage to pursue my own path. I will always wish I were a bit more like her. My late father, Tom Lyons, always encouraged me even when he did not understand me and taught me that, above all else, a teacher is someone who

feels compelled to give something back. Both of my parents have provided me with models of hard work and service that I strive to match. My niece, Arielle Lyons, and my nephews, T. J. Lyons and Owen Lyons, have been constant sources of joy. I will never be able to convey to them the deep love, obligation, and gratitude I feel toward them.

I owe my deepest thanks to my brilliant and beautiful wife, Gretchen, and our sweet daughter, Amelia, who came into the world as this project neared completion. Amelia has remade and enriched every aspect of my life simply by virtue of her existence. This work is no exception. It is my hope that one day she will read this dissertation and regard it as a reason to be proud of me.

When I first considered graduate school, Mills Thornton cautioned me that surviving the scholarly grind required the steady and gentle love of a true partner. At the time, I foolishly discounted his advice, but Gretchen has shown me the error of my ways. A profoundly gifted teacher and thinker in her own right, Gretchen's faith in my abilities and the value of this project have inspired me at times when I was tempted to choose an easier route. Her humor, charm, and passion have filled the time outside of the library and classroom with a soul-renewing joy. I never thought that my life would be graced and enriched by such love, and I have never been happier to have the limits of my own thought laid bare. I dedicate this work to her.

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I argue that David Hume's political and historical work should be read as that of an ideologically-committed and principled partisan of the centralizing project of Court Whiggery. This commitment proceeded from Hume's conclusion that the polite and refined social order that eighteenth-century Britons enjoyed and that Hume treasured was a product of a strong centralized state, a state that Hume associated with the aims and effects of the Court party's power-consolidating efforts. Consequently, Hume supported the Court party against the arguments and agitations of the Country party, radical and independent Whigs, and the Patriot movement, all of which he regarded as significant threats to the social order he so valued. I further argue that we should understand Hume's social and political commitments as proceeding from Hume's experience of a profound existential dread, which overcame him during his work on the *Treatise* and that I identify as the "sickness" of the Third Treatise of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*. The treatment Hume devised in response to this sickness was the enjoyment of polite, bourgeois pleasures. As Hume saw the stability generated by the Court party as the source and safeguard of the commercial social order that made those pleasures possible, he mounted a philosophically-informed defense of that order. My dissertation offers a riposte to a prevailing view in Hume scholarship that sees his political thought as the product of a disinterested political neutral. It further challenges the position held by some Hume scholars that his social and political thought was animated primarily by a worry that religious factions posed the greatest danger to the civil order of his day. Finally, it suggests that Hume is best understood as the defender of a social and political order in which the best for which humanity can hope are the little pleasures of the Nietzschean last man.

Having "caught a spell of fair weather for sailing," the flotilla of eighty transports left port, likely Boulogne-sur-Mer, sometime between midnight and 3:00 a.m. in late August, 55 B.C.[1] The ships carried the entire Seventh and Tenth Roman Legions under the command of Julius Caesar, who wished to secure intelligence about both the inhabitants and strategic positions of the island of Britain. Caesar had learned that the island's residents had been supplying their continental Celtic cousins with assistance in the latter's efforts at resisting Roman might, and he thus decided the time had come for him to take the measure of this more distant foe.[2] The Roman forces arrived off of Dover around 10:00 a.m. and were greeted by an imposing force of Briton warriors ready for battle and occupying the high ground of the cliffs.[3] Soundly concluding that a landing at Dover was strategically untenable, sometime after 3:00 p.m. he ordered his forces to weigh anchor and make their landing about seven miles away, somewhere between Walmer and Deal.

Despite the unfamiliar terrain, the strength of the Briton cavalry, the Romans' inability to beach their ships, and the fact that their forces had to come ashore overburdened by their arms, the Romans eventually established a beachhead.[4] After an initial back-and-forth—an offer of peace secured by hostages followed by a predictable Briton betrayal when the Romans' tenuous position on the island became clear—Caesar reported that the Britons, although enjoying obvious

---

[1] Caius Julius Caesar, *The Gallic War*, trans. H.J. Edwards (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 211. Although the date of Caesar's first voyage to and landing in Britain traditionally has been given as August 26 and 27, 55 B.C., in 2008 two astronomers announced that, given the phase of the moon reported in Caesar's account of the landing and the tidal patterns associated with that phase, the date of the voyage and landing had to be August 22 and 23, 55 B.C. British Broadcasting Corporation, "Doubt over date of Brit Invasion," July 1, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7483566.stm.
[2] Caesar, *Gallic War*, 205.
[3] Caesar, *Gallic War*, 211.
[4] Caesar, *Gallic War*, 213-15.

tactical advantages, made a second offer of peace, to which Caesar agreed.[5] Claiming victory and seeking to avoid the dangers of keeping his depleted forces in Britain over the winter, Caesar returned to Gaul. The Britons, predictably, then failed to send all of the promised hostages. In response, Caesar returned to the island the following year, although this time with a force of five legions and two thousand cavalry.[6] Although the Britons tried to marshal their forces under a single warlord, Cassivellaunus, a variety of malcontent Briton tribes allied themselves with the Romans. With this local assistance joined to customary Roman martial prowess, Caesar proceeded to defeat Cassivellaunus' forces, establish the Briton warlord Mandubracius as a Roman client, and extract a Briton pledge of hostages and annual tribute to Rome.[7]

So began the Roman conquest of Britain, as reported by Caesar, who strained mightily to leave his readers with the impression that he had extended Rome's sphere of influence to new shores. As beginnings go, however, Caesar's operations in Britain were, at best, only the beginning of the beginning. Writing eighteen-hundred years later, David Hume observed in the first volume of his *History of England* that Caesar had, in fact, "left the authority of the Romans more nominal than real in this island."[8] The civil wars diverted Caesar's attention—and that of

---

[5] Caesar, *Gallic War*, 215-27. Caesar reported that he agreed to the Britons' offer only on the condition that they provide double the number of hostages that they had originally offered, to be delivered to Caesar on the continent. Caesar, *Gallic War*, 225-27.

[6] Caesar, *Gallic War*, 227-29 and 243-47.

[7] Caesar, *Gallic War*, 249 and 253-63.

[8] David Hume, *The History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 1:7. Although the first volume in the final version of the *History* dealt with Roman, Saxon, and early Norman Britain, is was actually the second-to-last of Hume's six-volume *History* to be written. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, Hume wrote the two volumes dealing with the seventeenth century first, published in 1754 and 1757, then wrote two volumes covering the Tudor reigns, published in 1759, and completed his work on the *History* with his treatment of pre-Tudor England, with those two volumes published in 1762. The English divine, philologist, and politician John Horne Tooke is said to have quipped, "Hume wrote his *History* as witches say their prayers—backwards." Samuel Rogers, *Recollections of the Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1856), 123.

his countrymen, more generally—from expanding or consolidating Roman influence in Britain, saving the Britons "from that yoke, which was ready to be imposed upon them." The Augustan settlement and Augustus' admonition against the empire's further expansion had a similar effect, and so it was not until 43 A.D., during the reign of Claudius, that Rome again sought to exert itself over Britain. This effort reached its culmination in Agricola's conquest of northern England and Wales following his appointment as governor of Britain in 77 A.D. From that point forward, although Caledonia remained unconquered, the Romans proceeded to consolidate their hold on the province of Britannia, making it Rome's "last durable conquest."[9]

The Roman conquest was, in Hume's estimation, far from a disaster for the island's inhabitants, the loss of local self-determination notwithstanding. In particular, Hume emphasized two welcome consequences of Roman rule: its effect on the Druid religion and the introduction into the island of civilized letters, arts, and sciences. According to Hume, prior to Roman rule, the Druid priests enjoyed an outsized, near-tyrannical place in the ancient Britons' social and political order, as they controlled religious practice and education; were immune from taxation and military service; and could adjudicate both criminal and civil disputes between not merely individuals but entire tribes, with excommunication the ultimate penalty. Moreover, Hume noted, almost as an aside, that the Druids practiced human sacrifice. The Romans abolished the Druid religion, Hume stated approvingly, finding it incompatible with proper Roman laws and institutions.[10]

Hume also observed that in conquering Britain, Agricola provided a corrective to the Britons' previously crude, warlike, and fractious nature. Before the Roman conquest only the most southeastern portion of Britain had made any steps toward agriculture and more settled life.

---

[9] Hume, *History of England*, 1:6-10.
[10] Hume, *History of England*, 1:5-6.

The vast majority of the island's inhabitants, in contrast, remained nomadic herders, clothed themselves in skins, and lived in huts in the forests and swamps. Moreover, their communal lives were riven with strife, both within and between tribes; "wars," Hume continued, "were the chief occupation."[11] Accordingly, as part of his program of pacification, Agricola wisely "neglected not the arts of peace. He introduced laws and civility among the Britons, taught them to desire and raise all the conveniences of life, reconciled them to the Roman language and manners, instructed them in letters and science, and employed every expedient to render those chains, which he had forged, both easy and agreeable to them."[12] In Hume's estimation, the Roman standard brought with it an end to both the Britons' subjection to a vicious priestcraft and to their violent barbarism.

It would be understandable to read Hume's discussion of the ancient Britons as not only an indictment of the Druid religion but of priests, priestcraft, and clericalism more generally, whether operating in a semi-historical pagan wilderness or in the more familiar context of Christianized Europe. Hume's general antipathy for the clergy, especially when it enjoyed an independent base of social or political power, is not a matter of serious dispute, although his friendship with many of the so-called moderate clergy of mid-eighteenth-century Edinburgh complicates even that fairly well-grounded portrait. In his 1741 essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" Hume denounced priests as the product "of a timorous and abject superstition" to which people of a more anxious and melancholic cast of mind were prone. Priests, Hume asserted, represent themselves to the superstitious as either favored or dreaded by otherwise threatening supernatural forces. They are thus able to secure power over men and women of a superstitious bent by providing them with spurious techniques for currying favor with or

---

[11] Hume, *History of England*, 1:4-5.
[12] Hume, *History of England*, 1:10.

protecting themselves from whatever divine, demonic, or other unearthly forces they feared.[13] In Hume's estimation, priests were little more than particularly successful confidence men. Perhaps even more damning were Hume's remarks about priests in 1748's "Of National Characters." There Hume opined that "*priests of all religions are the same*," and bitingly observed that their character is largely the opposite of a soldier's, which Hume had just described as generous, brave, honest, and cordial.[14] In a footnote, Hume expanded on his conclusion, noting that most clerics exhibit some combination of hypocrisy, venality, and intolerance.

Finally, in discussing the advisability of state employment of the clergy in the *History*, Hume provided an economic explanation for the dangers of priestcraft. Hume reasoned that clergy unchecked by the benefit of a government salary would behave like hucksters in search of new customers, a situation that would result in ever more extravagant efforts by the clergy to attract votaries, which in turn would lead to increasing social tension between the members of different sects. As Hume explained:

> Each ghostly practitioner, in order to render himself more precious and sacred in the eyes of his retainers, will inspire them with the most violent abhorrence of all other sects, and continually endeavor, by some novelty, to excite the languid devotion of his

---

[13] Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 73-75. Interestingly enough, in a footnote to the first two published editions of this essay Hume differentiated between priests, whom he described as "only the pretenders to Power and Dominion, and to a superior Sanctity of Character," and clergymen who devote and devote themselves exclusively to "sacred Matters" and decent and orderly displays of public religious devotion. Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," in *Essays*, 617 n. 1. With the 1748 edition of his *Essays*, however, Hume significantly reworked the section of "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" that gave rise to this footnote and for whatever reason the footnote was excised from the text from that point forward.

[14] Hume, "Of National Characters," in *Essays*, 199 (emphasis in the original). To be fair, Hume also described soldiers as "thoughtless and ignorant," characterizations that might have had the effect of redounding to the clergy's benefit when he moved on to compare the two vocations.

audience. No regard will be paid to truth, morals, or decency in the doctrines inculcated.[15]

Accordingly, it would strike me as eminently sound to read Hume's account of the Druids as of a piece with his customary critiques of the clergy.[16]

That being said, I think something else is also going on in Hume's discussion of the Roman encounter with both the Druids specifically and the Britons generally. Specifically, I read Hume's discussion of both the Roman elimination of Druid priestly power and the concomitant introduction of the arts and sciences into ancient Britain as part of a broader project: associating the first flowering of a genuinely civilized life in Britain with the establishment of strong Roman authority. In articulating this association, Hume was suggesting to his eighteenth-century readers a necessary relationship between the enjoyment of a civilized, refined, and enlightened form of social life, all understood in terms of the eighteenth-century key word "politeness," with the strong centralized government that the project of Court Whiggery was seeking to maintain and extend. Hume's discussion of ancient Britain both before and during Roman rule thus gestured toward an underappreciated aspect of Hume's work, namely, that much of it can be read as a principled defense of the power-centralizing project of Court Whiggery, a defense he advanced

---

[15] Hume, *History of England*, 3:135-36. For a substantially similar analysis, see Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 62-63.

[16] John Price reaches much the same conclusion, identifying in Hume's discussion of the Druids his anti-clericalism, in particular an ironic jab at church-state arrangements in which the clergy operate as an independent and unaccountable site of power in the social and political order. Price, *The Ironic Hume* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 97-98. Somewhat ironically, Hume's anti-clericalism led him to support religious establishments as a way of mitigating the customary faction-generating tendencies of the clergy. For scholarly commentary on this aspect of Hume's thought on religion, see, for example, Ryu Susato, "Taming 'The Tyranny of Priests': Hume's Advocacy of Religious Establishments," *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 73, no. 2 (April, 2012); and Will R. Jordan, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration of David Hume and Religious Establishment," *The Review of Politics* 64, no. 4 (2002).

as early as his 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature* and developed further in both his *Essays* and *History*.

Put simply, we should see Hume as an ideologically committed and principled partisan of the centralizing project of Court Whiggery.[17] This commitment proceeded from Hume's conclusion that the polite and refined social order that eighteenth-century Britons enjoyed and that Hume treasured was a product of a strong centralized state, a state that Hume saw as having begun to emerge under the Tudors and that, in its fully emergent form, he associated with the aims and effects of the Court party's power-consolidating designs. Consequently, Hume supported the Court party against the arguments and agitations of radical, independent, and opposition Whigs; the Country party; and the Patriot movement; all of which he regarded as significant threats to the polite social order he so valued, a conclusion that seems especially

---

[17] For a rare discussion by a Hume scholar of Hume as an ideologically committed partisan of Court Whiggery, see John B. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 9-12, which, contrary to the dominant interpretation of Hume as having been a political neutral, sees him instead as having been deeply sympathetic with Court Whiggery. For two examples of studies that have come close to grasping the partisan and ideological import of Hume's work, see H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), 132-34 ("David Hume, although sometimes labelled a Tory and never fully accepted by the more partisan Court Whigs, was in fact particularly anxious to refurbish the ideology of the establishment so that all moderate men would accept the *status quo*. If his work had been fully understood he could have provided the Court Whigs with a conservative ideology which limited the authority of arbitrary governments without endorsing the sovereignty of the people."); and David Wooton, "David Hume: 'The Historian,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2nd ed., eds. David Fate Norton and Jacqueline Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 447-79 and 468-69 (ascribing to Hume the view that government should be evaluated "not by its fidelity to a mythical set of constitutional principles, but by its ability to preserve effective and beneficial government." From this Wooton concludes that, with respect to the various partisan accounts of English history, "there is no doubt that Hume, for all his claims to impartiality, effectively ended up supporting the argument of the court Whigs.") In a similar vein, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 493-95 (identifying Hume as a historian "predominantly of the Court persuasion" who "accepted" a Court view of the constitution, but failing to consider that these views proceeded from a commitment to the Court Whig project of centralizing social and political power).

understandable given the extent to which these movements tended to resonate with the members of Britain's polite middling ranks.[18] Most notably, in his *Treatise*, *Essays*, and *History*, Hume countered both the radical Whiggish and Patriot argument that insisted that the British government was bound to observe the terms of an original contract and the Country and Patriot argument that the British government was only legitimate to the extent that its structures reflected an ancient constitutional order that extended at least as far back as fifth-century Saxon Britain.

At this point, a brief sketch of the political landscape of late Augustan and early Hanoverian Britain seems in order. As a general matter, four factions dominated the political scene during the period, with two of them, the Tories and Whigs, providing one partisan axis, another two, the Court and Country, providing a second axis, and, as I indicate below, an evolving overlap among the parties of the two axes. The Whigs and the Tories emerged during the last years of the reign of Charles II, products of disagreements over both where the power in the English constitution should ultimately lie and the extent to which the Church of England should enjoy hegemony over English social life. The Tories in general sided with the Crown in its claims of broad royal prerogative and entitlement to its subjects' total obedience. The Tories further opposed toleration of dissenting religious sects and held that the only lawful site of worship and religious commitment in the kingdom rested in the Church of England. The Whigs,

---

[18] For support of Whiggish, Country, and Patriot opposition movements among members of the middling orders see John Brewer, "Commercialization and Politics," in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb; *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa, 1982), 199; Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 50-67, 126-27, and 392-94. See also Rogers, "The Urban Opposition to Whig Oligarchy, in *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, eds. Margaret Jacob and James Jacob (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1984), 136-137 (discussing the role that members of the middling orders played in leading the opposition to Walpole's regime).

in contrast, favored a strong role for Parliament in the constitutional order over the Crown's claims of prerogative, and further supported a broad religious toleration for most, if not all, dissenting sects.

The second factional divide, between Court and Country, arose roughly two decades earlier, following the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660. The Court party emphasized the importance of centralizing political power in, as the name suggests, the executive function of the royal court and favored the use of the royal patronage power to bring members of Parliament into agreement with the aims of the Court. The Country party was the site of resistance to these efforts, as its members opposed royal interference with the rights of localities and other traditional sites of political power within the nation and further defended the rights of Parliament as an independent center of power within the emerging English state. Prior to the Glorious Revolution, then, the partisan overlap tended to see Tories—although by no means all of them— siding with the Court's agenda, while the Whigs tended to find themselves in agreement with the aims of the Country.

After the Glorious Revolution and the post-revolutionary settlement, many of the points of contention between the Tories and the Whigs were rendered moot; the political class as a general matter rejected the claims of absolute royal prerogative and passive obedience that had formed the backbone of Tory ideology, and had further come to accept that Parliament was entitled to an active role in the formulation of law and policy. Moreover, while the Church of England continued to enjoy government financial support and dissenters labored under a variety of *de jure* civil disabilities, the Toleration Act of 1689 allowed for public worship by at least Trinitarian Protestant sects. As a practical matter, then, after 1688, and certainly by the middle of the 1710s, much of the Whigs' views were hegemonic among the political classes. With their

rise to power, however, the Whigs came to see the benefits in the centralizing project of the Court party, including its efforts at rendering members of Parliament more pliable through the use of the Crown's patronage power. As a result, by the 1720s and 1730s, a segment of the Whig party had embraced Court views, including a commitment to a strong executive and a centralized government capable of managing Parliament through the use of Crown patronage. These Court Whigs, in turn, found themselves opposed by both radical and independent Whigs, who aligned with those Tories who had reconciled themselves to the post-revolutionary settlement. This alliance of Tories and opposition Whigs united under the banner of a new Country party, later known also as the Patriot opposition, which stood for a more independent Parliament and a government more responsive to public opinion.[19] I should specify, also, that when I use the term "party" in reference to the Court party or the Country party and the Patriots, I am not speaking of anything like modern, disciplined parties with extensive or comprehensive ideological programs or, in the American model, as groupings of a variety of interest groups that come together largely as a *modus vivendi*. Instead, I simply mean to refer to groupings of political actors who found themselves united around commonly held dispositions, or persuasions, about the English constitution. These dispositions had far-reaching practical implications for the structure and practice of political life—that is, they were not simply a matter of style—but the Court and Country parties nevertheless came together initially as a product of how their members were disposed to think about the best way of maintaining the constitutional order that emerged out of the Glorious Revolution.

---

[19] The best and most comprehensive discussion of the ideologies of the Whigs, Tories, Court, and Country from the late seventeenth century through the mid-eighteenth century remains that of Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, chs. 1-5.

To be abundantly clear, when I identify Hume as a Court Whig, I am not saying that we should regard him as a variation on the Grub Street hack, a creature of Walpole churning out broadsides in the service of his dark master; nor am I claiming, against all evidence, that he was the kind of partisan operator involved in brow-beating Members of Parliament or the bureaucracy. Instead, it is my position that Hume was for principled and philosophically subtle reasons ideologically committed to Court Whiggery, as he saw the Court's project of centralizing power as the best hope for the maintenance of a salutary, polite social order in Great Britain, an order to which he was profoundly committed. In addition to whatever other ends Hume was seeking to achieve in writing the *Treatise*, the *Essays*, and the *History*, then, in those works Hume was offering his polite, middling readers nuanced and considered grounds for concluding that the refined social world they inhabited depended on the strong centralized power of the Court and that the Court thus merited his readers' allegiance. Similarly, he sought to illustrate the dangers that accompanied political programs that insisted on the realization of speculative political principles and to show just how unpleasant life under the imagined ancient constitution was, contrary to the histories that were written by partisans of the Country and radical Whigs. In this regard, Caesar was neither the first nor the most immediate partisan that Hume endeavored to counter in his *History*, and his approving remarks about the civilizing effects of Roman rule can be seen as suggestive of his regard for the polite commercial order that Court power made possible. His true and enduring targets were the agitators and ideologists of the anti-Court opposition.

*

In the process of making my argument that we should think of Hume as having been ideologically committed to Court Whiggery, I will also correct two significant deficiencies in the

scholarship on Hume's political and historical work, scholarship that has, in most instances, failed to grasp the deeply ideological agenda behind Hume's work. The first of these interpretations insists on reading Hume as an inveterate political neutral and his work in the *Essays* and the *History* as a dispassionate, disinterested, and strictly philosophical exercise in pointing out to his contemporaries the deficiencies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century partisan readings of English constitutional history.[20] The seminal work in this line of scholarship is Duncan Forbes's *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, which stresses the detachment and

---

[20] Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 125-26, 194, 211, 219-22, 263-67, and 275-79; ("The *History* is the non-party History [*sic*] which Hume came to realize Rapin had failed to provide."). It was this apparently philosophical approach to politics and the sacred cows of the Old Whigs that rendered Hume a "scientific" rather than a "vulgar" Whig, according to Forbes, and opened Hume up to accusations by his contemporaries—and some modern scholars—that he was a Tory. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 139. For other scholarly accounts that have read Hume's *History* as a product of a dispassionate and disinterested rejection of the ideology of the ancient constitution and as a call for the rejection of partisanship, see Victor G. Wexler, *David Hume and the* History of England, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1979), 21-29 and Chapter 4 ("I have indicated some of the substantial alterations; they reveal that Hume had found his place in the history of English historiography as an anti-Whig historian. . . . But his being an anti-Whig in the first volume never meant that he was pro-Tory."); Jeffrey M. Suderman, "Medieval Kingship and the Making of Modern Civility: Hume's Assessment of Governance in *The History of England*," in *David Hume: Historical Thinker, Historical Writer*, ed. Mark G. Spencer (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 122 ("His political and economic essays were almost all behind him, and there and in the earlier volumes of the *History* Hume had largely vented his spleen against the historical prejudices of Whigs and Tories."); and James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 166-74 and 308-21 ("Hume's skepticism with regard to several of the features of orthodox Whig history…was not the skepticism of a Tory. His purpose was the justification of the Revolution settlement, but, like the Court Whigs, he believed that such a justification was to be found in the present and not in the past. Modern politics, in other words, had no need of the kind of support from history that both Whigs and Tories usually supposed it needed."). For an examination of Hume's political thought as distinctly non-partisan, see Frederick G. Whelan, *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 325-26 ("Hume's proudest claim is to be impartial, a term he uses as nearly equivalent to philosophical; and the lack of congruence between his views and the "official" doctrines of the actual political parties of his day—Whig and Tory, Court and Country—bears out his claim to have taken a balanced and nondoctrinaire view of all controversial issues").

impartiality of Hume's philosophical analysis of the party conflicts of his day. According to this interpretation, Hume's *Essays* and *History* should be read as a philosopher's call to studied impartiality and political moderation, a call rendered in the form of a devastating—yet non-partisan—critique of both Whig and Country histories that had previously affirmed partisan claims about an original contract, an ancient English constitution, and the historical liberty of Englishmen.[21] These Whiggish and Country accounts held that English liberty depended upon an ancient constitution that, since the Saxons, had balanced the distinct privileges and prerogatives of Crown, Lords, and Commons; that the Stuart monarchs from James I through James II and the Hanoverian kings, especially during the ministry of Walpole, had deviated from this allegedly primeval constitutional balance; and that these deviations jeopardized an English liberty that only the recrudescence of the ancient constitution could ensure. On this account, Hume's political and historical writings were a marked departure from Country writers like Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, the Viscount Bolingbroke, and John Oldmixon.

Forbes's attribution to Hume of complete partisan neutrality goes too far. To be clear, on one level, I have absolutely no quarrel with this statement of Hume's historical and political thought, as from the very earliest editions of the *Essays*, Hume showed himself to be more than capable of acknowledging the short-comings of the parties of Great Britain, whether Whig, Tory, Jacobite, Country, or Court. Moreover, I agree with those readings of Hume's *History* as

---

[21] The most significant of these histories was Paul de Rapin-Thoyras's *Histoire d'Angleterre*, published in France from 1724 to 1727. Rapin's *Histoire* was subsequently translated into English—and made even more Whiggish—by Nicholas Tindal, who published the work in fifteen volumes from 1726 to 1731. Rapin's work was regarded as the definitive statement of English history, and especially constitutional history, until Hume's own *History* was published. Other works to which Hume was responding in the ancient constitutionalist tradition include John Oldmixon's two-volume *Critical History of England, Ecclesiastical and Civil*, Bolingbroke's *Remarks on the History of England*, which was originally serialized in the *Craftsman*, and William Guthrie's four-volume *History of England from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to 1688*.

genuinely disinterested and non-partisan when it came to his treatment of both the Whigs and the Tories. Hume had visited an utterly devastating attack on the Whiggish mythology that—aside from the fairly brief interruption of early Norman rule and the more recent efforts at absolutist innovation under the first four Stuart monarchs—England had, since the Saxon era, operated under a fairly continuous ancient constitution and that the Glorious Revolution had simply restored England's constitutional order to its pre-Stuart status quo ante. Similarly, in the final volume of the *History*, Hume ably documented the excesses of James II, excesses that severely complicated the claims of Tories, who, according to Hume, remained partisans of the Stuart line. In his essays "Of the Original Contract" and "Of Passive Obedience," Hume had offered withering critiques of the Whigs' and Tories' respective articles of faith.

Hume's detachment with respect to that partisan divide, however, does not demonstrate that Hume was equally detached when it came to the divide between Country and Court. Indeed, given that members of the Country party—whether Whig or Tory—regularly appealed to images of an ancient constitution and a similarly ancient English liberty, Hume's attacks on those shibboleths suggest that, as between Court and Country, he was far from neutral. Moreover, in light of the fact that Hume held that the partisan conflict between Whig and Tory was more of a disruptive side-show, his detached treatment of their conflict in the *History* might best be read as his way of delegitimizing the entire debate between Whigs and Tories, thus potentially clearing those commitments from the political field and clarifying what he regarded as the true partisan conflict lying at and proceeding from the very core of the British constitutional order, that between Court and Country.[22]

---

[22] Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 64-65 and 71-72. There, Hume attributed the continuing presence of the Tories and Whigs on the political scene to, respectively, the Tories' affection for the House of Stuart and the Whigs' love of liberty. Hume pointed out that

In relation to that divide, claims of Hume's political detachment fall flat. Indeed, that Hume aligned himself with the project of Court Whiggery is something that scholars who insist on Hume's philosophical detachment from partisan politics seem to recognize on some level. They nevertheless refuse to consider that Hume might have actually held such an ideological commitment, no matter how reflective and self-aware that commitment might have been. For example, on Duncan Forbes's account, Hume's was an "establishment history," one that sought "to do justice to both sides in the dispute," that is, Whigs and Tories. That characterization, however, prompts the question of where Hume might have stood in relation to the Court and the Country, as the defining poles on the other partisan axis upon which eighteenth-century English politics revolved. On that question, Forbes offers no satisfying answer, although much of his remaining discussion of Hume as simply an establishment historian relies on the same material

---

these allegiances, contrary to Bolingbroke's position, continued to scramble what should have been a clear party divide between Court and Country, thus showing that "some biass [*sic*] still hangs upon our constitution, some extrinsic weight, which turns it from its natural course, and causes a confusion in our parties." David Miller reaches a conclusion similar to mine, noting that "Hume's main purpose [in writing the *History*] was to show that the old division [between Tory and Whig] had become irrelevant and should be replaced by a straightforward contest between Court and Country parties—a contest which need not and should not be rooted in conflicting accounts of English history." Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 173 and 175-76. For two reasons, however, Miller goes too far when he claims that Hume held that the Court-Country conflict "need not and should not" be viewed in the light of his historical analysis. First, the evidence that Hume had marshalled against Whig arguments of an ancient constitution and English liberty was as relevant to and as easily deployed against identical arguments by Country partisans. Second, as I will argue in Chapter 5, Hume's discussion of the violence and inconveniences of life under the Saxon and medieval English constitutions should be read as his argument against the Country attacks on the modern state. That is, given that Country historians—whether Whig or Tory—claimed that life under the ancient constitution was preferable to that of the modern state that was emerging under the late Stuarts and the early Hanoverians, Hume was seeking to show his middling readers that the ancient liberty celebrated by Country historians was one that ought to be squarely rejected, as inconsistent with the enjoyment of a polite commercial social order.

that I will rely on below in support of my position that Hume ought to be read as a reflective but decided anti-Country partisan of the Court.[23]

Indeed, Forbes seems to strain mightily to resist the conclusion that Hume might have counted himself among the supporters of the Court party. As evidence of Hume's Country sympathies, he stresses Hume's apparent support for militias over standing armies, but all he can point to are passing references in five of the essays, references that, even if taken together, offer no conclusive evidence of Hume's actual position on the issue.[24] Indeed, no such conclusive evidence of Hume's position on the question of a militia appears available.[25] Moreover, Forbes

---

[23] On this, see Forbes's discussion of the Tudor monarchs and the regular system of government that arose under them, and that it was this regular system of government that allowed for the growth of commerce, the rise of the middling rank, and the rise of the arts and refined civility. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 268-81.

[24] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 211-12, citing "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic," "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," "Of the Protestant Succession," "Of Public Credit," and "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth."

[25] John Robertson as much as concedes this when, after setting out the best evidence for Hume's and Adam Smith's possible support of a Scottish militia, he notes that "it can be argued that this evidence of their attitudes is not conclusive…." Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1985), 238. The evidence to which Robertson was referring was three of Hume's letters and Hume's membership in Edinburgh's Poker Club. Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 237. In the first letter, however, to Lord Minto, Hume complimented Minto on the rhetorical quality of his son's speech in Parliament on the subject of the Scottish Militia Bill. The letter is silent on Hume's position on the issue, and Robertson mentions neither that Minto's son was a good friend of Hume nor that later in the letter Hume asks Lord Minto for a small favor. Hume to Sir Gilbert Eliot, Lord Minto, Edinburgh, 1 May 1760, in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 1:325. In the second letter, to Reverend Alexander Carlyle, Hume jokingly took credit for a pamphlet actually written by Adam Ferguson but published anonymously, which supported the cause of a Scottish militia. Hume to Alexander Carlyle, Edinburgh, 3 February 1761, 1:341-42. In the third letter, apparently to his publisher William Strahan, Hume referred to concerns over threatened popular agitation in Scotland—over what and involving whom it is not clear—and remarked, "Woud to God we had a Scotch Militia at present." Hume to William Strahan (surmised), Edinburgh, 14 November 1769, 2:211-12. Robertson does not appear to consider the possibility that Hume's remark might have had more to do with the intensity of his worries about popular unrest than with any commitment to a militia. As for the Poker Club, while the so-called Moderate literati who belonged to the club with Hume were leaders in the campaign for a

under-plays Hume's rejection of the idea of binding instructions for MPs, his resistance to the

Triennial Bill in 1742, and his embrace of Crown patronage—the bête noire of the Country

party—as the salvation of the British constitution.[26] In fact, Forbes studiously avoids any direct

reference to the issue of patronage. Rather than considering the possibility that Hume might have

been inclined toward the Court, Forbes instead asserts that Hume's position in the essays of the

early 1740s, as well as in writing the *History*, were those of "an impartial spectator."[27]

Other scholarly assessments of Hume's engagement with the partisan conflicts of his day

are similarly unsatisfying. In his new intellectual biography of Hume, James Harris seems to take

for granted the line that Hume was engaged in an impartial analysis of the British political

scene.[28] Harris actually recognizes that Hume's position in the *History* was essentially the same

position as the one adopted by the Walpolian press, but he never stops to consider that Hume

might have been writing as someone committed to maintaining and justifying the legitimacy of

Court Whiggery and the modern state it supervised.[29] In the same vein, Victor Wexler insists that

---

Scottish militia, it seems like quite a stretch to use Hume's and their membership in the same club as evidence that Hume favored a militia. By the same rationale, Hume's membership in the Poker Club would have argued for the conclusion that Hume was an orthodox Trinitarian Christian, like the Moderate literati members. Given the quality of the evidence that Robertson cites, rather than characterizing it as arguably inconclusive, it seems fairer to say that it is simply immaterial. On the opposing view, Bob Harris squarely situates Hume as an opponent of the militia, but unfortunately he does not supply any evidence for his position. Bob Harris, *Politics and the Nation: Britain in the Mid-Eighteenth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 191.

[26] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 212-14.

[27] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 219-21 and 263. In concluding that Hume was an "impartial spectator" of the mid-century political scene, Forbes relies on a total of two of Hume's essays: "Of the Independency of Parliament" and "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole." Given the defense of Crown patronage that Hume offered in "Of the Independency of Parliament," which could well be argued as the defining feature of the Court Whig program, and the more nuanced estimation of Walpole's ministry that Hume offered upon the publication of the "Character," Forbes's reliance on these two essays seems somewhat misplaced, if not outright telling.

[28] James A. Harris, *Hume*, 167-74, 238, and 321.

[29] James A. Harris, *Hume*, 319-20.

Hume's work was of a non-partisan nature, albeit one that favored stable government.[30] Like Harris, Wexler fails to consider the possibility that Hume is best viewed as a Court partisan. This failure seems especially puzzling given that Wexler likens the Court Whig historian Lord Hervey's argument—that British liberty only emerged as a product of the Glorious Revolution—to the conclusion Hume would reach in the *History*.[31] David Miller has likewise identified Hume's *History* as being "broadly in line with the interpretation of [English history] favoured by the Court Whigs, such as those attached to Walpole," but he ultimately refuses to situate Hume squarely in the camp of Court ideology, insisting instead that Hume "cannot consistently be placed in either [Court or Country]," and accepting Hume's self-characterization as a "man without party."[32] I will have more to say about Hume's characterization of himself as a political neutral and Hume scholars' reliance on Hume's self-description in Chapter 5.

Contrary to these conclusions, I am convinced that, in the ideological struggle between Court and Country, Hume was no mere impartial spectator. Instead, Hume, even though not a self-professed or card-carrying partisan of the Court interest, is most properly understood as a committed supporter of the ideology of Court Whiggery, a supporter who saw in the increasingly regularized social order that the Court Whig state provided the single best means of preserving Great Britain's polite commercial life. Concomitantly, both his political essays and the *History* should not be read as Hume's non-ideological engagement with the issues of his day, nor, as in

---

[30] Wexler, *David Hume and the* History of England, 28 n. 8. On Wexler's account, to be clear, Hume was not "impartial." Rather, he wrote the *History* in so small measure to undermine conventional Whig history because of the resentment he felt for the way in which the Whigs "monopolized a world where he could, in fact, find no satisfactory place and because they could, to use his phrase, 'purchase' the truth." Wexler*, David Hume and the* History of England, 8.

[31] Wexler, *David Hume and the* History of England, 73.

[32] Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*, 173, 177. In the course of this discussion Miller falls into the same error as Forbes on the issue of the standing army. Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*, 178-79.

the case of the *History* specifically, solely as his effort at demolishing the ancient constitutionalism of the Country party, but as his effort at defending before his polite middling readers the order erected by Court Whiggery and rallying them—albeit politely—to the Court's banner. This defense operated by both associating features of the Court Whig project with the predicates of polite refinement and by underlining the extent to which earlier constitutional orders, celebrated by the Country party as a single ancient constitution, were incompatible with the social order upon which commercial politeness depended and to which Hume's middling readers were so pleasantly accustomed. This defense, in addition, should be seen as a response to the Country agitations against Court Whig policies that erupted in London in the 1730s over the Excise Act and again the 1750s over the Jewish Naturalization Act and the loss of Minorca, agitations that appealed to members of the middling orders and that Hume saw as having had the potential to unleash radically destabilizing energies into the British social and political order akin to those seen in the popular movements of the English Civil War.[33]

A second reading of Hume that I aim to correct in this dissertation is suggested by Nicholas Phillipson, who holds that Hume regarded factions of religion as the most significant threat to the social and political order of his day.[34] Phillipson, somewhat like Forbes, Harris, and

---

[33] For more on popular Country-instigated urban uprisings, see George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848* New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), 51-52; Paul Langford, *The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 44-45. For discussions of the appeal that the Country held for the middling orders, see Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 50-67, 126-27, 246-254, 278-293, and 393-94; Bob Harris, *Politics and the Nation: Britain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 97-101.
[34] Phillipson, *David Hume*: *The Philosopher as Historian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 16-17, 29-30, and 65. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, other examples of the same misreading are provided in a more sustained way by Marc Arkin, "'The Intractable Principle:' David Hume, James Madison, Religion, and the Tenth Federalist," *The American Journal of Legal History* 39, no. 2 (1995); Jennifer Herdt, "Opposite Sentiments: Hume's Fear of Faction and the Philosophy of Religion," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 16, no. 3

Miller, regards Hume's *History* as a politically disinterested exercise in historical pedagogy, one directed toward making the prevailing order more resistant to the strains and appeal of factionalism. He thus reads Hume's *History* as an effort at reducing the danger of such factions by educating the British people about the relationship between commercial prosperity and social order. According to Phillipson, Hume's *History*:

> [W]as designed to encourage modern Britons to think about the stories they had been told about the history of civilization in their country, to ask whether there were not better ways of explaining it than those of party hacks, and to reflect on the disastrous political misunderstandings that could arise when political opinions were corrupted by an inadequate understanding of history.[35]

Hume's historical and political project, Phillipson continues, thus should be seen as one of introducing into the polite discourse of the middling ranks an understanding both of commerce as the best means to civilized refinement and social peace and of the extent to which that commerce depended upon what we would today call the modern state.[36] According to Phillipson, the danger to such a polite commercial order to which Hume was responding was the threat of religious factionalism.

To be fair, I share Phillipson's view that Hume was concerned about the fragility of commercial society and the threat of factionalism, and I appreciate his efforts at placing Hume within his broader discursive and institutional context. I will have much more to say on these issues in Chapters 3 through 5. Nevertheless, Phillipson ultimately misapprehends Hume's aim in the *Essays* and the *History*, seeing Hume as most concerned with the threats that religious

---

(1995); Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 2, *Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1999), 190-198. For a recent work that does not reduce Hume's concerns over faction to issues of religious factions, see Ryu Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).
[35] Phillipson, *David Hume*, 3.
[36] Phillipson, *David Hume*, 16-17, 21-22, 26-31, and 51-52.

factions posed to the social order of eighteenth century Britain. In his discussion of Hume's diagnosis of the causes of the English Civil Wars, Phillipson attributes to Hume the view that only "religious enthusiasm in its most militant form could break men's natural habits of obedience."[37] On Phillipson's account, then, it was Hume's conclusion that religious factionalism was the only type of factionalism that could threaten civil peace.

If that, however, were actually Hume's view, then presumably Hume would have had no worries about the immediate dangers of factional violence in eighteenth-century Britain, because religion had receded, in Hume's estimation at least, as a force capable of motivating such extreme behavior.[38] Given, however, that Hume does seem to have been worried about faction—a point that animates Phillipson's analysis as well as my own—his relatively sanguine attitude toward the religious factions of his day, coupled with a close reading of his *Essays*, suggests that he must have been concerned with some other form of faction, specifically, political faction.[39]

---

[37] Phillipson, *David Hume*, 85. See also Phillipson, *David Hume*, 65 ("So far as Hume was concerned, religious differences alone had the power to deflect the minds of men from the business of ordinary life and weaken their natural habits of obedience to the point where they were willing to rebel").

[38] Hume, "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic," in *Essays*, 51 ("Now, there has been a sudden and sensible change in the opinions of men within these last fifty years, by the progress of learning and of liberty. Most people, in this island, have divested themselves of all superstitious reverence to names and authority: The clergy have much lost their credit: Their pretensions and doctrines have been ridiculed; and even religion can scarcely support itself in the world"); "Of the Protestant Succession," in *Essays*, 508 ("during these last sixty years [since the Glorious Revolution] . . . even religious parties have been necessitated to lay aside their mutual rancor. . . .").

[39] In rejecting the idea that Hume regarded religious factions as the primary threat to the social and political order of his day, I do not mean to suggest that Hume did not see religion as at least a potentially dangerous social commitment. Instead, I am simply arguing that he did not see religious factionalism as a pressing source of social and political danger in his day. Interestingly enough, and to be entirely fair to Phillipson, there are points in his work where he does suggest that Hume was also concerned with political factions. Phillipson, *David Hume*, 58. The point, however, becomes lost in the course of Phillipson's argument, a result, I suspect, of Phillipson's insistence on hewing to the line that Hume must have been a political neutral. By maintaining

Although Hume of course recognized that religious factions could endanger social order, he regarded political factions that mixed elite interest and masses activated by commitment to speculative principles as the great threat to the social order of his own day. I will take up this point in Chapter 2, where I engage with the work of Mark Arkin and Jennifer Herdt, who have argued the same point as Phillipson in a more sustained fashion.

In addition, like the other line of scholarship I have identified, Phillipson fails to consider the particularly ideological nature both of Hume's historical argument and his broader aims. That is, he seems to insist that Hume's engagement with the serious political questions of his day was merely that of a disinterested philosopher. As Phillipson describes it, Hume's analysis was that of a ministerial Whig, but a ministerial Whig "bent on playing off the crude anti-intellectualism of ministerial propagandists against the intellectual strengths of opposition historiography." Whatever Phillipson might mean by that, the end result as he saw it was a history of late Tudor and early Stuart England "in which party historiographical prejudices had been refined philosophically to create a more impartial, more polite framework for a history of England."[40]

Phillipson's failure to grapple seriously with the possibility that Hume's ideological allegiances were to Court Whiggery seems especially difficult to understand, given that on his account, Hume's historical and political project was directed at explaining to middling British subjects the benefits of the Anglo-Scottish Union. According to Phillipson, by 1752, when Hume had begun work on the *History*, these benefits included the eradication of Jacobitism by the standing army, the taming of the aristocracy and the clergy by the Court's patronage machine; and a middling commercial order that was assuming pride of place in the social order thanks to

_____

that majority opinion, Phillipson is left casting about for some other villain against whom Hume must have been arguing.

[40] Phillipson, *David Hume*, 79.

the property- and expectations-securing effects of the state.[41] To the extent that Phillipson is correct about the substance of the lessons Hume was seeking to impart to his readers—and in large measure I think he was—then what Hume was teaching was Court Whiggery. Phillipson, however, is silent on the political and partisan implications of what he has identified as the aim of Hume's historical and political work. Finally, Phillipson's account fails to develop in a clear and adequate fashion what was at stake for Hume in his political and historical writings. As a result, his examination of Hume's work is often far too airy and abstract and at times seems to reduce its import to little more than the generation of more nourishing coffeehouse fare.

<div align="center">*</div>

The argument of this dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter 1, I provide a brief examination of Hume's life and career through the writing of the *History*. In the course of this chapter, I will also take a closer look at one of the more storied episodes of Hume's life: the threat of excommunication from the Church of Scotland that he faced in 1754 and 1755. This threat grew out of the struggle between the Calvinist traditionalists of the *kirk*'s—that is, the Church of Scotland's—Popular Party and Hume's friends in the church's modernizing Moderate Party, a struggle in which questions of church governance and the relationship between the *kirk* and the British government played a central role. Specifically, the Popular Party tended to hew to an independent Whiggish and Country view of the relationship between the *kirk* and the Court, while the Moderates tended to support the Court's efforts at bringing the Scottish church under greater centralized control.

To date, scholarship on the attempts to excommunicate Hume has tended to see those efforts in terms of the Popular Party's anger over Hume's disparaging treatment of seventeenth-

---

[41] Phillipson, *David Hume*, 29.

century Calvinism in the *History* and as a strike by the Popular Party against Hume's friends among the Moderates, who, it is likely, would have suffered some intra-ecclesial embarrassment from association with a demonstrated heretic. Although I have no quarrel with these readings, in the first chapter, I show that at least some of the unwanted attention Hume attracted from the Popular Party proceeded not strictly from conflicts over Hume's writings on religion, but also from the suspicion, as expressed by the Reverend Daniel MacQueen, that Hume supported the Court party's efforts at exerting greater control over the *kirk*. Such a position likely would have attracted the Popular Party's ire, given that the Popular Party opposed such efforts and the sympathies of its leadership rested with the Country party and independent Whiggery. MacQueen's *Letters on Mr. Hume's History of Great Britain*, I will argue, demonstrates that at least one of Popular Party's polemicists read Hume's *History* as a brief for the Court party's project of consolidating authority and sought to call him to account for that advocacy.

In Chapter 2, I make the case that Hume regarded political factions as the greatest threat to the stable social order of his day. This position, as I have also already indicated, runs counter to a prevailing conception in Hume scholarship that Hume regarded religious factions as the greatest threat to eighteenth-century British civil peace. This conception seems to be based on little more than Hume's low regard for factions of, as he put the matter, speculative principle and a reading of Hume that reduces his concerns about such factions to those animated by speculative *religious* principles. In the background, I have to confess, it strikes me that these readings end up relying on little more than the bare fact of Hume's uncontroverted status as an Enlightenment sceptic and apostate. That reliance, however, has prevented some Hume scholars from realizing the benefits that a fuller account of Hume's institutional, social, and discursive context might yield. In Chapter 2, I begin to provide that account with an examination of the

24

emergence of the modern fiscal-military state in Great Britain in the decades following the Glorious Revolution.

The prevailing understanding of Hume on faction is also marked by two interpretive errors. First, it simply ignores the amount of attention that Hume devoted in his work to political factions, including political factions of speculative principle. The more conventional accounts of Hume on faction also tend not to recognize that for Hume the most dangerous factions were not factions of speculative principle, but instead factions that mixed a leadership motivated by self-interest with a mass base committed to some abstract principle. In contrast to these readings, in Chapter 2, I show that Hume's writings on faction are best understood as a response to the Country party, which Hume saw as just such a mixed faction that opposed the emergence of the modern fiscal-military state in late Stuart and early Hanoverian England. It is that resistance from a mixed political faction, and not any kind of religious faction, that Hume regarded as the great danger to eighteenth-century Britain's polite commercial social life.[42] I will also argue that we should read Hume's discussions in the *History* of first the Puritans and later the Independents

---

[42] A possible objection to my conclusion is that Hume would have been inclined to regard the Jacobites as an even more significant threat, especially given that the uprising of 1745 happened during Hume's most intellectually productive years. While the '45 seems to have had some effect on Hume—he wrote the essay "Of the Protestant Succession" in response to it— attentiveness to Hume's audience can supply something of an answer to this objection. That is, given that Hume's political and historical work was aimed at members of the polite, middling ranks, particularly those engaged in politics within proper constitutional bounds, and given that the Jacobites tended not to receive much support from that segment of British society, efforts at persuading his audience to reject Jacobitism would not have served as a significant subject of discussion for Hume in his published works. As Paul Kléber Monod notes, mid-century support for Jacobitism tended to be limited to the landed classes and the lower orders. Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 269. In addition, Hume's surviving letters reveal little of his thoughts on Jacobitism. While the absence of discussions of Jacobitism in his correspondence might, indeed, be telling, it is hard to know how exactly was being said. Left, then, to the materials we have available, the only confident claim I can make is that as between Court and Country, Hume saw the Country and similar sites of opposition as the site of danger to social order.

as a more timely argument to his middling readers about the dangers that mass-based factions like the Country party posed to social order.

In Chapters 3 through 5, I develop my affirmative case that Hume should be regarded as ideologically committed to the project of Court Whiggery, a commitment that, I argue, proceeded from an antecedent devotion to the ethos of politeness that defined the social life of Great Britain's emergent middling orders. I develop Hume's embrace of this ethos in Chapter 3 and relate it to another storied period of Hume's life, his experience of and recovery from what pre-modern medicine termed the disease of the learned. In Hume's case, this condition, which is marked by, among other symptoms, a deep melancholy, nearly derailed his work on the *Treatise*. Employing the Nietzschean concept of the sickness, it is my position that Hume's melancholy proceeded from an overwhelming existential dread. This feeling, I contend, came over him as he came to recognize in the course of his work on the *Treatise* that his insistence on empiricism had driven him into a skepticism that left him incapable of providing philosophically satisfying foundations for even the most seemingly unassailable beliefs about life and physical reality, most notably causation, personal identity, and the existence and continuity of external objects. That skepticism, in turn, brought Hume to an effective paralysis, both intellectually and emotionally.

Of course, we know that Hume managed to formulate responses to this paralysis. Intellectually, faced with the prospect of a universe impervious to truly rigorous philosophical scrutiny, Hume retreated and found a redoubt of sorts for his inquiries in the assumptions of common life.[43] Hume found a similar answer for the more directly emotional effects of his work: the enjoyment of the polite and refined pleasures of his day. That is, Hume found in urbane, bourgeois distractions a response to the *ennui* he suffered for so many years, a point I see him

---

[43] For an excellent discussion of this point, see Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 9-33.

making in both the *Treatise* and his essay, "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion." As a result of

the beneficial effects those activities brought him, Hume became deeply protective of what he

regarded as the crucial predicate of the polite order of his day, the centralized state developed

and maintained by the Court.

In Chapter 4, I engage in an extended examination of the nature of the ethos I am

terming, alternatively, bourgeois politeness or commercial politeness, and discuss the social

changes that allowed for the emergence of this ethos. In the course of developing this portrait of

eighteenth-century politeness, I also bring to the foreground the role that Joseph Addison played

in the formulation of this ethos through his essays in *The Spectator*. In particular, I will argue

that, just as Hume sought to defend the Court party's project because of the role he saw that

project playing in the maintenance of a polite social order, thirty years earlier Addison had

sought to incorporate certain political attitudes into the substance of politeness as a way of

serving the interests of the establishment Whiggery that stands as the precursor to the Court

Whiggery of Walpole and the Pelhams.[44]

---

[44] As he does with the ideological nature of Hume's defense of mid-century commercial politeness, Phillipson similarly misses the partisan nature of Addisonian politeness. According to Phillipson polite periodicals like *The Spectator* arose to eradicate partisanship and "the fragmentation of opinion," in favor of a post-partisan political culture that would "check the spread of faction and zealotry and bring about the reformation of manners needed to secure the constitution." Phillipson, *David Hume*, 22-27. In somewhat contradictory fashion, however, Phillipson also criticizes Addison and his publishing partner Richard Steele because, according to Phillipson, their project of politeness was not directed toward generating a new, polite political culture, but instead simply politeness for its own sake. Phillipson, *David Hume*, 26. Indeed, on Phillipson's account it was exactly this deficiency in Addison's and Steele's work that Hume was seeking to correct in his essays. Phillipson, *David Hume*, 50-52. The problem with Phillipson's characterization of Addisonian politeness is that it fails to grasp the inherently partisan nature of Addison's and Steele's project in *The Spectator*, an effort designed to shore up the conception of the Court Whig project in the minds of middling readers. As I will argue in Chapter 4, *The Spectator* <u>did</u> address political issues directly, and when it did so it advanced a distinctly pro-monarchy, pro-Court, and pro-finance vision of British social and political life as the only one appropriate for polite subjects. To be sure, Addison and Steele did not make the

Following my study of eighteenth-century politeness, in Chapter 5, I engage in a close reading of Hume's *Treatise*, *Essays*, and *History* to demonstrate both Hume's deep commitment to the British ethos of commercial politeness and his association of that ethos with the strong, centralized state that had emerged in Great Britain following the Glorious Revolution and that was maintained by the project of Court Whiggery. From there, I will demonstrate that Hume's work in the *Treatise* and the *Essays* show him to have been a principled supporter of Court Whiggery, as evidenced by their shared support for established, order-producing authority; their mutual rejection of abstractions as a basis for government legitimacy; and their common view that the maintenance of the British constitution and social order depended upon the consolidation of power in the Court, most obviously through the use of royal patronage. In the course of this discussion, I will also respond to some objections I can anticipate to my position that we should regard Hume as ideologically committed to Court Whiggery. Finally, I will draw out the way in which Hume used his discussions of Saxon England to highlight for his contemporaries the undesirable nature of the Country party's beloved ancient constitution.

---

partisan nature of their project clear, but partisans often fail to do so. Phillipson, however, simply fails to consider that *The Spectator* was part of a deliberately partisan project, and, indeed, goes so far as to deny it. Phillipson, *David Hume*, 22. In doing so, he simply ignores the evidence of the particular political commitments that Addison and Steele were advancing in their *Spectator* essays. Moreover, not only was the project of *The Spectator* partisan, it was also directed at the creating the impression that the Court Whigs' project was unquestionably non-partisan. Indeed, the success of these essays was in no small measure that they were partisan without seeming partisan. Phillipson does not seem to grasp the extent to which Addison and Steele were seeking to create a polite political culture, albeit one so hegemonic that those who embraced it were utterly incapable of recognizing the object of their embrace as partisan. If successful, this project would have rendered readers of *The Spectator* nearly incapable of thinking their way out of the confines of the thought-world Addison and Steele were seeking to devise, and, indeed, given Phillipson's own seeming inability to see *The Spectator*'s political politeness for what it was, it would seem that any success that Addison and Steele had in crafting a hegemonic notion of political and social life has extended to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

At its core, this dissertation seeks to cast greater light on the ideological commitments of one of the most important thinkers of modernity, one whose work marrying a systematic philosophy to a philosophically and historically informed social theory extended well beyond an epistemological and institutional critique of revealed religion. Beyond my immediate project of more fully situating Hume's work within his institutional, social, and discursive contexts, however, I am also offering a means of conceiving of the nature, scope, and meaning of the Enlightenment that has not, as best I can tell, been seriously considered by historians of the period. Specifically, I see my study of Hume as an access point for a broader study of the Enlightenment as a project in the manufacture and reproduction of a hegemonic bourgeois common sense, a common sense that is, itself, partial and interested.

As a preliminary matter, the approach to the study of the Enlightenment that I am proposing responds to the still all-too-common claim that the Enlightenment is best understood as a project in emancipating humanity from the domination of revealed religion and clerical authorities. This account of the Enlightenment, classically associated with Peter Gay, continues to be proffered by prominent historians of the period like Jonathan Israel and theorists of liberalism and secular modernity like the late Richard Rorty, and unfortunately seems capable of withstanding all evidence to the contrary. On this view, the Enlightenment was the first major victory for the forces of religious toleration, religious disestablishment, and secularism, as well as human freedom more broadly; in the estimation of advocates of this position, it is in terms of these goals and accomplishments that the Enlightenment should be regarded.[45]

---

[45] See, for example, Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York, 1966), xi, ("The philosophes' experience, I discovered, was a dialectical struggle for autonomy, an attempt to assimilate the two pasts they had inherited—Christian and pagan—to pit them

In recent years, quite a bit of historical work has been done that challenges the claim that religious toleration arose out of the Enlightenment.[46] This work demonstrates that, rather than developing out of a concerted Enlightenment project, religious toleration emerged instead as an early-modern *modus vivendi* in places like England and the Netherlands, or out of the political-theological project of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English and American religious

---

against one another and thus to secure their independence. I see the philosophes' rebellion succeeding in both of its aims: theirs was a paganism directed against their Christian inheritance and dependent upon the paganism of classical antiquity, but it was also a *modern* paganism, emancipated from classical thought as much as from Christian dogma"); and Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, *Philosophy and the Making of Modernity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11, ("[T] Radical Enlightenment, whether on an atheistic or deistic basis, rejected all compromise with the past and sought to sweep away existing structures entirely, rejecting the Creation as traditionally understood in Judeo-Christian civilization, and the intervention of a providential God in human affairs, denying the possibility of miracles, and reward and punishment in an afterlife, scorning all forms of ecclesiastical authority, and refusing to accept that there is any God-ordained social hierarchy, concentration of privilege or land-ownership in noble hands, or religious sanction for monarchy"). To be fair, there is a crucial distinction between Israel and Gay in that Israel, unlike Gay, does not see the Enlightenment as a unitary phenomenon. Rather, on his account there was a materialist, anti-clerical, atheistic or at least deistic "radical" Enlightenment; and another, "moderate" Enlightenment that held that "philosophy's scope must be limited and reason reconciled with faith and tradition." Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford, 2006), 10. Nevertheless, Israel holds that the radical Enlightenment should be seen as the more genuine expression of Enlightenment, as that which emancipated humanity from the irrationality and oppression of traditional Western monotheism, while the moderate Enlightenment ought to be seen as a weak-kneed and mealy-mouthed appeaser of the retrograde forces that the radical Enlightenment was seeking to vanquish outright. For Rorty's characterization of the Enlightenment as a project concerned at its core with banishing religion from the public sphere and restricting it to a private one, see "The Continuity between the Enlightenment and 'Postmodernism,'" in *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, eds. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hans Reill (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); and *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, 1999), 168.

[46] For an excellent review of current scholarly works that examine the historical emergence of a lived practice of toleration and that thus challenge, albeit unintentionally, the claim that religious toleration was an achievement of Enlightenment thought, see Jeffrey R. Collins, "Redeeming the Enlightenment: New Histories of Religious Toleration," *The Journal of Modern History*, 81/3 (2009), 607–636.

radicals.[47] In challenging the claim that religious toleration arose from the Enlightenment, these works have provided an alternative and strongly documented narrative to account for the emergence of toleration. They have not, however, countered the notion that it was with questions of religious toleration, superstition, and religious enthusiasm that Enlightenment figures were primarily concerned.

In contrast to the account of seminal figures like Gay, Israel, and Rorty, I propose that the Enlightenment should not be regarded solely or primarily as a project in undermining the authority of revealed religion and clerical authority. Rather, the Enlightenment is best understood as both a theoretical and polemical exercise directed toward establishing the ideological hegemony of an emergent bourgeois order and the strong centralized state authority upon which that order has rested. In its theoretical dimension, the Enlightenment was an extended argument among intellectuals of various sorts about the preconditions for the construction and reproduction of a vibrant and expansive polite commercial social order. Although Enlightenment figures differed in their formulations of how best to achieve and maintain that order, all of them are properly seen as desiring that end and invested in determining how best to secure it. In this way, then, the Enlightenment in its theoretical aspect was concerned neither primarily nor solely with clericalism or an assault on revealed religion, but with identifying and securing those norms and institutions upon which a stable polite, commercial social order rested and that many in the modern world now take for granted.

---

[47] On the former point see Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007) and Andrew Murphy, *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America* (University Park, 2001); on the latter see, again, Murphy, as well as Teresa M. Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

On its polemical side, the Enlightenment sought to argue to a largely middling reading public for the superiority of a polite commercial order and the norms and institutions upon which that order relied. These arguments often, but not always, presented this bourgeois order and its predicates as mere common sense and plainly and obviously rational, a mode of presentation that can be seen in texts from Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophique* and *Dictionnaire Philosophique* to Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung?*, as well as in Hume's support of the Court Whig project. That order, it was also claimed, promised liberation from the prejudice, enthusiasm, and irrationality that marked a variety of contrary visions of social life, whether distinctly religious or more conventionally regarded—from our perspective, at least—as expressions of secular political commitments. Accordingly, on my reading, the Enlightenment's polemical project was broadly concerned both with shoring up a particular vision of social life and with delegitimizing those modes of discourse and potentially countervailing sites of social authority that ran counter to that vision. To be sure, clerical authorities were counted among the competitors to that vision, but so too were aristocratic elements as well as more popular religious and political enthusiasts and demagogues. It is against this full range of such competitors to a commercial and bourgeois order, competitors that included the Country party and the Patriot movement that Hume opposed, that the intellectual and rhetorical arms of the Enlightenment were arrayed.

The interpretation I am offering of the Enlightenment project both embraces and parts company with the work of scholars like John Robertson and Istvan Hont. It embraces their work in that they have conceived of the Enlightenment, both in its Scottish and in its more general expressions, as a project in theorizing about the preconditions for social and economic

modernization and in arguing for the benefits of commercial society.[48] Moreover, like Robertson, I see the Enlightenment as a unitary movement concerned with the conditions for and preservation of the kind of commercial order that had emerged in Great Britain and the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, and that had in the eighteenth century become the envy and desire of Europeans more broadly. It is in this way that I see as inadequate the notions of plural Enlightenments advanced by John Pocock and the late Roy Porter—who have rejected the notion of a singular Enlightenment in favor of a variety of national Enlightenments—and Pocock, Israel, and David Sorkin—who have seen distinct conservative, moderate, radical, and even religious Enlightenments.[49] Instead, the Enlightenment is best seen as having been unified

---

[48] On these points, see John Robertson, "The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, eds. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 151-177; Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8 and 28-33; Istvan Hont, "The 'Rich Country-Poor Country' Debate in Scottish Classical Political Economy," in *Wealth and Virtue*, 271-281; and Hont, "The Early Enlightenment Debate on Commerce in Luxury," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[49] For Pocock's discussion of a conservative, English Enlightenment, see, for example, "Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England," in *L'età dei lumi. Studi storici sul Settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, vol. 1, eds. Rafelle Ajello and others (Naples: Casa Editrice Jovene, 1985) and *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 1, *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5-7. For Roy Porter on the distinctly English Enlightenment, see "The Enlightenment in England," in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, eds. Porter and Michael Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For Israel's work on the radical and moderate Enlightenments, see the already-mentioned *Radical Enlightenment* and *Enlightenment Contested*, as well as his *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For Sorkin on the religious Enlightenment, see *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). An excellent summary of the efforts at treating the Enlightenment as a plural phenomenon can be found in John Robertson's *The Case for the Enlightenment*, 3-8 and 14-28, although Robertson and I differ in that he reads Israel's statement of the Enlightenment as singular one, with the radical Enlightenment as the only true Enlightenment, while I parse Israel differently and see him as identifying more than one Enlightenment, drawing a distinction between a more genuine and honest radical Enlightenment and a compromised moderate one.

by its efforts at securing the predicates of modern commercial activity and the cultural hegemony of bourgeois common sense, with expressions of national difference proceeding from the particular obstacles and opportunities for the emergence or maintenance of that activity and hegemony in discrete national contexts. Similarly, the extent to which this unified Enlightenment project can be said to have been conservative, moderate, radical, or religious arises from the specific cultural and social contexts that the advocates, theorists, and polemicists of commercial bourgeois social order confronted in various eighteenth-century European contexts. Hume's work—whether the notion of political legitimacy he developed in his *Treatise*, the *History*, and essays like "Of the First Principles of Government" and "Of the Original Contract"; his views on political partisanship in the *Treatise*, the *History*, and essays like "Of Parties in General," "Of the Parties of Great Britain," "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," and "Of the Independency of Parliament"; or his thoughts on political economy in essays like "Of Commerce," "Of Money," and "Of the Balance of Trade"—should be seen as a major part of this Enlightenment project, but it is my hypothesis that the interpretive approach to the Enlightenment that I am offering can and should be extended to other luminaries of the period like Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot and his fellow *encyclopédistes*, Smith, and Kant, to name only some of the most significant Enlightenment figures.

Despite this extensive agreement with Hont and especially Robertson on the unity, nature, and aims of the Enlightenment, however, I also differ from their assessment in the crucial respect already stated: I see the Enlightenment not simply as a disinterested conversation among intellectuals about the best means of achieving and maintaining a vibrant bourgeois social order, but as a deeply ideological movement directed at convincing the reading publics of eighteenth-century Europe of the unquestionable superiority of the norms and practices of an emergent but

in places already robust bourgeois social order. To be sure, in one respect, scholars of the Enlightenment have recognized this point: the citizens of the Republic of Letters obviously sought to convince their relevant reading publics of the uncontestable desirability of bourgeois pursuits like commerce and consumption and values like toleration, agreeableness, and disinterested reasonableness. Unlike earlier scholars of the Enlightenment, however, all of whom seem to assume that Enlightenment writers were not themselves interested partisans with their own ideological agendas, I have concluded that the Enlightenment might best be read not as a dispassionate exercise in theorizing about and arguing for a more just or rational social order—as John Robertson puts it uncritically, as the "the commitment to understanding, and hence to advancing, the causes and conditions of *human* betterment in this word"—but instead as a project that proceeded from partial interests and that took sides in the social and political controversies of the day.[50]

Simply put, my approach asks scholars to consider the extent to which Enlightenment figures can be read as eighteenth-century bourgeois ideologists. In the immediate work, then, instead of comparing and contrasting Hume's views on one or more seminal topics with those of his intellectual contemporaries or predecessors—be it the classical republican tradition that Pocock examines, the Spinozism upon which Israel focuses, or the interplay of Augustinianism and Epicureanism that Robertson develops—I have sought to situate Hume within the context of live political arguments over the desirability of a not yet fully emergent commercial order, the fiscal-military state upon which that order depended, the ideological challengers to that order and state, and Hume's efforts at convincing his readers that the positions those challengers advanced lay well beyond the bounds of any polite, self-respecting bourgeois subject's consideration. It is

---

[50] Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 28 (emphasis added).

my view that our understanding of the Enlightenment would benefit greatly if a similar approach were extended to its other key figures, whether French, British, German, or Italian, and whether radical, moderate, conservative, or religious.[51]

Of course, my approach has something to offer the broader scholarship on the Enlightenment only if it first of all can adequately grasp Hume's thought on the problems and possibilities of a distinctly modern social order. Failing in that enterprise, it could and should be rejected for extension to other major Enlightenment figures like Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, and Kant; succeeding, it should be extended to the study of such figures. Accordingly, it is to my analysis of Hume's thought on social order and its relationship to his life, commitments, and interests that I now turn.

---

[51] For a thoughtful and compelling, albeit brief, treatment of the French Enlightenment as a project of bourgeois progress, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 2012), 295-305. My thanks to David Waldman for referring me to Professor Wood's work.

CHAPTER 1

KIRK, COURT, AND MODERATES

In a June, 1755 letter to his old friend Allan Ramsay, David Hume noted, "I am preparing for the Day of Wrath, and have already bespoken a number of discreet families, who have promised to admit me after I shall be excommunicated. . . ."[1] At the time Hume wrote to Ramsay, members of the Church of Scotland's orthodox Calvinist Popular Party had been calling on the General Assembly—the church's governing body—to excommunicate Hume.[2] When the Assembly took up the issue at its 1755 meeting, however, it referred the question to its Committee on Overtures, which did not recommend excommunication to the Assembly's full body. Instead, the Church's Moderate Party, led by William Robertson, convinced the committee to pass a general resolution against the "Contagion" of "Infidelity and Immorality." The resolution named no names, passed unanimously in the General Assembly, and allowed the issue of Hume's excommunication to drop for that year.[3] Never pleased with a favorable result, Hume observed to Ramsay that although "my damnation is postponed a twelvemonth . . . next Assembly will surely be upon me."[4] Hume's seeming apprehension, however, was almost

---

[1] Hume to Allan Ramsay, June 1755 (surmised), 1:224.

[2] Members of the Popular Party have been referred to by both their contemporaries and ours using terms like "evangelical" and, as their enemies called them, "Highflyers" or the "Highflying Party." In this work I shall avoid referring to them as "evangelicals," in part because that risks identifying them too closely with other religious movements of the North Atlantic world of their time and in part because the term runs the risk of confusing their views with those of religious positions more contemporary with us. I also avoid the "Highflying" terms because of its generally derogatory nature. Instead, I will refer to the members of the Popular Party as precisely that, or as "traditionalist Calvinists," to distinguish them from their moderate "brethren." As Andrew Drummond and James Bulloch note, the Popular Party employed this name because they favored the rights of local parishes to select their clergymen. Drummond and Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1973), 64.

[3] The full text of the Committee of Overture's resolution can be found in Ernest Campbell Mossner, *Life of David Hume* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954), 343.

[4] Hume to Allan Ramsay, June 1755 (surmised), 1:224.

certainly an expression of sardonic bemusement; he must have recognized that the social world in which writers could be excommunicated for their views had already passed in Scotland, while a more polite and urbane social order was already well on its way toward coming into being.[5]

Despite the likelihood that the threat of excommunication was not a serious one, scholars studying Hume have often treated this episode as a critical one in Hume's struggles with orthodox Christianity. In doing so, they have usually focused their attention on the extent to which those threats proceeded both from opposition to Hume's skeptical attitudes toward the conventional religious views of his day, especially in their Calvinist form, and from an effort by the traditionalists to embarrass leaders of the moderate wing of the *kirk*. On this later head, commentators note that those pushing to censure Hume sought to embarrass the moderates by drawing attention to their relationship with someone who publicly held heterodox religious views; was widely associated with a philosophical skepticism that left no room for the metaphysical and eschatological claims of orthodox Christianity; and had, in his *History*, expressed sympathy for features of Roman Catholicism and disdain for both the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century and the Calvinists of seventeenth-century Britain. Hume's assault on these latter figures was especially problematic for him, given that members of the Popular Party saw the Puritans and Covenanters as not only their institutional and doctrinal forebears, but as champions of British liberty.[6]

---

[5] James Harris agrees with this conclusion, noting that Hume "was more amused than anything" by the effort at excommunicating him. Harris, *Hume*, 356.

[6] On this point, see Harris, *Hume*, 353-61; Ryu Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 132; Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 65-67; James Buchan, *Capital of the Mind: How Edinburgh Changed the World* (London: John Murray, 2003), 93-103; and Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 336-55

While there is ample reason to point to these aspects of Hume's writings as bases for the unwanted attention Hume received from the Popular Party, an aspect of the Popular Party's attack that seems to have been missed is the extent to which traditionalist ire toward Hume proceeded not merely from his skepticism, his irreligion, and his criticism of Calvinist enthusiasts, but also from the more positive statements he had made in the first volume of the *History* concerning seventeenth-century exercises of royal prerogative. Exactly that support, however, figured in Daniel MacQueen's *Letters on Mr. Hume's History of Great Britain*, one of the central critiques of Hume's works from a member of the Popular Party.[7] To date, however, little attention has been paid to that aspect of MacQueen's denunciation of the *History*. Similarly, the possibility that the Popular Party's attacks on Hume proceeded from his even-handed treatment of royal prerogative in the *History* has not been considered.[8] On the reading, I am suggesting, the Popular Party's assault on Hume proceeded not just as a function of his heterodox religious views or vicariously as a response to his relationship with the leaders of the Moderate Party, but because Hume was, himself, seen as arguing for the kind of centralized state

---

[7] Daniel MacQueen, *Letters on Mr. Hume's History of Great Britain* (1756), in *Early Responses to Hume's* History of England, 2nd ed., rev'd, ed. James Fieser (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 1:108-32.

[8] On the lack of attention to MacQueen's criticism of the *History* on the basis of its treatment of the conflict between Charles I and the Commons, I again refer to the works of Harris, Susato, Sher, Buchan, and Mossner cited above. Duncan Forbes does raise the issue of MacQueen's criticism of Hume's discussion of British liberty and royal prerogative, but not in the context of the dispute in the *kirk* over Hume and his connection to the moderates. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 291 n. 1. Forbes engages with MacQueen as part of a larger discussion about the Whiggish tendency to either attack or dismiss any history of England that was not obviously Whiggish in its support of the ancient constitution. Forbes reads MacQueen as concluding that Hume was inconsistent in his adjudication of questions of royal prerogative and parliamentary right in the first volume of the *History*, sometimes seeming to side with the Commons and sometimes with Charles I. A closer reading of MacQueen reveals that he concluded that Hume had in fact landed on the side of Charles I's claims of royal prerogative.

authority that the leaders of the Popular Party were resisting and the moderates were abetting in the context of the *kirk*'s patronage controversy.

In this chapter, I will bring to the fore the direct role that Hume's social and political thought, as articulated in the *History*, had in efforts by the Popular Party to involve Hume in their conflict with the *kirk*'s moderate wing. The moderates—a group of clergy that included such pivotal figures as the already-mentioned William Robertson, as well as Hugh Blair, Alexander Carlyle, Adam Ferguson, and John Home—were involved in a dispute between the Calvinist traditionalists, who sought to protect the perquisites of the *kirk* from the encroachments of the civil authority, and those—like the Duke of Islay—who sought to bring the *kirk* under greater control by an increasingly centralizing British government; it was with the latter that the moderate clergy allied themselves. In examining Hume's relationship to this conflict, I am providing an initial test case in my argument that Hume ought to be read as a committed supporter of the project of Court Whiggery. The scholarship to date on both Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment more broadly—in this case, the scholarship related to the patronage controversy in the *kirk*—has failed adequately to grasp the role that Hume's ideological support for Court Whiggery, especially in this instance as expressed in his *History*, might have played in the threats to excommunicate him. I begin with a brief discussion of Hume's early life and intellectual work, as well as an examination of an earlier episode in which party politics played a role in Hume's efforts at securing his economic and social position, before moving to a discussion of Hume's work as a writer of polite essays and his once-magisterial *History*. From there, I develop the contours of the conflict between the Calvinist traditionalists and the moderates and situate the traditionalists' threats to censure Hume within the context of the controversy over *kirk* governance and the *kirk*'s relationship with the British government.

40

Hume's remarks on royal power in the *History* would have been reasonably read as commenting upon that controversy and should be seen as a part of the explanation for why Hume inspired the enmity of the Popular Party. This analysis will, in turn, begin to point toward my reading of Hume as a committed supporter of the project of Court Whiggery, a political commitment that proceeded both from Hume's philosophical work and the existential concerns that they generated.

THE AMBITIONS AND REVERSALS OF A MAN OF LETTERS

As he recounted in his brief autobiographical sketch, "My Own Life," Hume was born on "the 26th of April, 1711, old style, at Edinburgh," the son of Joseph Home, laird of Ninewells, and the former Katherine Falconer.[9] Although Hume came from an established family related to the Earl of Home, the Homes were not rich. Consequently, given that Hume was the second of two sons, he grew up expecting that he would need to make his own way in the world, albeit with a slight social and financial cushion from his family.[10] In light of his obvious intellectual gifts, Hume matriculated at the University of Edinburgh at the same time as his brother, John, two years David's senior, and he reported that he "passed through the ordinary course of education with success."[11]

---

[9] David Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxii; Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 23-25. "Home" and "Hume" were variant spellings of the family name, and it was only in 1734, while working in Bristol, that Hume formally changed the spelling of his name from "Home" to "Hume" as a phonetic concession to the Englishmen around him. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 6, 90. In contrast, Hume's older brother, John, retained the "Home" spelling. *Ibid*, 6.

[10] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxii. Mossner calculates that Hume's inheritance probably left him with an income of "somewhat less than £50 annually." Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 25.

[11] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 39; Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxii.

His family tried to steer Hume toward a career in law, a vocation many of the Home men had pursued, and so, after leaving the university in 1725 or 1726 without a degree, Hume spent three years in the private study of law.[12] In this period, however, Hume also pursued his passion for poetry, history, and philosophy, and as he put it in a famous passage from his short autobiography, "while [his family] fancied I was poring upon Voet and Vinnis, Cicero and Virgil were the authors which I was secretly devouring."[13] Hume reported in a letter several years later that during this period his growing acquaintance with philosophy led to the growth of "a certain Boldness of Temper," one "not enclin'd to submit to any Authority in these Subjects, but led me to seek out some new Medium, by which Truth might be establisht." This boldness, Hume went on to report, "open'd up to [him] a new Scene of Thought, which transported [him] beyond Measure, & made [him], with an Ardor natural to young men, throw up every other Pleasure or Business to apply entirely to it." Hume put all thoughts of studying law behind him, and "cou'd think of no other way of pushing [his] Fortune in the World, but that of a Scholar & Philosopher."[14]

At the age of roughly eighteen, then, Hume set himself on a course to make his fortune as a man of letters, a course marked by a committed independence of thought. For the next three or four years, Hume dedicated himself as much as practicable to the study of philosophy and what would become his *Treatise of Human Nature*. He also, however, pursued his studies with a fervor that bore some unpleasant consequences for his health. As Hume described, after some months "[his] Ardor seem'd in a moment to be extinguisht."[15] Hume sought help from his physician, who joked that Hume had contracted "the Disease of the Learned" and prescribed "a

---

[12] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 39, 52-54.
[13] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxiii.
[14] Hume to Dr. George Cheyne (surmised), 1734, 1:13.
[15] *Ibid.*

Course of Bitters & Anti-Hysteric Pills. Drunk an English Pint of Claret Wine every Day, & rode 8 to 10 Scotch Miles."[16] Although his health at first improved somewhat, by the spring of 1731 Hume was exhibiting a disturbingly ravenous appetite, and his health continued to fluctuate until late 1733 or early 1734. At that time, Hume decided that what he really needed was "Business & Diversion," as an antidote to the distemper that "Study & Idleness" only exacerbated. As he put it, "I resolved to seek out a more active Life, tho' I could not quit my Pretensions in Learning, but with my last Breath, to lay them aside for some time, in order the more effectually to resume them."[17] I will have more to say on Hume's bout with the disease of the learned and his early work on the *Treatise* in Chapter 3.

The brief foray into the world of affairs appeared to do Hume a world of good in very short order, although not in the way he might have expected. In March 1734, he arrived in Bristol and took a clerical job with a merchant, although he had expected that the job would send him to the four corners of the world on his master's business. Growing disgusted with the writing style of his employer, Hume left Bristol after having been there for only "a few Months."[18] Deciding on a return to letters, Hume traveled to France, stopping in Paris before settling first in Rheims and later La Flèche, where he composed the *Treatise*.[19] Hume spent three years in France working on his frontal assault on the methods and conclusions of the Western philosophical tradition, although he certainly took time to become acquainted with his Gallic hosts. Writing to his friend Michael Ramsay, Hume commented on the politeness of the French, which he saw as

---

[16] *Ibid*, 1:14.

[17] *Ibid*, 1:17. Mossner suggests that Hume's departure from Scotland in pursuit of a brief tenure as a man of commerce might have proceeded from accusations that he had fathered a child out of wedlock and was seeking to escape his obligations to the child's mother, Agnes Galbraith. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 81-83.

[18] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxiii; Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 88-91.

[19] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxiii-xxxiv.

"real Politeness"—what he described as "Softness of Temper, & a sincere inclination to oblige and be serviceable"—in contrast to the merely outward displays of politeness he saw among the English.[20] To be fair, Hume conceded that the French performances of politeness often had an air of unreality about them, but he still appreciated the way they "serve to polish the ordinary Kind of People & prevent Rudeness & Brutality."[21] Already, then, in complimenting the manners of the French, Hume provided an early insight into his concerns for politeness and social refinement, concerns that would later come on for display in both his essays and the *History*.

Completing the *Treatise* in 1737, Hume returned to England where he looked for publishers. After nearly a year of investigating and negotiating, Hume published Books I and II at the end of 1738, at which point he returned to Scotland to await word of the work's reception.[22] Unfortunately—at least as far as Hume described it in one of the most-quoted passages from his brief autobiography—the *Treatise* "fell *dead-born from the press*, without reaching such distinction as even to excite a murmur from the zealots."[23] Indeed, although Hume's *Treatise* is now seen as one of the most significant works of modern philosophy, both on its own merits and for the effect its argument had on Immanuel Kant, in Hume's own lifetime it went through only one edition with a print run of one thousand copies, for which Hume received a total of £50.[24] Hume's desire for financial independence and the plaudits of the learned would have to be satisfied on another attempt.

---

[20] Hume to Michael Ramsay, Rheims, 12 September 1734, 1:20.
[21] *Ibid*. 1:20-21.
[22] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxiv. Hume published the third book of the *Treatise* in 1740.
[23] *Ibid*. (emphasis in the original).
[24] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 113, 137-38. To be clear, some controversy exists among scholars of Kant about exactly which of Hume's works served to wake Kant from his "dogmatic slumber," the *Treatise of Human Nature* or the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. For one discussion that comes down firmly on the side of the *Treatise*, see Lewis White Beck, "A

A taste, although only a taste, of success was not too long in coming. Having retired to the family estate in Scotland to continue his studies, Hume began working in the far more popular polite literary form of the essay, and in 1741 and 1742, he published his two-volume *Essays Moral and Political*.[25] According to Hume, writing more than thirty years later, the *Essays* were "favorably received, and soon made me entirely forget my disappointment."[26] In a 1742 letter to his friend and mentor Henry Home—later Lord Kames—Hume reported that the *Essays* sold out in London, according to "two Letters from English Gentlemen of my Acquaintance. There is a Demand for them…."[27] As I will argue, however, I take Hume's move to more polite literary forms like the essay and history to have proceeded not solely from a desire for financial security but also out of his desire to advance arguments for Hume's commitment to Court Whiggery to the middling audience that both consumed polite literature and that was also attracted to the program of the Country party and the Patriot movement.

Although Hume's efforts with his essays proved more immediately successful than his *Treatise*, even that success was not able to stave off his need to pursue gainful employment. In 1739, following the flat reception of his *Treatise*, Hume had written to his friend George Carre, asking him to recommend Hume for a job as tutor to the young Lord Haddington and his brother.[28] It appears nothing came of this request, but almost five years later, Hume was approached about serving as a travelling tutor for another charge. In this case, however, Hume declined the request because he was then being considered for a chair in philosophy at

---

Prussian Hume and a Scottish Kant," in *Essays on Hume and Kant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 111-29.

[25] For more on both essays and histories as quintessentially polite genres, see Chapter 5, n. 8.

[26] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxiv.

[27] Hume to Henry Home, Ninewells, 13 June 1742, in *New Letters of David Hume*, eds. Raymond Kiblansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 10.

[28] Hume to Carre, Ninewells, 12 November 1739, 1:35-36; Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 149.

Edinburgh. This opportunity, however, proved to be yet another instance when Hume's considerable talents met with rejection. In 1744, University of Edinburgh Lord Provost John Coutts asked Hume to stand for the chair in Ethics and Pneumatical Philosophy, and Archibald Stewart, who succeeded Coutts as provost that year, also favored Hume's candidacy. The ultimate decision, however, rested in the hands of the Edinburgh town council, and by the end of 1744, the council faced concerted opposition to Hume's candidacy, based on his "Heresy, Deism, Scepticism, [and] Atheism." By the early spring of 1745, despite the best efforts of Hume's friends and allies in Edinburgh, the anti-Hume movement had gained substantial momentum. The opposition to Hume even included Scottish intellectual luminaries like Francis Hutcheson and William Leechman, both professors at Glasgow, who, according to Hume, had described Hume as "Unfit" for the position.[29] In April, the town council elected Hutcheson to the chair, but Hutcheson surprised the council by declining the position. At that point, the council decided to defer its decision and seek the advice of the clergy.[30]

No contemporaneous record of the meeting between the council and the ministers exists, but in a letter to Henry Home, Hume reported that the Reverend William Wishart led the charge against Hume, by "pervert[ing] & misrepresent[ing]" Hume's views.[31] The Reverend Robert Wallace, who would later become a leader of the Moderate Party, rose to Hume's defense. Wishart's forces, however, carried the vote, and the ministers collectively advised the town council against approving Hume for the chair. Sensing defeat, Hume wrote to Lord Provost Stewart on June 1, 1745, and asked to have his candidacy withdrawn, but the letter arrived too late. On June 5, 1755, the town council voted to give the chair to Professor William Cleghorn,

---

[29] Hume to William Mure, Edinburgh, 4 August 1744, 1:57-58.
[30] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 157-58.
[31] Hume to Henry Home, Weldehall, 13 June 1745, 1:15.

who has been occupying the chair during the vacancy.[32] Almost seven years later, opposition

stymied a second attempt to secure an academic appointment for Hume, that time for the chair in

Logic at the University of Glasgow.

A SEAT IN THE ENGLISH PARNASSUS

Following his failure to secure the chair at Edinburgh, Hume took the less fulfilling

position of tutor to the "mad" Marquess of Annandale, which he held for less than a year, for

reasons suggested by the Marquess's sobriquet. After terminating his tutelage of the marquess,

---

[32] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 160. Ernest Mossner and John Price have argued that partisan politics might have played a role in scuttling Hume's candidacy, as Cleghorn was the candidate of the Squadrone faction of Scottish Whigs while Hume was seen as the candidate of the rival Argethelian faction, a faction allied with the Walpole ministry and headed by John Campbell, the second duke of Argyll, and Archibald Campbell, the earl of Ilay and later the third dukes of Argyll. Mossner and Price, introduction to *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*, by David Hume, eds. Mossner and Price (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967). Mossner and Price effectively reduce Hume's failure to secure the seat to the divide between the Squadrone and the Argethelians. Mossner and Price, introduction to *A Letter from a Gentleman*, xi-xii. Mossner's and Price's position is not without some evidence. University appointments in Scotland were a matter of political patronage and deep partisan interest, and at the time Hume was standing for the chair at Edinburgh the Squadrone, led by the fourth marquis of Tweeddale, had secured some leverage over the distribution of political patronage in Scotland, a result of the fall of the Walpole ministry in 1742 and its replacement by a ministry led by the Patriot Whigs John Carteret and Spencer Compton, the first earl of Wilmington. Roger L. Emerson, "The 'Affair' at Edinburgh and the 'Project' at Glasgow: The Politics of Hume's Attempts to Become a Professor," in *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, eds. M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 1-22; Harris, *Hume*, 207. Nevertheless, as Richard Sher has pointed out, the opposition to Hume came at least as much from Argethelians like Wishart as it did from Squadrone partisans, a fact that Sher attributes to Hume's heterodox views. Sher, "Professors of Virtue: The Edinburgh Chair," in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 105-06. Harris also adds Hutcheson and Leechamn to the list of Argethelians who opposed Hume. Harris, *Hume*, 207. Emerson and Harris have sought to rehabilitate the Mossner and Price position, plausibly arguing that the split within the Argethelian party over Hume's heterodoxy provided the Squadrone with an opportunity to appoint their man, Cleghorn. Emerson, "The 'Affair' at Edinburgh," 9-14; Harris, *Hume*, 207. On the close relationship between the Walpole ministry and the Argethelians see Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 10 n. 7.

Hume assumed a position on the staff of Lt. General James St. Clair, who was about to embark on campaign against the French in Canada as part of the War of the Austrian Succession.[33] Hume looked forward to this "Romantic Adventure" and the generous—"10s a day, Perquisites, & no Expences"—remuneration it promised, but bad weather intervened, and St. Clair's party never made it out of the English Channel.[34] Instead, in September 1746, St. Clair's forces were ordered to mount an invasion of Brittany, and Hume went along as the general's aide-de-camp. The campaign in France, however, bore little fruit, and St. Clair and his forces returned to England in late October.

Toward the end of 1747, St. Clair again approached Hume, whom he asked to accompany him on a military embassy to Vienna and Turin, a mission intended to ensure that the resources the British were providing their anti-French allies in the War of the Austrian Succession were being put to proper use.[35] Although finding the offer merely "agreeable" rather than "profitable," Hume accepted it. As he informed his friend James Oswald, he wanted the opportunity to view "Courts & Camps," on the off chance that he might one day secure the kind of leisure that would finally grant him his goal of a life as a man of letters. In particular, Hume noted that he had "long had an intention, in my riper years, of composing some History," but he felt that he needed more first-hand experience of military operations and political machinations before he would be qualified to embark on such a project.[36]

Apart from the perspective on worldly affairs that the embassy offered Hume, it also gave him his first real taste of the financial independence he had been craving his entire adult life. As

---

[33] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 188.
[34] Hume to Alexander Home, Portsmouth, 23 May 1746, 1:90; Hume to John Home, Quiberon Bay, 4 October 1746, 1:94-95; Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 191-93.
[35] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 209.
[36] Hume to James Oswald, London, 29 January 1748, 1:108-09.

he reported in "My Own Life," "my Appointments, with my Frugality, had made me reach a Fortune, which I called independent, though most of my Friends were inclined to smile when I said so: In short, I was now master of near a thousand pounds."[37] Thus Hume closed the 1740s having gone some ways toward achieving one of his two primary life goals. The life of an acclaimed man of letters, however, would have to wait a bit longer. While in Europe, Hume's two newest works, *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*—which was largely a popularization of the epistemology of his earlier *Treatise*—and *Three Essays, Moral and Political*, saw publication. Hume reported that the first was "entirely overlooked and neglected," the other meeting "not with a much better reception."[38]

For the first two years following his return to Great Britain, Hume lived with his brother on the family estate. It was during this period that Hume's works began drawing public attention and sales began to rise. By 1751, the *Philosophical Enquiries* was in its third edition, and that same year, he published the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, a popularized form of the *Treatise*'s moral philosophy. Also in 1751, following his brother's marriage, Hume moved from the family estate to Edinburgh, where he began his friendships with Blair, Carlyle, Ferguson, Home, and Robertson. In 1752, he published his *Political Discourses*, which was in its third edition by 1754, the same year that saw the publication of the first volume of his historical work: *The History of Great Britain under the House of Stuart, vol. I.* [39]

Given his stated intention in his letter to James Oswald about only composing a history in his "riper years," it might seem that the nearly ten months of the diplomatic mission and the period from 1749 to 1754 had aged Hume considerably before his time. More, however, than the

---

[37] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxv.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 224.

mere passage of time figured in Hume's decision to turn his authorial attention from metaphysics, moral philosophy, and political economy well before he had reached his "riper years." Specifically, in 1752, Hume accepted a job as the librarian for Edinburgh's Faculty of Advocates, a position that offered him little in the way of income, but complete run of "a large Library."[40] Hume reported in his autobiography that it was upon that appointment that he "formed the Plan of writing the History of England."[41]

But this remark, mediated through almost a quarter of a century of memory, fails to capture the actual timing of Hume's interest in writing history. Hume had shown an attraction to historical writing at least as early as the publication in 1742 of his second collection of essays, which included the historical analysis, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences." Even more, from the period 1745 to 1749, Hume generated four manuscripts brimming with notes on English history and a sketch of English history from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the reign of Henry II.[42] There was also, of course, the 1748 letter from Hume to his friend Oswald, which demonstrates Hume's clear interest in producing a historical work.[43] Hume made similar remarks to Henry Home in a 1747 letter.[44] Irrespective of when Hume set himself on the path of becoming a historian, the position with the Faculty of Advocates, which possessed one of the most well-appointed libraries in Scotland, brought him much closer to achieving his goal.[45] Moreover, whenever the library lacked materials Hume needed, there were always agents of his

---

[40] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxvi.
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 212-13.
[43] Hume to James Oswald, London, 29 January 1748, 1:108-09.
[44] Hume to Henry Home, 1747 (surmised), 1:99.
[45] As with the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh, however, the Squadrone faction once again saw Hume as the candidate of the Argethelians and once again sought to scuttle Hume's chances of securing the position at the Library of Advocates, albeit to no effect in this instance. Harris, *Hume*, 353; Hume to John Clephane, Edinburgh, 4 February 1752, 1:165.

in London—notably, his publisher, Andrew Millar—to ship other historical works to him, when possible purchased formally by the library.[46]

Beyond opportunity, however, stood Hume's lifelong desire to distinguish himself as a man of letters. Given the less than resounding acclaim that met his philosophical work, history might have seemed like an attractive next move, especially given the deficiencies Hume and others saw in the quality of English historiography up to his time. As he noted in an early 1753 letter, "there is no post of honour in the English Parnassus more vacant than that of history."[47] Although the *History of the Rebellion and the Civil Wars* by Edward Hyde, the 1st Earl of Clarendon, continued to be well-regarded in Hume's time, Clarendon's work was limited to events to which he was a witness, rather than a general history of England.[48] For someone truly seeking to stand out in the cultured world of his day, history could well have struck Hume as a domain where he could yet make his mark. This conclusion could only have been reinforced by the immense popularity that histories enjoyed with the middling sorts of Hume's day as a form of polite literature, and the fact that the perceived need for a truly great national history was deeply felt by the British generally and the English specifically, especially in light of the heights that had been achieved by the neoclassical French and Italian historians, let alone the historians of classical antiquity. As the English saw the matter, their nation would only have fully come into

---

[46] Hume to Andrew Millar, Edinburgh, 22 March 1760, 1:321-24.

[47] Hume to John Clephane, Edinburgh, 5 January 1753, 1:170.

[48] Philip Hicks, *Neo-classical History and English Culture from Clarendon to Hume* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), 142. Hume did not quite share in his contemporaries regard. Although in his *History* he referred to Clarendon using the customary title "the noble historian" and found both the man and his work marked by genuine "probity and goodness," Hume also refused to regard him as an accomplished historian, and described his style as "prolix and redundant." See Hume, *History of England*, 5:232; 5:545-46 n. r; and 6:154.

its greatness if it had a history worthy of its relatively newly acquired stature as one of the greatest powers of Europe.[49]

And so Hume went to work. Of course, there were other histories of England at the time, but they were invariably marked with the stench of partisan politics, whether Whig, Tory, or even Jacobite.[50] The general consensus in Hume scholarship has been to take Hume at his word that he wrote the *History* in large measure to correct for the partisan histories of his time, most especially the narrative of eighteenth-century adherents of the Country persuasion, which can be seen as the original "Whig history."[51] On this account of English history, a constitutional order of limited monarchy and parliamentary supremacy stretched as far back as Saxon England.[52] This ancient constitution, as developed by Paul de Rapin-Thoyras and exploited by the Tory Viscount Bolingbroke, was deployed as the authorizing myth for resistance to the growing power of the Court under Sir Robert Walpole. As figures in opposition, Country Tories like Bolingbroke and his circle of traditionalists, Country Whigs, and independents embraced the myth of the ancient constitution as a means of claiming that Walpole's "Robinocracy," while

---

[49] Hicks, *Neo-classical History*, 1-3; Mark Saber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 39-40; Phillips, "'The Most Illustrious Philosopher and Historian of the Age': Hume's *History of England*," in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe (Malden, MA.: Blackwell, 2008), 409.

[50] For Whig histories from the period, see John Oldmixon, *The Critical History of England*, 2 vols. (London: J. Pemberton, 1724-1726); *The History of England During the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart* (London: J. Pemberton, 1730); and *The History of England During the Reigns of King William and Queen Mary, Queen Anne, King George I* (London: Thomas Cox, 1735); and especially the much-lauded Whig history by Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, *The History of England*, trans. Nicholas Tindal, 15 vols. (London, 1724-1731). For Country Tory accounts of the history of England, see Bolingbroke's *Remarks on the History of England* (1730-31) and *A Dissertation upon Parties* (1733-34), both originally published in Bolingbroke's opposition journal, *The Craftsman*. For a Jacobite history from the same period see Thomas Carte, *General History of England*, 4 vols. (London: W. Russel, 1747-1755).

[51] On the purportedly anti-partisan goals of Hume's *History*, see footnote 19 in the introduction of this dissertation.

[52] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 238-41.

purportedly Whig, had nevertheless betrayed the conventional balance of power and aristocratic virtue of English society.

It was an interest in exposing this myth's lack of foundations, as well as his dreams of greater wealth and success as a man of letters, that led Hume to write his *History*. As early as 1748, Hume had shown himself to be, in his own words, "a Whig, but a skeptical one."[53] Hume accepted much of the Whig settlement of his era, but he detested the tendencies toward the potentially destabilizing factional partisanship that characterized British politics of his day, especially when, as he saw it, that partisanship proceeded from commitments to abstract principles and outsized self-interest. Hume thus had no patience for the partisan Country histories, including that of the much fêted Rapin, whose work, as a result of his own research, Hume came to regard as "despicable."[54] Contrary to the prevailing Country myth of the ancient constitution, Hume noted in one letter that, at the time of the first two Stuart monarchs, "the Constitution was in their time very ambiguous & undetermin'd."[55] For this reason, Hume saw as unjustified Country claims that James I and Charles I had sought unprecedented monarchical powers; a view he expressed, albeit impliedly, in the *History*, and that he expected would meet with disapproval from those of the Country persuasion.[56] Indeed, his desire to address the partisan spirit of his time informed the order in which Hume wrote the *History*. As he explained in a 1752 letter to Adam Smith, Hume began his work with the reign of James I because "Twas under James that the House of Commons began first to raise their Head, & then the Quarrel

---

[53] Hume to Henry Home, London, 9 February 1748, 1:111, referring to his essay "Of the Protestant Succession."
[54] Hume to James Oswald, Jack's Land, 28 June 1753, 1:178-79.
[55] Hume to Andrew Millar, Edinburgh, 12 April 1755, 1:217.
[56] Hume to John Clephane, Edinburgh, 28 October 1753, 1:180.

betwixt Privilege & Prerogative commenc'd."[57] In his autobiography, Hume put a finer point on it: "I commenced with the Accession of the House of Stuart; an Epoch, when, I thought, the misrepresentations of faction began chiefly to take place."[58] The other option Hume had considered was to begin the *History* with the reign of Henry VII, because it was then that, on Hume's and Smith's account at least, a real change in "public Affairs" began.[59] Moreover, as Hume later remarked to Andrew Millar, during the reign of Henry VII "modern History commences."[60] Indeed, with that consideration in mind, he later expressed some regret over his decision to start with the Stuarts.[61] Had he done so, he observed, he could have shown in a more deliberate fashion how royal power grew to unprecedented levels under the Tudors, "and that the Stuarts did little or nothing more than continue matters in the former tract, which the people were no longer willing to admit."[62]

Put simply, Hume refused to write the *History* in a fashion that would please the Country partisans of his day and instead actively sought to undermine the mythic bases for eighteenth-century partisanship. Hume's *History*, as has been said by others, would be disinterested and "philosophical," rather than partisan.[63] Nevertheless, Hume was not seeking, as scholars like Forbes have argued, to instruct his readers in a spirit of genuine neutrality toward the partisan conflicts of the day. Instead, as with his move to essays, Hume was using his *History* as a platform for reaching those members of the middling order who might find themselves attracted

---

[57] Hume to Adam Smith, 24 September 1752, 1:167-68.
[58] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays,* xxxvi.
[59] Hume to Adam Smith, 24 September 1752, 1:167-68.
[60] Hume to Andrew Millar, Edinburgh, 20 May 1757, 1:248-49.
[61] Hume to William Strahan (surmised), Edinburgh, 25 May 1757, 1:251.
[62] Hume to John Clephane, Edinburgh, 3 September 1757, 1:264. Hume alluded to a similar conclusion in a letter believed to have been written to William Strahan. Hume to William Strahan (surmised), Edinburgh, 25 May 1757, 1:251.
[63] Hicks, *Neo-classical History and English Culture*, 182; Hume to the Abbé le Blanc, Edinburgh, 12 September 1754, 1:193.

to the popular agitations and ideological project of the Country party and Patriot movements, and convincing them that the past to which the Country and Patriots appealed held nothing to attract a polite middling sort of eighteenth-century Britain. Instead, his readers should treasure the order and reliability that came with the strong, centralized state that the Court party had generated and maintained and, like Hume, embrace the Court's project.

Hume published *The History of Great Britain under the House of Stuart*, vol. I in 1754, followed this work in 1756 with *The History of Great Britain under the House of Stuart*, vol. II, and then loosely worked backward. He published the two-volume *History of England under the House of Tudor* in 1759, along with revised editions of the Stuart volumes that same year. In 1761, he published the two-volume *History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry VII*, and the following year he published the complete work, styled *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. During Hume's remaining years, the *History* went through another four editions, in 1763, 1767, 1770, and 1773; Hume also prepared a sixth edition, which saw publication only in 1778, two years after his death.

In addition to producing a work that would correct the Commonwealth Whig and Country myths of an ancient constitution, Hume's *History* stood as more distinctly philosophical than earlier histories by virtue of its scope and theoretical sophistication. As Mark Phillips has observed, beginning with his early essay "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," Hume articulated an approach to understanding different types of historical causation. Specifically, Hume explained, "*What depends upon a few persons is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to chance, or secret and unknown causes; What arises from a great number, may often*

be accounted for by determinate and known causes."[64] Hume thus found those historical

phenomena in which large numbers of people played a role to be susceptible of systematic

analysis and comprehension, a conclusion that applied to the rise of commerce—a matter that

occupied more than a little of Hume's attention in the Tudor and Stuart volumes of the *History*—

as well as the rise of learning and refinement and changes in commonly held opinions, and he

applied this approach to the social and historical analyses he offered in the *Essays* and the

History.[65] In doing so, Hume expanded the range of acceptable subjects for the study of history,

helping to make it a more textured and theoretically sophisticated examination of the human

condition. In particular, Hume's approach provided him with a means of demonstrating to his

middling readers that the world that they took for granted was something contingent and

relatively new, and offered them a means of understanding how that new world had come into

being.[66]

   Had someone told Hume, shortly after the first Stuart volume saw print, that he would

oversee the publication of six editions of his completed *History of England*, he might have

chuckled ruefully. His Edinburgh publisher, Gavin Hamilton, printed two thousand copies of the

first volume and managed to sell 450 of them in five weeks, before taking the remainder to

London, where a monopoly of book-sellers forced the publisher to relinquish control of the

copies to Andrew Millar. Millar managed to sell only forty-five copies of the work over the next

---

[64] Hume, Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences, in *Essays*, 112 (emphasis in the original).

[65] Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 48-50; Phillips, "The Most Illustrious Philosopher," 410-14. Examples of this approach in the *Essays* can be found, for example, in the already-mentioned "of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," as well as "Of Civil Liberty," "Of Refinement in the Arts," and "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations"; while examples in the *History*, as Phillips notes, can be seen in that work's appendices. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 52-53.

[66] Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 53-55; Phillips, "The Most Illustrious Philosopher," 411-13.

year, and the sales of the second volume were only slightly better.[67] Nevertheless, Hume soldiered on with five more volumes, despite sales that were at best "tolerable." By 1762, however, Hume realized that "the Copy Money, given me by the Booksellers, much exceeded any thing formerly known in England: I became not only independent, but opulent."[68]

The reception of *The History of England*, in contrast, told a somewhat more mixed story. On the positive side of the ledger, the *History* effectively made Hume's reputation as *the* premier man of letters in the English-speaking world, at least as far as the French, whom Hume so admired, were concerned. Writing in a 1764 edition of *La Gazette Littéraire* about the French edition of the *History*, Voltaire announced: "Nothing can be added to the fame of this History, perhaps the best written in any language." Hicks reports that the French generally declared Hume to be a new Tacitus, perhaps the highest compliment a literate eighteenth-century Frenchman could pay to a historian, and those who rejected the characterization did so only because they thought Hume had actually surpassed Tacitus.[69] In 1763, having returned to government service, Hume traveled to France as the private secretary to the British ambassador, Lord Hertford, where three future Kings—Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, and Charles X—praised Hume and the *History*.[70] Moreover, the Republic of Letters, of which Hume had so longed to be a citizen, accepted him warmly.[71]

---

[67] Hicks, *Neo-classical History and English Culture*, 196. For an extended discussion of the difficulties the *History* confronted in the London book market, see Ernest Campbell Mossner and Harry Ransom, "Hume and the 'Conspiracy of the Booksellers': The Publication and Early Fortunes of the *History of England*," *The University of Texas Studies in English* (1950), 29:162-82.

[68] Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxviii.

[69] Hicks, *Neo-classical History and English Culture*, 203-04.

[70] Hume to Alexander Wedderburn, Paris, 23 November 1763, 1:414-15; Hume to William Robertson, Paris, 1 December 1763, 1:416-17.

[71] Hume to Adam Smith, Fontainebleau, 28 October 1763, 1:409, Hume to Hugh Blair, Paris, December 1763, 1:419-20.

In Great Britain, in contrast, the reception of the *History* presented Hume with more difficulties, not surprisingly, given the anti-Country agenda Hume brought to the task. As Hume observed in a letter shortly after publication of the first Stuart volume, "I observe that some of the weekly papers have been busy with me. I am as great an atheist as Bolingbroke; as great a Jacobite as Carte; I cannot write English, &c."[72] Hume attributed this harsh treatment from the Whigs to the relative power they enjoyed compared to the Tories, power that had accustomed the Whigs to hearing only from authors who sought to curry favor with them, at the expense of even-handed analysis. I thus think Duncan Forbes is almost certainly right in this respect: those who have ascribed Toryism to Hume do so out of overly simplistic notions both of party loyalty and of party in eighteen-century Britain, one that precludes entertaining the kind of skeptical Whiggery that Hume claimed as his own and considering that Hume's party affiliations might have been more properly found not on the axis of Tory and Whig, but instead on that of Country and Court. In any event, Hume's attack on the Country myths of a Stuart innovation in public affairs and, by extension, the ancient constitution, met with consistent attacks by the Country interests—including the more radical and republican Whigs—of his day.[73] Similarly, Hume's *History* brought him similarly unwanted attention from the traditionalist clergy of Scotland, a point that returns me to the calls for Hume's excommunication.

THE PATRONAGE CONTROVERSY IN THE *KIRK*

The seeds of the Popular Party's attack on Hume in the mid-1750s had been planted decades earlier. Disputes in the *kirk* over church governance and church relations with the civil

---

[72] Hume to the Earl of Balcarres, Edinburgh, 17 December 1754, 1:214.
[73] For more on this topic, see Duncan Forbes, "Sceptical Whiggism, Commerce, and Liberty," in *Essays on Adam Smith*, eds. Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975).

authority had been simmering—and often boiling over—since the seventeenth century. Resistance to Church of England-style episcopal governance in the Church of Scotland had of course played a substantial role in the crisis that led to the English Civil War, and Scottish and Puritan insistence on a more "republican" ecclesiology—and the calls for greater constraints on, or the outright abolition of, monarchical power that often accompanied that insistence—was a constant source of social and political tension throughout the seventeenth century. In a new form, issues of church governance and structure played out in the emergence of the *kirk*'s Moderate Party over the power to appoint ministers to local churches.

Before 1649, vacancies in the Church of Scotland's congregations were filled in one of two ways: in royal burghs, the town councils appointed new ministers, while in country parishes, the resident nobility and gentry wielded that power. After the execution of Charles I, however, the Scottish Parliament altered the procedure for appointing clergy, giving the appointment power to church elders, as guided by the local presbytery, and giving local male heads of household the power of ratifying those appointments. Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, this new procedure became a recurring point of contention between the local landed elites—or patrons—on one side, and both *kirk* officials and the heads of non-landed families, on the other. Accordingly, in 1690, William III, in an effort to consolidate his hold on his newly acquired British dominions, approved a compromise procedure for the appointment of ministers in the *kirk*. Under that procedure, local heritors—non-noble hereditary landowners—and church elders received an equal stake in nominating ministers for vacant church posts, subject to ratification by the male heads of the families in the relevant congregation. This method for the appointment of clergy thus struck a middle path between those in the *kirk* who favored a more fully republican selection process involving only local heads of households, those who favored

59

selection by a procedure involving both church elders and heads of households, and Revolution Whigs, informed by a Commonwealthman ideology, who thought that the local heritors should enjoy plenary authority in the appointment of ministers.[74]

This compromise measure remained in place until 1712, when the then newly unified Parliament of the United Kingdom, at the time dominated by the Tories, passed the Patronage Act of 1712. Under the Patronage Act, authority to appoint ministers to local parishes returned to the pre-1649 status quo, thus granting the appointment power to local landed elites exclusively, and completely removing church authorities and non-landed families from the process. Opponents of the Act saw it as a violation not only of the compromise of 1690 but of the Treaty of Union of 1707 between England and Scotland, which had guaranteed Scottish ecclesiastical autonomy from the interference of the merged parliament. Popular resistance was common. As a result of that resistance, local patrons were often slow to exercise their new prerogative, and for many patrons it took them more than a decade to embrace the privilege. According to Richard Sher, this shift came only when Robert Walpole's Scottish manager, the already-mentioned Archibald Campbell, leader of the Argethelians and the so-called "king of Scotland," began a programmatic enforcement of the Patronage Act.[75] As Richard Sher describes it, Campbell and subsequent government managers embraced this approach "partly because it gave them leverage among the Scottish landed interest, and partly because it was thought to encourage social stability and religious moderation."[76] It was at this point that the right of patronage became a significant point of contention within the church.

---

[74] Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 47-48.

[75] *Ibid.* For Campbell's designation as the "King of Scotland," see Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 248.

[76] Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 48.

With the more systematic enforcement of the Patronage Act under Campbell, the leaders of the Church of Scotland split into three factions, one favoring the pre-1649 procedure that the Patronage Act had revived, a second favoring the Calvinist approach by which the clergy and local heads of households made church appointments, and a third pushing for a return to the compromise of 1690. The splintered nature of the opponents of the Patronage Act ultimately inured to the favor of the Act's supporters; the faction favoring the settlement of 1690, which eschewed the republicanism and clericalism of the traditional Calvinist approach, ultimately came to accept the Patronage Act as the more palatable and workable of the other two options. Nevertheless, ecclesiastical and popular resistance to the Patronage Act continued through the 1740s. The most consistent argument used by those traditionalists opposing the placement of patron-appointed clergy was that conscience entitled them to refuse the placement of any minister who had not been presented through what they regarded as proper presbyterian measures.[77]

More troubling for those concerned with the church's institutional discipline, the General Assembly, which was charged with effecting the enforcement of the Patronage Act, failed to secure local presbyteries' full compliance. Instead, it adopted a number of half-measures designed to settle those ministers appointed by patrons without securing the formal compliance of the local presbytery.[78] As Sher explains it, once a patron appointed a minister to a church, the law of the Church of Scotland required that the local church governing authority, the presbytery, had to accept or "settle" the clergyman presented by the patron. Of course, problems arose when the local presbytery refused to do so. Accordingly, the Reverend Patrick Cuming, who was Campbell's—and thus the government's—agent within the church's General Assembly,

---

[77] *Ibid*, 48-50.
[78] *Ibid*.

instituted a creative solution: he established so-called "riding committees" composed of ministers from outside a resisting presbytery. These committees, invested with questionable authority under church law, would then settle the candidate in the objecting presbytery. Sher reports that, not surprisingly, this measure only exacerbated tensions within the church, and disputes over the settlement of patron-appointed ministers proliferated during the 1740s. Moreover, Cuming's approach caused a loss of the General Assembly's perceived authority within the church.

In the early 1750s, resistance to the Patronage Act finally met with serious counter-resistance in the form of a "little band of earnest men," a band that included William Robertson, Hugh Blair, John Home, and Alexander Carlyle. These men, forged in no small measure in the crucible of the Jacobite rebellion of '45, would in short order become the *kirk*'s Moderate Party. As the moderates saw it, proper presbyterian governance depended on the strict subordination of presbyteries to the General Assembly. By failing to apply the Patronage Act consistently, the Assembly was ducking its obligations as the highest authority in the church and thus undermining the church's ability to maintain order and discipline. In May 1751, these moderates—both clergymen and laymen—met in an Edinburgh tavern and resolved "to use every means in [their] power to restore the authority of the Church."[79]

The moderates' first attempt to restore central church authority came with the settlement of the Reverend James Watson, a minister appointed in 1748 to the parish of Lord Torphichen in the Presbytery of Linlithgow. The 1751 General Assembly eventually managed to settle Watson, but, contrary to the demands of the moderates, merely issued a rebuke of the presbyters, a move

---

[79] Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 50. Sher identifies George F. S. Elliot, *The Border Elliots and the Family of Minto* (Edinburgh, 1897), 333, as his source for the "little band of earnest men" designation.

that frustrated both the moderates and their opponents in the Popular Party. Led by John Home

and William Robertson, the moderates had moved to suspend the offending presbyters for six

months, but this motion was defeated by a vote of two hundred to eleven.[80] Undaunted, the

moderates continued to press the point of church discipline in the very next settlement dispute

that came before the select commission, the Church of Scotland's executive body: the settlement

of the Reverend Andrew Richardson in the parish of Inverkeithing in the Presbytery of

Dunfermline. In November of 1751, the select commission had ordered the Presbytery of

Dunfermline to confirm Richardson's settlement as of January 3, 1752.[81] The select commission

further noted that if the presbyters failed to do so, they would face "very high censure" by the

commission at its March 1752 meeting. Predictably, the presbyters failed to appoint Richardson,

and so the appointing heritor petitioned the March 1752 meeting of the select commission to

discipline the presbyters and appoint Richardson over local resistance.[82]

---

[80] Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 51-52; *The Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh: Sands, Murray, and Cochran; 1752), 13: 258. Interestingly, twenty-four members of the Assembly even dissented from the decision to only mildly censure. Those dissenting from the consideration of any punishment followed the lead of William Wishart, who argued against any censure on republican and radically Presbyterian grounds, more than double the number of votes the moderates received for their proposed suspension of the resisting presbyters. Wishart argued that the Church of Scotland existed not by either agreement or by civil establishment, but was part of the true Church instituted by Christ. As such, the church was bound to obey neither civil authority nor by any particular group of private individuals, but only by the law of Christ. Moreover, Wishart argued that the very presbyterian nature of the Church of Scotland placed all clergy on a level of complete parity. On his account, only violations of the laws of Christ—and not offenses against the orders of the civil authority or a governing body of the church—could justify the censure of a member of the church. *The Scots Magazine*, 13:220-21.

[81] *The Scots Magazine*, 14:154; General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Annals of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1739-1766*, ed. Nathaniel Morren, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1838-1840), 1:228.

[82] *The Scots Magazine*, 14: 154; General Assembly, *Annals*, 1:227-28.

At the March meeting, the Dunfermline presbyters argued that their right of conscience entitled them to refuse to comply with the commission's November order.[83] In a decision that infuriated the moderates, the select commission declined, by a slim majority, to follow through on its threatened censure of the Dunfermline presbyters.[84] Moreover, rather than insisting that the presbyteries of Dunfermline acquiesce in Richardson's settlement, the select commission instead chose the expedient route of authorizing the Synod of Fife, which oversaw the Presbytery of Dunfermline, to appoint Richardson.[85] Of course, this manner of effecting Richardson's settlement in Inverkeithing simply poured gasoline on the moderates' simmering fire. By refusing to force the Dumfermline presbyters to effect Richardson's induction, the commission had once again communicated that it—and by extension its principal, the General Assembly— lacked the will needed to maintain church discipline.

Accordingly, seventeen members of the commission—including the usual suspects Hugh Blair, John Home, and William Robertson—dissented from the commission's decision against censure and moved to bring the issue before the next General Assembly.[86] The moderates made a public case for their dissent in the pamphlet *Reasons of Dissent*, which they published in March and proceeded to present to the General Assembly at its annual meeting in May 1752. Authored by Robertson, the *Reasons of Dissent* made the most clearly drawn statement of the moderates' position in the conflict over patronage and church governance. For that reason, it has come to be known as the Manifesto of the Moderate Party.[87] Not to be outdone and recognizing the high stakes involved in the Richardson settlement, the Popular Party responded to the *Reasons of*

---

[83] General Assembly, *Annals*, 1:229-30.
[84] *The Scots Magazine*, 14:154-55.
[85] *The Scots Magazine*, 14:155; General Assembly, *Annals*, 1:230.
[86] *The Scots Magazine*, 14:154-55; General Assembly, *Annals*, 1: 230.
[87] General Assembly, *Annals*, 1:230-31; Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 52.

Dissent with their own *Answers to the Reasons of Dissent*. Like the pamphlet that inspired its creation, the *Answers* put forward in remarkable clarity the public position of the Popular Party's arguments against the kind of church discipline that the moderates favored.

Put simply, in the *Reasons of Dissent* the moderates argued that every form of social life required a government and clear lines of authority and obedience that "must necessarily be absolute, and final; and their Determinations received as the Voice and Decision of the Whole."[88] Accordingly, the *Reasons of Dissent* went on, the Dunfermline Presbytery had a duty to obey the order of the commission, and the commission had a duty to enforce the stated policy of the General Assembly. Absent such accession to properly constituted authority, the Church of Christ, of which the Church of Scotland stood as one instantiation, would always be threatened by an anarchy that ran contrary to the plan Christ had set down for the church.[89] Perhaps not surprisingly, the *Reasons of Dissent* made a point of associating the anti-authoritarianism of the Dunfermline Presbytery and its apologists in the select commission to the Independents of seventeenth-century England, an association that could only suggest a kind of disloyalty to not only presbyterian church governance, but to the stability of the Hanoverian settlement.[90]

Responding to the moderates, the *Answers* claimed that while the *Reasons of Dissent* stressed maintaining the order and discipline of human governments, it made no mention of the ultimate source of all authority: God.[91] The *Answers* went on, arguing that all human authority must be subject to the will of God. As a result, when individuals believe that obedience to a

---

[88] William Robertson, et al., *Reasons of Dissent from the Sentence and Resolution of the Commission of the General Assembly, met at Edinburgh, March 11, 1752, concerning the Conduct of the Presbytery of Dunfermline* (Edinburgh, 1752), 1-2.
[89] Robertson, et al., *Reasons of Dissent*, 3-6.
[90] Robertson, et al., *Reasons of Dissent*, 12.
[91] *Answers to the Reasons of Dissent from the Sentence of the Reverend Commission of the General on March 11 1752* (Edinburgh, 1752), 5.

human authority would violate a duty owed to God, they should be free to follow their own conscientious understanding of the divine will and disobey the human authority.[92] The dissenters, according to the authors of the *Answers*, were placing any and every obligation to human authority above the Christian's duty to God. The authors of the *Answers* thus argued that any properly Christian social arrangement either had to make allowances for private conscience and a conscientious refusal to obey ecclesiastical or civil authority, or accede to a return to the despotism of popes and Stuarts.[93]

The *Reasons of Dissent* and the *Answers*, then, drew the official lines of battle between Moderate Party and Popular Party over patronage in terms of—for the moderates—social order, unity, discipline and authority; and in terms of—for the Calvinist traditionalists—divine law, individual conscience, and the primacy of the *kirk* over the civil authority. The moderates, of course, were not apostates: they themselves acknowledged the importance of the *kirk* as a society directed toward the salvation of souls and ultimate obedience to Christ. They did, however, express that obedience in terms of a seemingly mundane value: hierarchy, the maintenance of social order, and constituted bodies of authority.[94] Similarly, the traditionalists within the *kirk*'s leadership did not favor a kind of ecclesiastical anarchy. Rather, they instead seem to have held that self-governance of the church, and its governance along what they took to be properly Calvinist lines, authorized resistance to both civil law and ecclesiastical authority, resistance they justified on the lines of individual conscience and fidelity to divine law. In addition, the

---

[92] *Answers*, 9-13.

[93] *Answers*, 7. To be clear, the dissenting moderates did concede that disobedience to a human authority could be justified, but only when that authority had so severely violated the basis of the society's original charter that the society should be dissolved. *Reasons of Dissent*, 2. The authors of the *Answers*, in turn, argued that the moderates' position was too extreme and that some middle positions had to be possible, when disobedience to authority could be justified without completely calling into question the overall legitimacy of that authority. *Answers*, 14-15.

[94] *Reasons of Dissent*, 3-4.

argument the traditionalists advanced seemed to reject the notion that the civil power enjoyed ultimate authority over the *kirk*, a notion with which the moderates seem to have made their peace.

Indeed, in their preaching, the moderates often reflected the view that the primary task of the church was the maintenance of the established social and political order, even to the detriment of the perquisites of the church. By contrast, the traditionalists seemed more concerned with the autonomy of the church and the maintenance of what they regarded as Calvinist doctrine, rather than the broader social order. The divide between the moderates and traditionalists, then, put on display two starkly competing visions of the *kirk*: one in which ecclesiastical society operated in the worldly sphere in an Erastian fashion, subordinated to the broader civil authority; and another in which the civil authority was bounded by the rights of Christian conscience and ecclesiastical independence. Ultimately, the dispute over patronage within the *kirk* served as a proxy for fundamental disagreements over traditional prerogatives and British state involved in a project of increasing centralization. Similar concerns played out in Hume's treatment of the political conflicts of his day between the Country party and the Court both directly in his essays and more esoterically in the *Treatise* and the *History*.

With the contours of the struggle between moderates and traditionalists having been largely defined, the General Assembly still had to address the question of Richardson's settlement, as the Synod of Fife had refused to carry out the select commission's order to settle Richardson at Inverkeithing. Apparently having had enough, on May 14, 1752, the General Assembly moved to have all ten members of the Presbytery of Dunfermline meet on May 21, 1752, to admit Richardson as minister for the parish of Inverkeithing, and further required a quorum of five to effect the settlement. The Assembly further ordered that all of the presbyteries

appear before the Assembly the following day to give an account of their conduct. The motion, which passed by a vote of one hundred and two to fifty-six, was somewhat unusual, because under church law the settlement of a minister in a parish required the action of only three presbyteries.[95] Of course, given the problem of foot-dragging that the Assembly had been dealing with generally and from Inverkeithing particularly, I find it likely that the Assembly wanted to make clear to all of the Dunfermline presbyteries that each of them would be expected to accede to and maintain church discipline.

If bringing recalcitrant presbyteries to heel was the Assembly's intent, however, most of the Dunfermline presbyteries saw fit to frustrate it: of the ten presbyteries, only three appeared to settle Richardson. When called to account for their failure to appear for Richardson's settlement, six of the absent seven pointed to the illegitimacy of the Act of Patronage; the popular resistance to Richardson, as the designee of a patron rather than the congregation; and the presbyteries' own scruple that forcing an unwanted minister on a parish violated proper principles of Calvinist governance.[96] Faced with six defiant clergy, the Assembly decided to impose the type of discipline for which the moderates had been agitating for the past year: by a vote of 93 to 65 it agreed to depose one of the six resisting ministers, Thomas Gillespie, from his position as minister for the parish of Carnock.[97] On June 18, 1752, Richardson was finally settled at

---

[95] *The Scots Magazine*, 14:261.

[96] *The Scots Magazine*, 14:262-63.

[97] *The Scots Magazine*, 14:263-66. Fully 102 members of the Assembly refused to vote for the deposition of any of the non-complying ministers. *The Scots Magazine*, 14:264-65. The following year supporters of Gillespie petitioned the General Assembly to reinstate—or "repone," in the parlance of the *kirk*—Gillespie to his ministry. A motion was made to that effect in the General Assembly, but failed by three votes. *The Scots Magazine*, 15:252-53.

Inverkeithing.[98] The moderates had scored their first significant victory in their struggle with the *kirk*'s Popular Party.

TRADITIONALISTS, CENSURE, AND THE *HISTORY*

The moderates' victory just described would come to cause more than a little aggravation for David Hume, whose philosophical, historical, and political writings and friendship with leaders of the Moderate Party made him an appealing target for the Calvinist traditionalists. As Richard Sher has pointed out, Hume's writings were becoming much more well known in the 1750s. As a result, his skepticism—which had been on public display since 1739 for anyone who bothered to look—was becoming more widely known. Moreover, the essays called not only metaphysical, epistemological, and theological presuppositions of orthodox Calvinism into question, but also ruthlessly criticized the concept of a social contract, the very touchstone of Country Whig ideology and, according to Sher, a political principle of paramount importance to the Popular Party. The battle lines were drawn even more sharply when, in the *History*, Hume characterized the *kirk*'s sixteenth- and seventeenth-century forebears as fanatical enthusiasts. Second, as a means of settling scores with the moderates for their victory in the patronage controversy, Hume seemed to be tailor-made for orthodox Calvinists.[99] How, the traditionalists

---

[98] *The Scots Magazine*, 14:316. Three of the other six ministers who failed to appear for Richardson's settlement on May 21, 1752, also refused to appear for his settlement in June, in violation of a second order of the General Assembly. The General Assembly then suspended these three ministers until such time as they should apologize for their disobedience. *The Scots Magazine*, 15:252. Although supporters of the three ministers—David Hunter, Alexander Daling, and John Spence—petitioned the General Assembly of 1753 to lift the suspension, the three refused to support the petition, but would instead simply wait until such time as the General Assembly saw fit to lift the petition on its own motion. *The Scots Magazine*, 15:253.

[99] Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 66-67. In *An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments Contained in the Writings of Sopho* [Kames]*, and David Hume, Esq.; Addressed to the consideration of the Reverend and Honourable Members of the General*

could ask with some justification, could the moderates have made church discipline such a shibboleth when they, themselves, failed to apply appropriate church discipline to a heretic like Hume?

Hume was not the sole "infidel" friend of the moderates to receive unwanted attention from the Popular Party. In 1751, Henry Home, Lord Kames—lawyer, jurist, philosopher, and mentor to Hume—had anonymously published *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion*, which Kames had intended as a friendly refutation of the skepticism his protégé had developed in his *Treatise on Human Nature*.[100] Kames's intentions aside, his work attracted the attention of orthodox clergy who saw in his *Essays* a heterodox denial of free will and an embrace of philosophical necessity at least as distressing as Hume's philosophy.[101] Accordingly, when Kames's identity as the author of the *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion* became public knowledge, the clerical knives came out against him quickly and forcefully. Hume remarked in correspondence to his friend Michael Ramsay that "the Clergy have already decided it, & say he

---

Assembly of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1755), the anonymous author makes largely this point: that the recent publication of the first volume of Hume's *History* makes him an appropriate object of attack. The identity of the author of this work remains a point of some contention. Greig believed that the pamphlet was the work of George Anderson. Jane Rendall, however, attributes the authorship of the *Analysis* to the Revered John Bonar, and both Mossner and Sher accept this conclusion. Rendall, *The Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment* (New York: St. Martin's, 1978), 214-16; Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 341; and Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 65 n. 65.

[100] Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 65 n. 65. Mossner reports that Hume had spent more than a little time trying to explain his *Treatise* to Kames around its time of publication. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 118. Although it took a while, Kames reported that he eventually come to understand the significance of the *Treatise* and felt compelled to respond. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 118.

[101] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 340-41.

[Kames] is as bad as me. Nay some affirm him to be worse, as much as a treacherous friend is worse than an open Enemy."[102]

In 1753, the anonymously published *An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion, Personally and Publicly Stated: Illustrated with References to "Essays on Morality and Natural Religion"* offered a sharp rebuke to both Kames's purported apostasy and that of Kames's "assistant *David Hume*, Esq." The *Estimate* was believed to have been written by the Reverend George Anderson, who would lead the orthodox charge against Kames and Hume at the 1755 meeting of the General Assembly. Anderson was by no means alone in his crusade against Hume and Kames. Just one day after the opening of the 1755 General Assembly, where the question of Kames's and Hume's excommunications was to be taken up, an anonymous pamphlet addressed to the assembly was published, decrying the views of Kames and Hume.[103] The rhetoric of the Popular Party, however, did not carry the day, and, as already noted, the Moderate Party was able to prevent the General Assembly from reaching the question of Hume's excommunication that year.[104]

Nevertheless, Hume's opponents within the Popular Party were not idle, and in January 1756, another work against Hume was released, the already mentioned *Letters on Mr. Hume's History of Great Britain*, written by Daniel MacQueen, although anonymously published. The *Letters* criticized Hume's discussion of the Reformation in the first published volume of his *History* and faulted him for being both overly tolerant of Catholicism and monarchy and insufficiently committed to seventeenth-century claims of parliamentary authority. Five days

---

[102] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 336; Hume to Michael Ramsay, Ninewells, 22 June 1751, 1:162.

[103] Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 65-67; Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 336-37. The pamphlet was the already-mentioned *Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments Contained in the Writings of Sopho* [Kames]*, and David Hume, Esq*.

[104] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 343.

before the start of the 1756 General Assembly, another anonymously published work, *Infidelity a Proper Object of Censure*, rehearsed the case for excommunication against Kames and Hume, identifying both as "avowed Infidels." The advertisement for this work commended it especially to the consideration of the members of the impending General Assembly. Reverend Anderson followed this work with a second attack, published on May 20, 1756, the opening day of the meeting. This time, however, Anderson's polemic, *A Remonstrance against Lord Viscount Bolingbroke's Philosophical Religion. Addressed to David Mallet, Esq; the Publisher*, was attributed.[105] The same day another pro-Popular Party work was published, *A View of the Edinburgh Review*, which targeted the periodical associated with Hume's and Kames's allies in the church's Moderate Party.

The Assembly formally began to address the issue of excommunication on May 27, 1756, when the Committee on Overtures again took up the question. The committee concluded that it should confine its inquiry to Hume, who had publicly acknowledged his views and who seemed to have flatly rejected both revealed and natural religion. In contrast, the committee decided to forego an investigation of Kames, who, it concluded, simply held heterodox opinions.[106] The committee prepared a recommendation that the Assembly inquire into Hume's writings and decide on the question of excommunication at the 1757 meeting of the Assembly.[107] Once again, however, the Moderate Party managed to carry the day, defeating the Popular Party's recommendation in committee by a vote of fifty to seventeen. By the end of the year, Anderson, the ringleader in the campaign against Hume and Kames, was dead, and the Assembly had

---

[105] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 344-45.
[106] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 346.
[107] *Ibid*.

turned its attention to an enemy even closer to home.[108] The question of Hume's apostasy was

allowed to fade and Hume's wry prognostications of the previous year amounted to as little as

Hume likely expected.[109]

Beyond the possible explanations for the threat of excommunication against Hume that

Sher, Harris, and others have rehearsed, however, neither apostasy, nor radical skepticism, nor a

desire to embarrass the moderates served as the only grounds for the traditionalists' decision to

make Hume an issue in intra-ecclesial politics. Instead, Hume's support for the claims of royal

prerogative made by Charles I played a role in the traditionalists' decision to target Hume for

censure. In his *Letters on Mr. Hume's History*, Daniel MacQueen took Hume to task not only for

expressing impolitic opinions about Protestantism generally and seventeenth-century Calvinism

in particular, but for Hume's apparent support for Charles I in his struggles with Parliament and,

by extension, his support for efforts by the Court to exert more direct control over the personnel

of the *kirk*.

According to MacQueen, although Hume at points had appeared to support claims of

parliamentary right against the monarchy, he had also demonstrated a willingness to consider as

justified Charles's claims to absolute power and pointed to the confused state of the English

constitution during the seventeenth century as support for Charles's position. MacQueen,

however, found Hume's position unconvincing. Instead, he observed that the seventeenth-

century questions surrounding the nature of England's mixed monarchy demonstrated that any

pretensions of absolute royal power under the English constitution—and any willingness to

entertain the legitimacy of those pretensions—must have been mistaken. Consequently,

---

[108] The play *Douglas*, authored by the Reverend John Home, incensed clergy in the Popular
Party, who opposed theater as a corrupting influence on social mores and discipline and were
outraged that a member of the clergy had written a play.
[109] Hume to Allan Ramsay, June 1755, 1:224.

MacQueen continued, Hume's seemingly even-handed approach to the disputes between Charles and the Commons—which MacQueen dryly described as "so very moderate and cautious"—was properly read as an attempt by Hume to mask his support for "arbitrary" monarchical power.[110] As far as MacQueen was concerned, Hume had been revealed as an apologist for royal power, a position that would in turn have situated Hume on the side of those who saw the Scottish clergy as just one more group of civil servants properly subject to the Court's patronage power.

Indeed, MacQueen raised the stakes against Hume on exactly this question by pointing to Hume's statements concerning the trial for treason of the Earl of Strafford. As MacQueen reported, although the Commons had, rightly in MacQueen's estimation, regarded Strafford as a principal actor in an effort "to introduce an arbitrary and tyrannical government" into the British Isles, Hume saw Strafford's conduct of his duties as "innocent, and even laudable."[111] For MacQueen, Hume's willingness to entertain the possibility that Strafford was worthy of admiration had revealed Hume's true colors. Hume had, in MacQueen's estimation, weighed in on the side of "a favorite minister" of an aspiring tyrant, a minister who had aided and abetted the cause of unlimited royal prerogative.[112] Given the role that Robert Walpole had played in the consistent enforcement of the Patronage Act, then, I see MacQueen as signaling to his readers that Hume was an ally of the Court Whig project in its Scottish instantiation, an enemy to the perquisites of the *kirk*, and deserving of some censure, no matter how the basis of that censure

---

[110] MacQueen, *Letters*, in *Early Responses to Hume's* History of England, 1:117. MacQueen went on, noting that in seeking to apologize for Charles's claim of arbitrary power, Hume had "done injury to that cause"—that is, the royal cause—"which, it would appear, he meant to support." The better approach to such a line of argument, MacQueen admonished, would have been for Hume to have adopted Clarendon's line of analysis, which held that parliament erred when it decided to press its seeming advantage over Charles after the king had already agreed to the triennial election of parliaments and the abolition of the courts of star-chamber and high commission.

[111] MacQueen, *Letters*, in *Early Responses to Hume's* History of England, 1:118.

[112] MacQueen, *Letters*, in *Early Responses to Hume's* History of England, 1:119.

was expressed. Accordingly, it is for these reasons that I see Forbes as mistaken when he concludes that MacQueen read Hume as having been simply "inconsistent." Instead, MacQueen had identified Hume as an enemy of the ancient constitution, a partisan of monarchical power, and by extension a supporter of the Court's project of establishing its dominance over the *kirk*.

The point to all of this is that in his critique of Hume's *History*, MacQueen was troubled by more than Hume's account of the Reformation, the Puritans, and the Covenanters. In addition to those problems, MacQueen also identified in Hume's *History* a historical argument in favor of the kind of centralized Court authority that had been brought to bear on what MacQueen must have seen as the traditional rights of *kirk* self-governance. Such an argument, in turn, exposed Hume to MacQueen as an ideological opponent of the traditionalists on crucial questions of ecclesiology in addition to other matters of traditional church doctrine. Given the extent to which the Court, through its exercise of the patronage power, had been interfering with what the Popular Party saw as the *kirk*'s customary privileges, it makes sense that MacQueen would have sought to expose Hume as a supporter of Court interest as a means of amplifying opposition to him among those members of the clergy that were resisting the enforcement of the Patronage Act.

In seeking to associate Hume with the Court's project of bringing the *kirk* under greater centralized control and thus identify him as an enemy of the Popular Party's political interests, MacQueen was on to something, and it is something that prior Hume scholarship has failed seriously to take up: Hume's principled support for a strong, centralized Court administration, which he saw as a crucial feature of the polite social order that eighteenth-century Great Britain was enjoying. It is that support, I submit, as well as his apostasy and friendship with the moderates, that informed the traditionalist attack on Hume in the mid-1750s. Simply put, the

traditionalists recognized that Hume was a committed supporter of the ideology of Court Whiggery, one who sought to bolster the legitimacy of Court power and methods in the eyes of his readers while also leading them to regard alternative sites of authority and ideological opponents of the Court, most notably the Country party, as dangerous sites of factional discord.

CHAPTER 2

"TO BE DETESTED AND HATED"

I ended the last chapter by proposing that Hume was marked for excommunication in part because he had been identified as having offered support for the project of Court Whiggery, support that put him at odds with the *kirk*'s Popular Party. Along the same line, I observed that his political and historical writings should be read as efforts at convincing his readers both to commit themselves to that project and to reject, as dangerously factional, competing ideological projects, most notably those of the Country party and the subsequent Patriot movements. In this chapter, I want to begin to develop this case further by highlighting the concerns Hume had with the political factions of his day, in particular the Country party and its successor, the Patriot movement.

That Hume identified faction as the central political and social problem seems fairly clear. As he observed in the essay "Of Parties in General," his most focused treatment of the topic, "Of all men, that distinguish themselves by memorable achievements, the first place of honour seems due to LEGISLATORS and founders of states, who transmit a system of laws and institutions to secure the peace, happiness, and liberty of future generations."[1] In contrast to such Olympian figures, Hume observed that:

> As much as legislators and founders of states ought to be honoured and respected among men, as much ought the founders of sects and factions to be detested and hated; because the influence of faction is directly contrary to that of laws. Factions subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest of animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other.[2]

---

[1] Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 54.
[2] Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 55.

On his own account then, Hume identified the leaders of factions as the greatest threat to ordered, stable liberty. Given his views on the origin and nature of justice and social order, Hume's alarm over the prospect of faction makes eminent sense. As seen in the *Treatise*, Hume took the position that human beings do not have an instinct for cooperation or sociability that is naturally occurring in the first order; instead, we are at our core deeply self-interested animals. Nevertheless, given the benefits that accrue from collective action, human beings ultimately come to recognize that our individual self-interest is naturally best served by submitting ourselves to certain conventions of justice like property and contract rights.[3] Likewise, by extension we also conclude that it is best to subject ourselves to both the social order that allows for the enjoyment of those conventions and the political order that enforces them against those who are otherwise inclined to seek immediate advantage by violating the conventions of property and contract.[4] In short, according to Hume, a deliberate—some might say enlightened— understanding of our self-interest should lead us to obey civil authorities and commit ourselves to the maintenance of social order.

In Humean terms, however, factions have the tendency to obscure this understanding of self-interest and can lead us to elevate the interests of one part of the social whole over that of the whole itself. This elevation, in turn, can degrade our ability to recognize that our self-interest is best served by an allegiance to society as a whole and can even threaten civil peace when a narrow interest is seen as more important than the norms of property, contract, and order. As Hume put the matter, "When men act in a faction, they are apt, without shame or remorse, to

---

[3] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 484-501. For a succinct statement of this point, see Carl Wennerlind, "David Hume's Political Philosophy: A Theory of Commercial Modernization," *Hume Studies* XXVIII, no. 2 (November, 2002).

[4] Hume, *Treatise*, 534-39.

neglect all the ties of honour and morality, in order to serve their party."[5] In light of these effects

that factions can have on our commitments to the preconditions of justice and social peace,

Hume's views on human psychology and the sources of moral and political obligations naturally

led him to hold grave objections to partisan commitments.

Unfortunately, attention to the role that faction played in Hume's political thought has

failed to consider adequately the ways in which his writings on faction might shed light on

Hume's own ideological commitments.[6] This chapter, then, seeks not merely to explicate

---

[5] Hume, "Of the First Principles of Government," in *Essays*, 33. On this point see also the language from "Of Parties in General" quoted above.

[6] One classic monograph on Hume's political thought that does engage with the topic of faction and seeks to situate it within Hume's social and political context is Nicholas Phillipson, *David Hume*. As I have explained in the introduction, however, I find Phillipson's analysis ultimately lacking, largely because it fails to offer any explanation of why he sees religious faction as the concern that animated Hume's political and historical writings. One seminal study that addresses Hume's views on faction, albeit briefly, is Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*, 174-77. Duncan Forbes also discusses Hume on party in the context of situating Hume's thought on the British constitution. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 184-86 and 201-19. Forbes and Miller, however, insist on reading Hume as deliberately without party and a neutral in the disagreements between Court and Country. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 219-23; Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*, 177-82. In advancing his view of Hume as a reformist liberal, John Stewart also brushes up against discussions of Hume on faction, but as with Forbes, this analysis is incidental. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 244-52. That being said, Stewart situates Hume's reformism in the context of a commitment to Court Whiggery. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 9-12. In his more comprehensive earlier work on Hume, Stewart pays almost no attention to faction, Stewart, *The Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). Other major seminal works on Hume's political thought that do not discuss Hume's views on faction are Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* and Whelan, *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Of more recent works on Hume's political thought, two only address the issue of faction perfunctorily. Russell Hardin, *David Hume: Moral and Political Theorist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 151-53 and Neil McArthur, *David Hume's Political Theory: Law, Commerce, and the Constitution of Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 129. McArthur, in addition, makes the classic mistake that I discuss in this chapter of reducing Hume's concern with faction to religious factions. Two other significant recent works do engage with Hume on faction. Andrew Sabl, *Hume's Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the* History of England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) and Ryu Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*. Sabl's treatment of Hume on faction, however, does not situate Hume in his political or discursive context, but

Hume's writings on faction, but to examine the ways in which those writings can provide

perspective on Hume's own partisan allegiance, which, contrary to much of the conventional

wisdom on Hume's social and political thought, included the promotion of the Court Whig

---

instead only comes in the course of Sabl's innovative account of Hume's political thought, which according to Sabl is best understood as a statement of the game theory concept of dynamic coordination, a statement that Sabl sees Hume as having developed most fully in the *History*. On Sabl's reading, for Hume political conventions of authority and allegiance arose as the mutual products of interest-promoting behavior on the part of political actors. Sabl, *Hume's Politics*, 6-9. Sabl examines both faction and religion—which he treats as having been analytically distinct for Hume—as social phenomena that have the effect of interfering with the kind of strategic behavior on which dynamic coordination—and stability-producing political conventions—depends. Susato's work, in contrast, does seek to place Hume within his own context and soundly recognizes that Hume was at least as concerned with political factions as he was with religious factions and thus that Hume did not reduce the problem of faction to one exclusively of religion. Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 177-213. Nevertheless, I part company with Susato when he claims that the Jacobite uprising of 1745 especially focused Hume's attention on the problem of political faction. Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 185-189. In support of this conclusion Susato points to the fact that in editions of the essay following the '45 he excised his erroneous position that by the early 1740s the Scottish "find, that the *Jacobite* Party is almost entirely vanish'd from among us." Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 187-88, quoting Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 616 n. k (emphasis in the original). That decision, however, only reflects on the fact that Hume recognized the flawed nature of his analysis about the danger that Jacobitism posed. Susato also cites the fact that Hume wrote four essays on faction following the '45—"Of the Original Contract," "Of Passive Obedience," "Of the Protestant Succession," and "Of the Coalition of Parties"—but ignores the countervailing fact that Hume wrote even more essays concerned with faction before the '45, namely, "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," "Of the First Principles of Government," "Of the Independency of Parliament," "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic," "Of Parties in General," Of the Parties of Great Britain," and "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole." Indeed, Hume's discussion in the *Treatise* of the origin of government and the nature, extent, and conditions of political legitimacy are also directed toward the problem of the political factions of his day, most particular political factions that make use of or are motivated by commitments to speculative principles like social contract theory. Hume, *Treatise*, 534-567. To be fair to Susato, although he does not point to the *History* as evidence of Hume's increased interest in faction following the '45, the *History* was, nevertheless, another post-1745 work of Hume's that was deeply concerned with the beliefs, commitments, and preconceptions of Britain's political factions. Given the extent to which Hume was concerned with the problem of faction from the *Treatise* to the *History*, the better reading of Hume is that he was acutely concerned with the problem of political factions throughout his career and that, contrary to Susato's claim, the '45 in no way "triggered Hume's realization that party zeal, especially based upon personal attachment, was stronger and more dangerous than he had previously estimated." Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 188.

project. In the course of making this case, I will also counter a prevalent view of Hume that sees him as having been primarily concerned with factions based on speculative religious principles, which usually has been understood in terms of a fanatical Christian enthusiasm.[7] Contrary to that position, I argue that Hume regarded mass-based political factions founded on both principle and interest that opposed the centralized state and commercial order of his day—that is, the Country party and the successor Patriot movement—as the real dangers to the social order of his day.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds in four parts. First, I will briefly set forth Hume's basic typology for understanding faction and then move to an examination of how other Hume scholars, in applying Hume's outline of factional types to Hume's own political and social thought, have mistakenly identified Hume's primary concern with faction to factions of religious principle. These scholars, I argue, have ignored the social, political, and economic context in which Hume was writing and therefore have proceeded from a distorted sense of the issues that motivated Hume's thought. Accordingly, in the second section, I will bring forward that context to provide a richer sense of why concerns about faction loomed so prominently in Hume's political thought and why those concerns took the forms they did. In particular, I will discuss the emergence of the fiscal-military state in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Britain and the centralization of power in the Court. In the third section, I will discuss the reaction to this centralization by the Country party. Having developed this discursive and social context, in the fourth section, I will then examine Hume's thought on faction and social order and bring to the foreground the ways in which he viewed the Country party, not religious factions of principle, as the pressing threat to British social order in his day.

---

[7] See Phillipson, *David Hume*; Arkin, "'The Intractable Principle'"; Jennifer Herdt, "Opposite Sentiments"; Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*; and Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 2, *Narratives of Civil Government*, 190-98.

HUME'S FACTIONAL TYPES AND CURRENT SCHOLARLY MISREADINGS

Having identified factions as being properly detested and hated, Hume—in typical Humean fashion—went on in "Of Parties in General" to provide a typology of factions. He divided them into two main types, personal and real, which he described in turn as "factions founded on personal friendship or animosity among such as compose the contending parties, and . . . those founded on some real difference of sentiment or interest." Although he noted that parties were "seldom found pure and unmixed, either of the one kind or the other," Hume made clear that a party almost by necessity would be dominated by one of these two characteristics. He had a bit less to say about personal factions than real, noting that they occur most readily in small republics, where "Every domestic quarrel . . . becomes an affair of state."[8]

As for real factions, Hume subdivided them into factions that proceeded from interest, principle, or affection. Hume described factions of affection as parties "founded on . . . attachments of men towards particular families and persons, whom they desire to rule over them." For example, in Hume's day, those who continued to favor the Stuart pretense out of an affinity for the Stuart line, rather than from some principled commitment to the divine right of kings, could have been said to have been a faction of affection.[9] As for factions of interest, which are marked by their members' shared interests in social status or access to wealth, resources, or other economic advantage, Hume regarded them as "the most reasonable, and the most

---

[8] Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 56.

[9] The difference between personal factions and real factions of affection is that with the former the members of the faction have a direct personal relationship and obligation to the factional patron, while in the latter case the members have no such direct tie to the factional patron, but instead support the patron from a distance. On this point, see the original version of Hume's essay "Of the Parties of Great Britain," where he describes the Tories less as a party of principle committed to the notion of indefeasible right and more as a party of affection for the House of Stuart. *Essays*, 613-14.

excusable." This type of faction, according to Hume, proceeded as a kind of natural consequence of human selfishness, given that "distinct orders of men, nobles and people, soldiers and merchants, have all a distinct interest."[10] Despite, however, the seemingly accepting tones with which Hume characterized parties of interest, in both the *Essays* and especially in the *History*, he ultimately ended up taking a far less receptive view of them than this apparent approval would suggest; this is a conclusion I will develop below.

The third type of real faction in Hume's typology was factions of speculative principle, which, interestingly enough, Hume identified as being "known only to modern times." According to Hume, such parties could aggregate around either speculative political or religious principles. With the exception of personal factions, Hume far and away devoted the most attention in "Of Parties in General" to real factions of speculative religious principle.[11] That being said, when he addressed faction in the remainder of his essays, Hume was much more expressly interested in factions of speculative political principle, especially the Country/Court and the Whig/Tory divides in English politics. Essays in which Hume devoted considerable attention to parties of speculative political principle and political interest included: "That Politics May be Reduced to a Science," "Of the First Principles of Government," "Of the Independency of Parliament," "Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic," and "Of the Parties of Great Britain"—like "Of Parties in General" all published in 1741; A Character of Sir Robert Walpole"—published in 1742; "Of the Original Contract" and "Of Passive Obedience"—both published in 1748; "Of the Protestant Succession,"—published in 1752; and "Of the Coalition of Parties"—published in 1758. Accordingly, worries over political factions figured prominently in Hume's thought.

---

[10] Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 59-60.
[11] Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 56-63.

Given his extended attention to factions of speculative political principle, I find it surprising that the scholarship that does discuss Hume on faction tends to reduce his concern to one of religious factions. As a preliminary matter, with rare exceptions like Phillipson and Susato, the leading monographs on Hume's political thought do not offer much in the way of sustained analyses of the role that faction plays in his work.[12] Other works that have addressed Hume's thought on faction fall into two categories: efforts at identifying the continuities and discontinuities between Hume and James Madison on the topic of faction, and the contemporary philosopher of religion Jennifer Herdt's exploration of the relationship in Hume's thought between his moral psychology and his account in the *History* of the emergence and spread of factional commitments. The role of faction in Hume's political thought, as distinguished from the relationship of that thought to the political thought of James Madison, thus has received scant attention. Moreover, the legal historian Marc Arkin—who has written in the line of scholarship linking Hume and Madison—and Herdt have both collapsed Hume's concern with faction into a concern with religion.[13] Although these writers are certainly correct to associate Hume's concern

---

[12] Of the major monographs exceptions, again, are Phillipson, *David Hume* and Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*.

[13] Herdt, "Opposite Sentiments"; Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*; Arkin, "'The Intractable Principle'." As I have previously noted, Phillipson makes the same mistake. Phillipson, *David Hume*, 16-17, 21-22, 26-31, and 51-52. Similarly, John Pocock also falls into the same error of his discussion of Hume in the second volume of *Barbarism and Religion*. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 2, *Narratives of Civil Government*, 190-98. There, Pocock claimed that the factions of "abstract speculative principle" that Hume decries in "Of Parties in General" were reducible to matters of, in Pocock's words, "theological and ecclesiological belief." In reaching this conclusion, Pocock expressly rejected the possibility that Hume might have been referring to "political, social [*sic*] or historical" ideologies. To effect this rejection, however, Pocock was forced into a strained and highly tendentious reading of a crucial passage in "Of Parties in General." Specifically, Pocock focused on Hume's suggestive observation that parties of speculative principles—what we might call parties of an ideologically programmatic nature—are a distinctively modern phenomenon. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 2, *Narratives of Civil Government*, 191. Pocock insists that "modern" in this instance cannot be read "in its Enlightened and post-ecclesiastical sense," but instead must point toward another

with religion as a social and political phenomenon with his concern about faction more generally, they were wrong to claim total identity between the two. Put simply, Hume's anxieties about faction went well beyond his concerns over religion.

On Arkin's account, Hume "treated religion as a primary cause of faction in the modern state and religious denominations as a paradigm of the self-interested groups that can undermine the secular state."[14] This treatment, Arkin goes on, amounted to an "equation of religion and

meaning, one that related "modern" to all of European history after the close of antiquity. In that sense, Pocock contends, Hume could only have been talking about factions based on religious belief. In rejecting the first possible reading of modern, however, Pocock simply asserts that Hume's discussion of parties of principle could not have been addressing parties centered on political or social ideologies because, according to Pocock, such factions were only beginning to emerge later in Hume's life, and thus well after Hume wrote "Of Parties in General." Consequently, the only other possible meaning of modern that Hume could have been using is the one on which Pocock settled, a meaning that allowed Pocock to reduce all of Hume's concern with faction to matters of religious authority and enthusiasm, and perfunctorily eliminate from consideration the possibility that Hume could have been talking about political or social factions. The problem with Pocock's position is that it demands that one ignore the numerous essays in which Hume actively engages with the problem of factions of political principle. Pocock mentions just one of these in his treatment of Hume—"That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science"—but only in passing and on an unrelated topic. Simply put, in no way did Hume need to wait until "the later years of [his] life" to encounter parties with programs founded on political, social, or historical doctrines. At the time at which Hume wrote and published his first essays British politics had been marked for decades by arguments between Court and Country over the national debt, the moneyed interest, and the Crown's patronage power, arguments that triggered hotly contested debates over the nature of the English constitution and theories of political legitimacy, and that Hume addressed from his earliest essays.

[14] Arkin's article comes out of the tradition of reading James Madison's views on faction and constitutional structure through the interpretive lens of Hume's political thought. This tradition dates back to Douglass Adair's 1943 dissertation at Yale and, more particularly with respect to faction, Adair's seminal 1957 article on Hume, Madison, and faction. Adair, "That Politics may be Reduced to a Science: David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (August, 1957). The dissertation is "The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy: Republicanism, the Class Struggle, and the Virtuous Farmer" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1943), eventually published as *The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy: Republicanism, the Class Struggle, and the Virtuous Farmer*, ed. Mark E. Yellin (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2000). Like Adair, Arkin seeks to identify connections between Hume's and Madison's thought on and responses to the problem of faction. Where Adair and others emphasized Hume's and Madison's structural responses to the problem of faction, however, Arkin sees another unexplored site of both continuity and discontinuity:

faction" in Hume's thought. In support of this reading, Arkin relied almost exclusively on "Of

Parties in General," which she characterized as "predominantly concerned with the problems

presented by religious parties." Arkin claims that for Hume "religious strife was the preeminent

danger to the body politic," and that this strife proceeded from enthusiastic sects and a priestly

class independent from the control of the civil authority.[15] Arkin reduced Hume's solution to this

problem to an established church under the strict control of the secular authority.

    Arkin is certainly right when she observes that Hume regarded a religious establishment

as a necessary feature of government policy, a point over which he differed with his good friend

---

Hume's and Madison's concern with and responses to religious factions. Indeed, as Arkin herself
notes, hers was the first work to associate Hume's thinking on religion with his political thought.
Arkin, "'The Intractable Principle'," 158. According to Arkin, the relationship between Hume
and Madison on faction can be found in what she sees as Hume's reduction of faction to religion,
Madison's familiarity with Hume's thought on faction, Madison's accompanying recognition
that Hume had reduced all faction to religion, and Madison's conclusion that the experience of
religious pluralism in Virginia might offer useful ways of thinking about the problem of faction
more generally. Unfortunately, Arkin does not adequately support her conclusion that Hume's
primary concern with faction was religious faction. Indeed, in constructing her argument Arkin
ignores significant textual evidence that runs counter to her position and fails to take a
sufficiently full account of the context in which Hume was writing. As a result, she ends up
misstating Hume's views on faction, and this misstatement undermines the soundness of the rest
of her analysis. For other works in this vein, see Edmund S. Morgan, "Safety in Numbers:
Madison, Hume, and the Tenth *Federalist*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (Spring,
1986); Mark G. Spencer, "Hume and Madison on Faction," *The William and Mary Quarterly*,
3rd series, 59, no. 4 (October, 2002); Garry Wills, *Explaining America: The Federalist* (Garden
City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980). This line of scholarship has mostly emphasized the structural
features of government that Hume and Madison proposed for dealing with faction in republics.
Prior to Hume and Madison the prevailing view among political theorists from Polybius to
Montesquieu had been that self-government could only obtain in small republics; allow the state
to grow too large, the classical analysis went, and factions would become so numerous and
unruly that the state would only be governable by a despot. Moreover, even in small republics
factions presented a constant threat, as the liberty that the citizens of republics enjoyed could
easily be turned to projects of self-advancement instead of the common weal.
[15] Arkin, "'The Intractable Principle'," 158-64.

Adam Smith. Arkin's more substantial point on Hume, however, is mistaken.[16] Quite simply, Hume did not think about faction exclusively or even primarily in terms of religion. Indeed, Arkin fails to supply any real support for her conclusion that Hume "equated" religion and faction. Instead, she selectively cites from Hume's works, focusing on "Of Parties in General," which, admittedly, does devote substantial attention to the topic of religious faction. From the attention devoted to religious faction in that single essay, Arkin concludes that for Hume "religious strife was the preeminent danger to the body politic."[17]

Arkin's discussion does not take adequate account of the complexities of even that single essay. In addition, she fails to consider the substantial attention Hume devoted to the problem of eighteenth-century political factions in the other essays I have already mentioned. Indeed, of the several other essays that Hume wrote on political factions, Arkin mentions only "Of the Parties of Great Britain," "Of the Original Contract," and "Of the Coalition of Parties," and those only in passing. Moreover, she provides no substantive engagement with the *History*, Hume's most extensive treatment of the social dangers of faction. In addition, Arkin fails to situate Hume within his own discursive, social, and political context, paying no attention to the events of Hume's time that would have led him to his earlier-quoted conclusion that factions were the greatest danger to stable social order.[18] Given these omissions and oversights in her study, it is

---

[16] Mark G. Spencer shares this estimation of Arkin's argument, stating that, contrary to Arkin's position, "religious factions were a long way from serving for Hume 'as a paradigm for faction." Spencer, "Hume and Madison on Faction," 869-96.

[17] Arkin, "'The Intractable Principle'," 158-59. The only support she offers for her assertion is the conclusory declaration that "Hume's views were clearly informed by the events of the English Civil War," a declaration that she defends by reciting the bare facts of seventeenth-century British history. Arkin, "'The Intractable Principle'," 159 n. 60.

[18] Indeed, beyond her failure to contextualize Hume, at one point Arkin seemingly mis-contextualizes him: "Just as Hume wrote against the background of the English Civil Wars," Arkin writes, "so Madison read Hume against the background of his own colonial experience." At another point she states that for Hume the religious strife of the sixteenth and seventeenth

no wonder that Arkin mistakenly concludes that Hume identified religion as either the quintessential form of faction or at least its single most dangerous instantiation.

Although her work on Hume is far more interesting and analytically subtle than Arkin's, the philosopher of religion Jennifer Herdt makes substantially the same mistake in her study of Hume and faction: she concludes that for Hume religious commitments were the real site of his worry over faction. Herdt makes this claim as part of a larger analysis of Hume's moral philosophy that is in most ways exceedingly well-reasoned and compelling. Herdt begins with what I see as an eminently sound premise: she argues that Hume's philosophy of religion and his social and political writings were not, contrary to some earlier commentators, separate projects.[19]

---

centuries was "recent history." Arkin, "'The Intractable Principle'," 168. Of course, Arkin understands that unlike Madison's experience in Virginia, Hume did not have direct experience of the English Civil War. Nevertheless, she still seems to collapse the temporal distance between two points in the past, seemingly on the assumption that events that occurred in the past all happened at roughly the same time, in this case the one hundred years between the start of the English Civil War and Hume's publication of "Of Parties in General." Claiming that Hume wrote against the background of the English Civil Wars is a bit like claiming that Walter Lippmann wrote against the background of the American Civil War.

[19] On this point, Herdt follows in the line of scholars like Kenneth R. Merrill and Donald G. Wester, who argue that Hume's interest in religion is of a piece with his concern with social life and political order, and Keith Yandell, who sees Hume's interest in religion as part of Hume's larger moral project. Herdt *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 8-9; citing Merrill and Wester, "Hume on the Relation of Religion to Morality," *Journal of Religion* 60 (1980), 273 and 276; and Yandell, *Hume's Inexplicable Mystery: His Views on Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 83. The position against which Herdt, et al., are pushing is the idea that Hume's interest in religion is simply and solely an outgrowth of a more fundamental interest in epistemology, a conclusion found in J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, (London: Macmillan, 1978) and Richard Wollheim, *Hume on Religion* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963). Even stronger arguments against the compartmentalization of Hume's thought can be found in other studies that see a unified agenda in Hume's broader philosophical work and his social and political writings. On this, see Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* and Whelan, *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Similarly, Victor Wexler has rejected the claim of scholars like Carl Becker and James Noxon, who saw a sharp rupture between Hume's philosophical and historical work, a rupture caused on their account by Hume's skepticism or empiricism, respectively, and his resulting conclusion that any continuing philosophical inquiry would have been futile. Wexler, *David Hume and the* History of England, 24-25. Instead, following David Fate Norton and Richard Popkin, Wexler sees Hume's historical

Instead, Herdt reads Hume's philosophy of religion as of a piece with his social and political thought.

In particular, Herdt sees Hume's corpus as directed toward the social, political, and economic improvement of Scotland. That is, on Herdt's account Hume's intellectual output lies firmly within the trajectory of the Scottish Enlightenment and its drive to elevate Scotland to the level of major economic and intellectual centers like England and the Netherlands.[20] Although Hume's interests extended well beyond the material and social improvement of Scotland to the maintenance of prosperity and social order in Great Britain and greater peace—and opportunities for trade—among the developed states of Western Europe, Herdt is certainly correct that Scotland's relative poverty—and Hume's desire for Scottish development—also figured prominently in Hume's concerns.[21] Herdt, however, then proceeds to make what I regard as a crucial analytical misstep: she asserts that Hume regarded religious faction as the greatest threat to Scotland's national emergence and to the stability of Great Britain more generally. She bases this claim on the conflict between the Popular Party and the Moderate Party described in the preceding chapter.

Herdt then sets out to reconstruct why Hume would, according to her, regard religious faction as the great danger to social order. Relying on Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, Herdt discusses Hume's view that monotheistic belief systems call on believers to adopt views of God

---

attack on the Whiggish "enchanted view" of the English past as continuous with the skepticism that Hume developed in the *Treatise*. *Ibid*., citing Norton and Popkin, *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), lx.

[20] Herdt "Opposite Sentiments," 246-47; Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 10-11.

[21] On the Scottish Enlightenment and the Enlightenment more generally as a project directed primarily at the improvement of the material conditions of life, see John W. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

that are ultimately incoherent. In particular, Herdt cites Hume's discussion of the duty of

believers to heap love and praise on God, even in the face of the immense punishments that God

wills for His own inscrutable reasons.[22] Even worse, according to Hume, the monotheist believes

that God has complete knowledge of the believer's thoughts, thus requiring the believer—who

wishes to be pleasing to God—to conceal from himself or herself the feelings of anger and

distrust he or she feels toward God for the sufferings God visits on the world.[23] According to

Herdt, these contradictions "give rise to instability and faintness of belief, instability of belief

gives rise to zeal—and zeal is what accounts for the virulence of religious faction," as religious

believers of particular stripes band together to insulate themselves from the added pressures of

those who hold differing beliefs.[24] Religious faction thus results from the psychological stresses

and contradictions of monotheistic belief, and, according to Herdt, Hume held that the zeal that

accompanies that belief makes religion the most dangerous of social factions.[25]

---

[22] Herdt, "Opposite Sentiments," 249-52; Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 11-13, 224.

[23] Herdt, "Opposite Sentiments," 252 ("Worshippers must affect admiration even of a God who sentences people to eternal damnation, and must do so not solely publicly, but privately—they must attempt to deceive themselves, since it is no longer possible to deceive the deity by professing one thing while believing something else. The deity's eavesdropping capabilities have been exalted to infinity along with everything else"). Herdt notes that Hume's statement of God's attributes and proper human attitudes toward God reflects his specifically Calvinist upbringing. Herdt, "Opposite Sentiments," 252.

[24] Herdt, "Opposite Sentiments," 253.

[25] Herdt makes an even more developed argument in her monograph, which relates Hume on religious faction to his theory of the source of moral action. According to Herdt in the *Treatise* Hume sought to develop a wholly this-worldly account of human moral action that could delegitimize the temptation toward social conflict and violent disturbances, and would instead encourage "living well and doing well in this world, which is the only one we know." Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 26. The source Hume identified to explain the prospects for moral human action was the quality of extensive human sympathy. According to Herdt Hume's theory of moral sympathy rejected the traditional Calvinist account that saw human nature as viciously self-interested and in need of external constraints ultimately supplied by the will of God. It also sought "wholly to secularize modern natural law," which depended on a spare, non-sectarian conception of a providential deity, "without undermining the acceptability

Although Herdt provides a subtle and careful reading of some dense Humean texts, she falls victim to the same types of errors that Arkin commits. Admittedly, Herdt does a better job of contextualizing Hume, as she at least relates him to discursive and institutional conflicts that he lived through, namely, the program of the Scottish Enlightenment and the eighteenth-century conflicts in the Church of Scotland. While I agree with Herdt that those conflicts did inform some of Hume's thinking on faction and social order, Herdt is simply too quick to limit her efforts at contextualization to the disagreements between the Popular Party and the Moderate Party. Put simply, the battle within the *kirk* was just one of the conflicts and tensions at play in mid-eighteenth-century British society and, at least judging from his writings, not the one that held the greatest concern for Hume.

In addition, like Arkin, Herdt seems to ignore Hume's writings that run directly counter to her thesis. To be fair to Herdt, she does employ the *History* in the fifth chapter of her monograph, but her engagement with the *History* is with an eye toward demonstrating the ways in which Hume used the *History* as a means of helping his readers identify their own efforts at self-deception, helping them develop their sympathetic responses by confronting them with historical others, and shoring up her account of the relationship between zealous factions

---

of [Hume's] account by . . . depicting human beings as utterly selfish and morality as merely a hidden expression of self-interest." Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 21-27. Hume's theory of sympathy built on both Francis Hutcheson's idea of an innate human moral sense (but it also rejected the providential origin that Hutcheson saw for that sense) and theories of sympathy developed by Latitudinarians and the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury. Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 2 and 27-33. Humean moral sympathy, according to Herdt, is of an extensive and active nature; it enables people to enter into the perspectives of others and thus to act in genuinely cooperative and altruistic ways with those with whom we have entered into a properly Humean sympathetic relationship. Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 1-2. Herdt then argues that religious zeal, reinforced by factional unity, interferes with the proper development and operation of this human capability, thus making the prospects for social conflict and, ultimately, social violence much greater. Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 203-05 and 213.

predicated on speculative religious principle and the breakdown of the capability of extensive sympathy.[26] She does not, however, acknowledge that much of the *History* deals with types of faction and factional violence that have nothing to do with factions of religious principle. Indeed, she expressly minimizes the problem of factions of interest, factions that elsewhere in the *History* Hume expressly decries. Of course, as I noted above, in "Of Parties in General," Hume remarked that factions of interest were "the most reasonable, and the most excusable." Herdt, however, misreads Hume on this point, a conclusion that a fuller reading of both the *Essays* and the *History* reveals.

As with Arkin, if Herdt had been more attentive to some of Hume's other essays, she would have seen that Hume's worries over faction in his time extended well beyond factions of religious principle to a far greater worry about the divides in British society between the Court and Country parties and to a lesser extent between the Tories and Whigs. She also would have recognized that for Hume the most pernicious threats to social order were not bare factions of speculative principle, whether of a religious or a political nature, but factions that combined a self-interested elite and masses motivated by speculative principle.[27] As it stands, however, the only essay on party with which she engages is "Of Parties in General." Engaging solely with that essay greatly misstates the worries Hume had about the factions of his time and creates the mistaken impression that Hume was primarily concerned with religious faction.

To be clear, I am not attempting to argue that Hume had no concerns with religious factions. He clearly did, and he devoted more than a small amount of attention to them in his

---

[26] Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, 188-206 and 223. For more on Herdt's views of extensive sympathy in Hume, see footnote 27 directly above.

[27] For the division in religious factions between priestly elites driven by interest and popular elements driven by principle, please see Hume, "Of Parties in General" in *Essays*, 61-62. For Hume's statement of the same sort of elite-mass divide in the British court and country parties, see Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 65.

writings. I am, however, arguing that Hume's primary—indeed, his predominating—factional worry came in the form of political parties that wedded elite self-interest and a principle-driven mass base. Efforts to argue that Hume was instead primarily motivated by worries over religious factions misunderstand his writings and his efforts at engaging the problems of British society as he saw them. In the remainder of this chapter, then, I will seek to provide a fuller portrait of Hume's thinking on faction, one more attentive to Hume's social and discursive context, the concerns that motivated Hume's attention to faction, and the range of Hume's writing on the topic, both in his *Essays* and the *History*.

THE IRONY OF REVOLUTION

In arguing for the significance of Hume's political thought, David Miller has noted, "It is often suggested that the work of the great political thinkers of the past should be interpreted as a response to dramatic events occurring within their personal experience."[28] Unlike Hobbes and the English Civil War, Locke and the Revolution of 1688, or Burke and the French Revolution, however, Hume's thought, according to Miller, cannot be tied to any single moment of crisis and rupture. Rather, Miller continues, Hume was most active during the "years of *comparative* political stability" that Great Britain enjoyed from 1714 until the 1760s, a "stability" that deprived Hume of the chance to develop his political thought in response to some great transformative event. Nevertheless, Miller concludes, Hume is an exception to the stated rule: a great political thinker whose work did *not* proceed from the crucible of open civil conflict. The remainder of Miller's work goes on to make that case.

---

[28] Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*, 1.

Although British events in the early and middle parts of the eighteenth century did not rise to the level of obvious disruptions like those Miller cites for other great political thinkers, he still conceded too much on this point. Indeed, in his recitation of great thinkers and great events, Miller also points to Marx, linking him not, for example, to the revolutions of 1848, but instead to "the various upheavals surrounding the birth of an urban proletariat in Western Europe."[29] To the extent that social transformations and tensions of less obvious moment than civil wars and revolutions can still qualify as "dramatic events" capable of producing great political thinkers, the economic, social, and political transformations of Augustan and early Hanoverian Britain at least merit consideration. Given the extent to which the kind of commercial society and centralized, fiscal-military state that mark the modern West were emerging and taking hold in Great Britain during the latter half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century, a period that obviously included the very same years in which Hume came of age and wrote, denying that Hume confronted "dramatic events" seems erroneous.[30] Indeed, it simply takes for granted the kind of social order that the contemporary developed world enjoys and ignores the substantial social tensions and pressures that the emergence of that order generated in early and mid-eighteenth century Great Britain. Miller's conclusion ignores the considerable stresses that the changes Great Britain was experiencing placed on the social order generally, the

---

[29] *Ibid*. I assume here that Miller would have been more specific had he been referring to the failed revolutions of 1848 instead of the broader social transformation that Europe was experiencing in the nineteenth century.

[30] Bob Harris makes a similar case in his *Politics and the Nation*. There, he argues that the conventional narrative of English political stability from the 1720s through the 1750s misses the intense sense of "insecurity and challenge" felt by mid-eighteenth century Englishmen, especially in the face of what was then perceived as an ineradicable Jacobite threat, the mid-century rivalry with a France that seemed poised to threaten England's Protestant succession, and perhaps even British maritime preeminence, and the changes being wrought on British society by commercial development. Harris, *Politics and the Nation*, 2-5, 10.

social and political responses to those stresses, and the effect those stresses would have had on the thought of an active and subtle mind like that of Hume.

In large measure, Hume's political and social thought was a product not—as Arkin would have it—of the English Civil Wars nor—as Herdt would have it—of the controversies between partisans of the Church of Scotland's Moderate and Popular parties, but instead out of the tensions and stresses that surrounded the emergence and consolidation of the modern British state, a state that developed in the centralized apparatus of the Court and developed out of—and in many ways despite—England's Glorious Revolution. The most significant of the tensions and stresses resulting from the development of the state was the partisan controversy that erupted between Court loyalists and a Country opposition over these developments. These developments may not have exhibited the obvious *Sturm und Drang* upon which Miller seems to insist, but they were no less momentous or disruptive of the social order. As John Brewer has demonstrated, William III's expansion of the royal army and navy ushered in the emergence of the modern, centralized state in Great Britain. It also inaugurated a shift in political power from the landed class to a centralized state apparatus. This transformation in English social and political life in turn served as the crucial flashpoint for the debates over faction in eighteenth-century Great Britain that so concerned Hume. It also ironically helped to effect some of the same changes in the English state and society that William's supporters in England had sought to prevent under James II.

As Steve Pincus has assiduously argued, resistance to James II emerged over what Pincus has described as James's program of Catholic modernization. Under this program, which was deeply influenced by James's admiration for Louis XIV's régime, James II and his advisers sought to extend state power along rational and absolutist-Bourbon lines. James generated

substantial new revenues through the royal prerogatives over customs, excises, and the hearth tax.[31] He also expanded central state power over local government, sought to make the judiciary his own creature, and tried to bring Parliament to heel by depriving uncooperative MPs of their government offices.[32] In addition, the army and the navy began to grow under James as part of his project of Bourbon-style modernization. James's military project included tripling the amount spent on the army, more than quadrupling the size of the army to roughly forty thousand troops, and stationing government troops throughout England.[33]

As Pincus has argued, James's careful and effective efforts at state centralization, neither his Catholicism nor his purportedly irrational policies, produced the united revolutionary front of Whigs and Tories against him.[34] The Tories resisted James because they opposed his invasion of traditional prerogatives and his efforts at state centralization at least as much as they did his Catholicism and his attempt, whatever its true motive, at a broad religious toleration. The Whigs, in turn, supported James's moves toward tolerating non-conforming Protestants but loathed his efforts at making Parliament either his shill or an irrelevancy through the use of royal patronage. In their own ways, both groups understood English liberty in terms of the prerogatives enjoyed by the "estates" of the Lords and the Commons, and so they viewed James's efforts at overriding those prerogatives as assaults on English liberty. Further, both groups deeply opposed his efforts at developing a standing army, especially one staffed with ideologically loyal Catholic officers.

---

[31] Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 160; Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 65.
[32] Pincus, *1688*, 154-59.
[33] Pincus, *1688*, 144-45.
[34] Pincus, *1688*, 180. Brewer comes close to recognizing the same point, observing, "The Glorious Revolution was not only a Protestant but a 'country' revolution, concerned both to preserve the true faith as England's official religion and to reduce the powers of central government." Brewer, *Sinews*, 142.

James's program thus united most of the political nation in revolution against him and in favor of the accession of William III and James's daughter Mary II, who, it was planned, would rule in a manner strictly consistent with the wishes of Parliament.

Although William came to the throne on a wave of opposition to James's efforts at centralizing state power along Bourbon lines, the irony of history is that it was the anti-Bourbon policies of William III and his anti-absolutist Whig supporters—and William's successors—that helped further the centralization of state power that had begun under and contributed to the fall of James II. Moreover, the centralized state apparatus that developed around first the late Stuart and then the Hanoverian monarchs provided royal ministers with the means of bringing Parliament to heel in ways of which James II could have only dreamed, and contrary to the visions of utter parliamentary supremacy that had danced through the head of many a seventeenth-century Whig. These ironies and the resistance to their emergence led to the eruption of the Country ideology that joined Old Whigs with Tories in early- and mid-eighteenth-century Great Britain in defense of what they claimed were the traditional prerogatives of Parliament.

As one would expect, the concentration of power in the Court that continued under William did not happen without resistance from Parliament. The dominant Whigs in Parliament were committed to ensuring that, unlike Parliament in the earlier Stuart reigns, they would keep a tight control on government finances and thus, by extension, on the Court. In particular, they sought to deprive their new king of the kind of income that would allow him to act independently of parliamentary approval. Parliament refused to grant William the competency for life that Charles II and James II had enjoyed and instead only permitted him to retain the monarch's hereditary revenue from the excise on beer and ale and the revenue from customs.[35] This latter

---

[35] Brewer, *Sinews*, 144-45.

source of revenue, however, was subject to parliamentary renewal every four years. In sum, Parliament limited William's approved income to £200,000 per year, or £250,000 less than the requirements of the Court's peacetime operations.[36] Moreover, at the start of William's reign, the Commons strenuously opposed long-term borrowing by the crown to cover the cost of war with absolutist France, as members understood that paying off such debt would require years of higher taxes. Even more, Parliament would not grant William extraordinary income to service the short-term debt the government assumed as a product of the Nine Years' War, thus forcing him to service that debt with his already inadequate ordinary income.[37]

Thanks then to the limitations imposed by both Parliament and his prosecution of the Nine Years' War, William found himself much more financially dependent on Parliament than his post-Restoration predecessors had been.[38] As a result—and as Parliament had intended—if he wished to secure sufficient revenue to cover his ordinary expenses, let alone expenses associated with the prosecution of his anti-Bourbon activities, he would be forced to call regular Parliaments.[39] Nevertheless, like his predecessors, he sought to gain some advantages over Parliament through the use of patronage.[40] In light of those activities, Parliament moved to force William to more formally recognize some of the prerogatives that had been squeezed from him after his landing. In addition, Parliament passed the Triennial Act of 1694, which required the

---

[36] Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832* (New York: Arnold, 1997), 39.
[37] Brewer, *Sinews*, 144, 152-53. The opponents of long-term borrowing could not prevent it completely during the Nine Years' War, but they did manage to keep such borrowing under 10% of payments for that conflict. Brewer, *Sinews*, 153.
[38] P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit* (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 47.
[39] Brewer, *Sinews*, 144-45.
[40] O'Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 36.

king to call annual sessions of Parliament and general elections once every three years.[41] Parliament also passed measures that limited the crown's power of patronage by restricting the freedom of MPs to hold concurrent office as royal tax collectors.[42] Lords and Commons thus received greater formal assurance that they would be capable of responding to potential overreach by the Court. At least formally, then, it seemed that Parliament had adopted effective safeguards against the growth of royal power and establishing itself as the master of the Court. Exigencies of state—especially William's opposition to the ambitions of Louis XIV—already-established royal prerogative, and some of the policies intended to hinder the extension and exercise of royal power, however, all ultimately furthered the accrual and consolidation of power in the Court.

As before the Revolution, the king enjoyed customary power over the conduct of foreign affairs, and William was able to use that power to effect radical change in England's policy toward the continent.[43] While under Charles II and James II the official English position toward Louis XIV's France had been one of friendship or at least neutrality, under its Dutch king England's policy toward the Bourbon monarch changed to outright enmity, as William sought to employ the resources of his new domains against French pretensions to universal monarchy. This change in direction met with stout approval from the Whigs, who saw in Louis XIV's absolutism and friendship with James II a standing challenge to the achievements and potential of the Glorious Revolution.[44]

---

[41] Brewer, *Sinews*, 159.

[42] O'Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 36-37. The bills in question were directed at land tax collectors and salt duty commissioners (passed in 1694), excise officials (passed in 1699), and customs officials (passed in 1701).

[43] O'Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 38-39.

[44] Indeed, Brewer notes that even those MPs deeply loyal to the Revolution were willing to go against their instinctive opposition to higher taxes, government debt, more centralized control,

Accordingly, although England had largely avoided continental entanglements for most of the seventeenth century, with William III on the throne and with anti-Bourbon Whig backing, the English joined with the Dutch Republic, the Holy Roman Empire, and Sweden in an alliance that prosecuted a war against France from 1688 to 1697. Although the Treaty of Ryswick ended the Nine Years' War, conflict between England and France resumed in 1701, as an alliance of England, the Dutch Republic, the Holy Roman Empire, and Portugal unsuccessfully sought to prevent Philip, the grandson of Louis XIV, from succeeding to the Spanish throne. As one might expect, English engagement in continental conflicts did not end when the House of Hanover acceded to the throne, as England entered into further conflicts with France in the War of the Austrian Succession of 1739 to 1748 and the Seven Years' War of 1756 to 1763.[45] Over the course of the eighteenth century, continental and even global warfare became an accepted reality in British affairs.

Of course, the prosecution of these wars did more than signal a change in British policy toward France in particular or the continent more generally; it also generated unprecedented growth in Britain's naval and military forces, and, concomitantly, in the power of the Court. Put simply, although England had not participated in the continental military revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that changed decidedly after 1688 with massive expansions of England's naval and military forces.[46] This growth in the armed forces presented the Crown

---

and a standing army—and, by extension, a more powerful Crown—because they realized that failing to agree to such measures would place the achievements of the Revolution at the mercy of the Catholic absolutist Louis XIV and his client James II. Brewer, *Sinews*, 140-43.

[45] Of course, beyond the temporal scope of this dissertation are England's engagement in two additional eighteenth-century conflicts with France: the War of American Independence and the Wars of the French Revolution.

[46] Brewer, *Sinews*, 7. English naval power had been growing since the middle of the seventeenth century, as the Commonwealth, the Protectorate, and the restored Stuarts all had pursued what became England's traditional "blue water" policy. Brewer, *Sinews*, 168. That increase, however,

with a variety of opportunities for patronage, opportunities that eluded the anti-patronage

measures passed by Parliament in 1694, 1699, and 1701, and made members of both Houses of

Parliament willing servants of the Court. By 1702, just over one-quarter of the House of

---

paled in comparison to the growth in naval power under William, Anne, and the Hanovers. The number of ships in England's navy nearly doubled during the Nine Years' War, from 173 in 1689 to 323 in 1697. J. H. Plumb, *The Origins of Political Stability: England, 1675-1725* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967), 119. By 1714 the number of ships in the royal navy had fallen from the high of 1697 to 224, but Great Britain's nevertheless remained the largest navy in Europe. *Ibid.*; Michael Duffy, "The Foundations of British Naval Power," in *The Military Revolution and the State, 1500-1800*, ed. Michael Duffy (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1980), 55 and 82. Over the course of the eighteenth century the royal navy continued to swell, expanding to 334 ships by the last year of the War of the Austrian Succession and 432 ships toward the end of the Seven Years' War. Duffy, "The Foundations of British Naval Power," 82. The number of men serving in the navy also grew substantially, from an annual average of just over 40,000 during the Nine Years' War to an annual average of just under 75,000 during the Seven Years' War. Brewer, 30-31. (Brewer notes that, for a variety of reasons, the figures for both naval and military personnel are far from certain, as the figures we have are for personnel that Parliament voted to fund, and does not reflect the number of men who actually made it to ship or the field. Brewer, *Sinews*, 31.) During the same period the English army also grew to unprecedented levels. Immediately following the Glorious Revolution—again, fought in part to resist James II's development of a 40,000-man strong army—Parliament raised an army of 10,000 men, and because of England's involvement in the Nine Years' War that number quickly ballooned to an annual average of 76,000 men during that conflict, in one year peaking at 87,500. Plumb, *Origins*, 129; Brewer, *Sinews*, 30-31. (Brewer notes that under the Commonwealth the army stood at 70,000 men. Moreover, Pincus has observed that under James II the English army grew to roughly 40,000 men. Pincus, *1688*, 144. These figures were, however, anomalous for seventeenth-century England before the Glorious Revolution.) The average annual size of the army grew again during the War of the Spanish Succession, to nearly 93,000 men, with the number of men fielded in the final year of the war a staggering 145,000. This trend reversed somewhat during the War of the Austrian Succession, when the annual average of army personnel fell to just over 62,000 men, but that was an anomaly, as the annual average of the army's size again rose to nearly 93,000 men during the Seven Years' War. Brewer, *Sinews*, 30-31. (These numbers grew even higher in the War for American Independence, when the size of the army swelled to an annual average of over 108,000 men.) Perhaps most remarkable is the fact that during the first half of the eighteenth century England maintained a peacetime army of, on average, 35,000 men. Brewer, *Sinews*, 32. These figures, incidentally, include neither England's national militia nor the mercenary and foreign forces that the English hired for major wars during the eighteenth century. Brewer, *Sinews*, 32-33.

Commons' members were placemen, in addition to the over one-half of the House of Lords on whom the Court could rely.[47]

The cost of this expansion was considerable. England spent £36,270,000 on its army and navy during the Nine Years' War, or 74% of total government spending, and £64,718,000 during the War of the Spanish Succession, or 66% of total government spending.[48] The cost of these conflicts, coupled with the constraints on the royal income that Parliament had instituted, also significantly increased the debt owed by first the English and later the unified British government and ultimately led to both more and higher taxes and a more centralized body of government officials to administer those taxes. [49] In 1689, the year William III took England into the Nine Years' War, the English government had no debt, but by the war's end in 1697, England's national debt stood at £16.7 million. At the start of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701, England's government debt was £14.1 million; by the war's end in 1713, it was a staggering £36.2 million. The Treaty of Utrecht, however, did not halt the growth of the debt, so that by 1721 it had risen to £50 million.[50] Indeed, over the twenty-six year period of relative peace between the War of the Spanish Succession and the War of the Austrian Succession, England's debt continued to grow, so that by 1739, the year of the start of the War of the Austrian Succession, Great Britain's government debt stood at £46.9 million, although much of

---

[47] O'Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 37- 43.

[48] Brewer, *Sinews*, 40. This trend reversed slightly in the next major conflict the British entered, as they spent £55,814,000 during the War of the Austrian Succession, or 64% of total government spending; but came roaring back as they spent a staggering £84,727,000 during the Seven Years' War, or 71% of total government spending Brewer notes that these numbers do not account for inflation. Brewer, *Sinews*, 38. Nevertheless, Brewer is confident rejecting the notion that "inflation . . . has any major effect on the data." *Ibid*. As he points out, prices were fairly stable from the late seventeenth century until just after 1760.

[49] I use the admittedly suspect term Anglo-British state to refer as a continuous entity to the English state that existed prior to May 1, 1707, the effective date of the Acts of Union, and the British state that succeeded the English government on that date.

[50] Brewer, *Sinews*, 30 and 114.

that was accumulated before 1721. By the cessation of hostilities nine years later, the government had accumulated another £30 million in debt. Finally, when the Seven Years' War reached its end in 1763, the national debt of Great Britain had ballooned from £74.6 million to a massive £132.6 million. As Brewer notes, government non-military spending stayed fairly stable in this period, growing from about £1 million annually in the early 1690s to about £5 million at the end of the Seven Years' War. The Anglo-British state thus amassed this debt through the expansion of its military and naval power and, concomitantly, the projection of that power across the Channel, across the Atlantic, and across the globe. The emergence of this debt led to a massive restructuring of public finances, prompted a reversal in early efforts by the post-revolution Parliament at limiting the Court's sources of revenue, and reinforced and accelerated the trend toward state centralization that had begun under James II.

To be sure, from early on, William's ministers sought to secure additional sources of revenue within the structural limitations imposed by the post-revolution Parliament. In particular, they requested a general excise on staples.[51] Excises were especially attractive because—as had happened under James II—they had the promise of potentially enormous yields and were collected by tax officials employed by the crown. Moreover, excises were relatively unobtrusive as they were levied on producers, who simply passed the added cost on to customers. For these exact reasons, however, Parliament never approved the government's request for a general excise, fearing the potential income—and independence—that it would provide the king and the lack of resistance constituents would have to a tax that would simply be baked into the price of

---

[51] Brewer, *Sinews*, 100-01, 139, and 146-47. William's ministers also requested a direct tax on land. In contrast to the excise, Parliament had little problem with the proposed land tax because it was almost a complete mirror image of the requested general excise: the revenue derived would be determinate, it would be collected by agents of the local gentry rather than the Crown, and it was levied in a manner obviously apparent to land owners, who thus would aggressively push for its repeal once the immediate need for it had receded. Brewer, *Sinews*, 100 and 147-48

goods. This latter feature carried with it the danger that the excise would simply become a given of economic life and thus a permanent source of royal income. In addition, an excise required a host of royal tax collectors, all responsible to the Crown and indebted to it for its livelihood, which would add to the administrative strength of the Court.[52] The government strained mightily to effect passage of the general excise, but all that William's ministers managed to achieve were added taxes on beer, wine, and spirits and new taxes on salt, malt, and—far less successfully— leather, glass, bottles, and tobacco pipes. Indeed, even these limited excises were met with resistance because it was feared that they were simply opening gambits for the government's stated goal of a general excise that would grant financial independence to the king and place the revolution in jeopardy.[53]

Consequently, from 1688 to 1714, a land tax that William had requested and that proved more attractive to the Whigs in Parliament was the dominant source of government revenues, although, as Brewer notes, at that point "in the long-term history of English taxation," such a direct tax was anomalous.[54] Unfortunately, for those interested in avoiding long-term debt—and, as Dickson notes, their numbers were legion—the revenue derived from the land tax, customs, and excise proved inadequate to the task of covering the Crown's war-related short-term loans.[55] Recognizing that the government would not be capable of covering its debt on a short-term basis, much of the short-term debt that arose from the Nine Years' War was restructured as long-term debt and directly supported by an expansion of the scope and rate of the dreaded excise. The same pattern was repeated following the War of the Spanish Succession and subsequent eighteenth-century conflicts. Ironically, by refusing to vote William sufficient revenue to fund

---

[52] Brewer, *Sinews*, 100-01 and 145-47.
[53] Brewer, *Sinews*, 147-49.
[54] Brewer, *Sinews*, 99.
[55] Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England*, 15-35 and 47.

his war effort and by insisting that the majority of debt he assumed was short-term, the Commons created a situation in which the long-term assumption of debt was necessary, and such debt could be repaid only through additional taxes.[56] As Brewer notes, this approach to government finance created a situation in which the taxes intended to cover the repayment of government debt could not be repealed without significantly undermining public confidence in the government's intention to repay the relevant debt. As such, and to the horror of much of the political class, the taxes associated with funding the debt and a financial class charged with overseeing—and able to profit from—the servicing of that debt became seemingly permanent fixtures in the country's social and economic life.[57]

After 1714, the British government increasingly shifted to the use of excise taxes both to fund the government's current expenses and to service the growing government debt.[58] As I mentioned earlier, excises were attractive for a variety of reasons: unlike the land tax, they were easily concealed as part of the cost of goods, their yield would grow with a growing economy, and they were collected using Court-appointed tax collectors, rather than agents loyal to the local gentry. Indeed, by responding to this growth in government military expenditures and debt with additional and higher excise taxes, the Courts of William III, Anne, and George I gave a substantial push to the consolidation of a centralized government bureaucracy that had begun to develop under Charles II and James II.[59] In 1690, the number of full-time employees in the fiscal bureaucracy was 2,524. By 1716, the number had more than doubled, to 5,947, and the greatest expansion had occurred in the Excise Office, with an increase from 1,211 to 2,778 in the same

---

[56] Brewer, *Sinews*, 89, 99-100, 116-19, and 154; Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England*, 47 and 97.
[57] Brewer, *Sinews*, 119.
[58] Brewer, *Sinews*, 99.
[59] Brewer, *Sinews*, 65, 92-93, 100, and 139.

period.[60] The growth and rationalization of the Court into a centralized state thus proceeded from the growth in Britain's military and naval might and the debt that accompanied it. To be sure, and as Brewer notes, history could have played out differently, with the government deciding to rely on a decentralized system for collecting taxes and raising troops—which presumably would have led to increasingly dire fiscal and military straits as the eighteenth century wore on—but in the case of Great Britain, Charles Tilly's memorable dictum was borne out: "war made the state, and the state made war."[61]

The fashioning of a modern British state in this period was accompanied by a growth in the opportunities the Court had to exert influence over Parliament through the use of patronage, appointing MPs to positions in the military, the navy, the church, the Treasury, or in positions at court.[62] Brewer notes that in 1690 there were about 100 placemen in the Commons, but that for most of Queen Anne's reign that number was somewhere in the range of 130 to 140 MPs.[63] Moreover, the growth in the naval, military, and fiscal departments created other opportunities for rewarding cooperative members of Parliament, by either appointing their friends and relatives to government jobs or by awarding them government contracts.[64] Further, the Court retained the power to appoint peers and bishops, a highly attractive carrot that could be dangled in front of a

---

[60] Brewer, *Sinews*, 65-68.
[61] Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42, cited in Brewer, *Sinews*, 137; Brewer, *Sinews,* 137-39.
[62] Plumb, *Origins*, 112-25; H. T. Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy* (London: The English Universities Press Ltd. 1973), 15. Plumb notes that in the period from the Glorious Revolution to 1715, the Treasury not only expanded, but it also brought within its purview the Customs and Excise offices, as well as "other departments connected with taxation." Plumb, *Origins*, 112-13.
[63] Brewer, *Sinews*, 159.
[64] Plumb, *Origins*, 124-25; Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*, 15.

variety of ambitious office-holders and leading men of Great Britain.[65] As much as the Revolution Settlement between Parliament and William III may have put paid to claims of royal prerogative and fights over the form of the English constitution, the growth in government positions subject to appointment by the Crown gave the monarch and his or her ministers a means of exercising control over Parliament.

To be fair, this exercise need not be seen solely in terms of self-interested manipulation on the part of the Court. Rather, whether out of self-interest and ambition or out of a concern for political stability, Court officials regarded Parliament as too chaotic to be entrusted with complete independence in its participation in governing. This point is especially salient given that the Commons was composed of men of independent means unaccustomed to the kind of party discipline found in later liberal-democratic legislative bodies. The Court, then, came to conclude that the perquisites of the monarch that had survived the Glorious Revolution— specifically, royal patronage powers—should be used to reward those members of the Commons who showed themselves to be loyal allies of the Crown and contributed to the nation's political stability.[66]

FEARS OF CONSTITUTIONAL CORRUPTION: THE COUNTRY PARTY AND ITS PROGRAM

As one might expect, the project of patronage just described and the changes in English social, economic, and political life that had made it possible met with more than a little resistance. That resistance came in the form of a Country party that claimed to speak for the whole country, in contrast to the allegedly narrow interests of the self-seeking partisans of the Court, and that often united both radical and malcontent Whigs with Tories around the project of

---

[65] Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*, 15.
[66] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 95-99.

limiting the Court and its project of rationalizing and centralizing administrative power. In the twenty-five years following William's accession to the throne, the disputes between Whigs and Tories over the substance and structure of the English constitution receded, as the Whigs downplayed their more radical members' appeals to popular sovereignty and the Tories abandoned their prior commitment to absolute monarchy and indefeasible hereditary succession.[67] By the early Hanoverian period, both parties had come to accept and even embrace the form of a balanced constitution of Crown, Lords, and Commons. Instead of a Whig-Tory divide, then, the resistance to the new order wrought by the fiscal-military state and the financial revolution came in the form of the Country opposition. To be clear, the idea of such an opposition first arose in the reign of Charles II, but was given new life due to the military build-up and resulting fiscal regime instituted during the reigns of William and Anne, and became especially pronounced in the Hanoverian era, in particular during the ministries of Robert Walpole and the Pelhams.

The Country opposition married a variety of elements of the political class around the stated concern that the emergent British fiscal-military state would ultimately undermine and even eradicate the liberty that the Glorious Revolution was supposed to have secured. In particular, it counted among its adherents Whigs, Tories, and independent country gentlemen who were not interested in securing places at Court but instead sought to safeguard the limits on government power that the Glorious Revolution and the balanced constitution were supposed to ensure. These members of the political class were concerned with protecting what they saw as their unique place as political leaders and defenders of English liberty and preventing the emergence and consolidation of central state power that the fiscal-military revolution had

---

[67] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 92-93.

initiated and that threatened their social and political position. The Country party also included radical Whigs—or Commonwealthmen—who as a matter of principle sought to impose limits on the Crown that extended beyond those agreed upon following the Revolution, and Whigs and Tories who simply found themselves on the outs with the Court.[68]

Among the most significant of the Country party members was the Viscount Bolingbroke, who was the preeminent tactician, popularizer, and theorist for the opposition. Born Henry St. John, he took office in 1701 at the age of twenty-three, succeeding his grandfather as a Tory MP for Wooten Basset in Wiltshire. He became a leader of the Tories, and for his efforts on behalf of Queen Anne, was made Viscount Bolingbroke in 1712. Rising to the office of Secretary of State for the Northern Department, in 1713 he negotiated the Treaty of Utrecht, a great accomplishment by Tory standards but a national betrayal in the view of many Whigs. With the Tories' fall from political grace in 1714, Bolingbroke sought refuge on the continent, where he joined the court-in-exile of the Stuart Pretender. As a result, Parliament stripped Bolingbroke of his title and lands.

Bolingbroke spent most of the next decade seeking to rehabilitate his reputation in the eyes of George I. Friends of his in the Hanoverian court were eventually able to effect his return to England on agreeable terms, but only after Walpole had ensured that Bolingbroke would not be permitted to sit as a peer or hold any other public office. Being barred from office, however, had little if any effect on Bolingbroke's influence, as he built up a circle of anti-court writers that included Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and John Gay. This group, with Bolingbroke at its

---

[68] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 102-03. Plumb notes that due to concerns over the corrupting influence that patronage could have over parliamentary independence and the governing perquisites of the landed gentry, by the end of Anne's reign the Country Tories had embraced conventional Whig positions like regular meetings and dissolutions of Parliament and restricting membership in the Commons to men of independent means who did not need to rely on Crown patronage for support. Plumb, *Origins*, 146.

head, became the first great site of opposition to Walpole's ministry, and the group's newspaper,

The Craftsman, served as the main public organ for that opposition.[69]

If the conflict between the Whigs and Tories was over the form and substance of the English constitution, the conflict between the Country party and partisans of the Court centered on what members of the Country party saw as efforts by the Court at subverting—or corrupting—the substance of the constitution while maintaining its form.[70] As Country party members saw it, the liberty that 1688 had secured and renewed depended on two crucial features of social and political life. First, according to Country party members, English liberty rested on a balanced constitution, one marked by and reliant upon a genuine independence enjoyed by each part of the constitution: Crown, Lords, and Commons. As Bolingbroke put the point:

> our constitution is in the strictest sense a bargain, a conditional contract between the prince and the people, as it always hath been, and still is, between the representative and collective bodies of the nation. . . . That this bargain may not be broken, on the part of the prince with the people . . . , the legislative, or supreme power, is vested by our constitution in three estates, whereof the king is one. Whilst the members of the other two preserve their private independence, and those estates are consequently under no dependency, except that which is in the scheme of our constitution, this control on the first will always be sufficient; and a bad king, let him be as bold as he may please to be thought, must stand in awe of an honest parliament.[71]

Second, members of the Country party held that English liberty rested on the politically engaged and independent land-owning gentry, that is, a class of men who by dint of their economic

---

[69] The seminal work on Bolingbroke's political career, thought, and allies, upon which I rely in this discussion, is Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

[70] Dickinson describes this difference in terms of the nature and the working of the constitution. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 93-94.

[71] Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *A Dissertation upon Parties*, in *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*, ed. David Armitage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 124.

resources were best positioned to defend parliamentary independence and exercise political power.[72]

Country politicians and polemicists feared that the Crown would use its patronage power to make Members of Parliament personally dependent on royal largesse, which in turn would make Parliament simply one more creature of royal government and effect the kind of absolutist tyranny that the balanced constitution was supposed to prevent. For members of the Country party, then, efforts by the Crown at exerting control over Parliament through patronage was not a sensible *modus vivendi* for maintaining political and social order. Rather, it amounted to a corruption of the very substance of an independent Parliament, a corruption that jeopardized both the balanced constitution and the special English liberty that the constitution preserved, while maintaining the bare façade of the balanced constitution.[73] More cynically, Country partisans saw in the Court party's efforts a direct threat to their own political power. Either way, the Country party feared that the Crown would achieve through patronage what James II and his Stuart predecessors had failed to achieve through claims of royal prerogative.[74]

In response, partisans of the Country persuasion favored limits on the exercise of Crown patronage and opposed the expansion of the excise tax and government administration generally, as, on their account, the growth of each only served to create new opportunities for patronage and new means of paying for it.[75] In addition, the Country opposition called for the repeal of the Septennial Act of 1716, which as its name suggests required parliamentary elections only every seven years, and its replacement with an act requiring parliamentary elections either every three

---

[72] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 103-04, 173-75, and 182-86; Brewer, *Sinews*, 155-56.
[73] Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*, 147-48.
[74] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 109-10; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 480.
[75] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 107.

years or every year. The argument was that subjecting MPs to more frequent elections would render them less susceptible to corruption by the Court. As Bolingbroke put the matter:

> The people of Britain have as good a right, and a right as necessary to be assisted, to keep their representatives true to the trust reposed in them, and to the preservation of the constitution, by the control of frequent elections, as they have to keep their kings true to the trust reposed in them, and to the preservation of the constitution, by the control of frequent sittings of parliament.[76]

Along similar lines, the Country party sought at various times to subject MPs' decisions on parliamentary votes to instructions received from their constituents, instructions that would invariably call for opposition to the Court.[77]

The Country critique of the early Anglo-British fiscal-military state, while deeply concerned with royal patronage, did not stop there. Again, Country ideology held that English liberty rested not solely on the balanced constitution, but also on a class of independent land-owners who, because of their economic and social independence from the influence of the Crown, were uniquely positioned to defend the balanced constitution and English liberty from any possible predation by the Court. On the account of Country party adherents, only independent men of means were capable of the civic virtue upon which the preservation of the balanced constitution depended. That is, only men whose personal resources made them both financially independent and directly invested in the well-being of Great Britain would be willing to put the interests of the country ahead of their own narrow private interests.

Accordingly, the Country interest found the financial revolution and the financial class that had arisen under the reigns of William and Anne dangerous for several reasons. First, the financial class was growing in power at the expense of the landed gentry. That is, the financial

---

[76] Bolingbroke, *Dissertation upon Parties*, in *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*, 105.
[77] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 188.

class's wealth and power flowed in large measure from the debt that the Crown had accumulated in prosecuting wars with France, and in order to pay that debt, the Crown was taxing the landed class. The Country party thus saw the landed class—upon which it claimed English liberty depended and from which many of its members hailed—in a zero-sum game with the financial class that the fiscal-military state had called into existence.[78] Second, partisans of the Country worried that members of the increasingly powerful financial class were fundamentally unworthy of governing, and that if they were to secure political power, it would be to the detriment of the public weal. On this line of analysis, financiers placed material gain at the center of their lives and thus lacked the requisite civic virtue required of a governing class. Moreover, the wealth of the financiers, unlike land, was transferable beyond the bounds of Great Britain and thus far less necessarily tied to the flourishing of British society. Consequently, the Country party—and the landed classes at large—saw financiers as lacking the necessary prerequisites of political power, a conclusion that the crisis of the South Sea Bubble only seemed to confirm.[79] Relatedly, Country writers argued that the financial class's growing influence threatened to enslave future generations of British subjects to a self-seeking class of projectors. Put simply, the argument went that as the national debt continued to grow, additional taxes would have to be levied, and the British people would, as a result, find themselves working less for themselves or the commonweal and more simply to service the greed of the financial class.[80] Finally, going back to the Country's concern with Crown patronage and its potential to destabilize the constitution, Country party members feared that the standing army made possible by the debt and the

---

[78] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 106-07; Reed Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 28-29.
[79] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 106-07; Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*, 144-45.
[80] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 107 and 171; Bolingbroke, *Dissertation upon Parties*, in *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*, 181.

bureaucratic positions necessary for the administration of the debt provided the Court with additional opportunities for the abuse of the patronage power, all to the end of making Parliament a creature of the Court.[81] For these reasons, the Country party was a consistent critic of the debts that the later Stuarts' anti-Bourbon wars had generated, the land tax that helped service those debts, and, especially in the case of the Country Tories, the muscular foreign policies of William and Anne that had served as the catalyst for the Crown's mounting debts.[82]

Along with its opposition to patronage and the rise of government debt and the financial class, the Country party had another significant object of concern with the emergent fiscal-military state: the rise of a standing army under William and Anne, which was not disbanded after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht. The standing army that remained following the end of the War of the Spanish Succession was thirty-five-thousand-men strong, a state of affairs that ran counter to traditional understandings of English liberty and that, thanks to Cromwell's New Model Army, had been seen as a feature of despotic government since at least the middle of the seventeenth century.[83] The Country party adopted this attitude toward standing armies whole-heartedly for three reasons. First, many adherents of Country ideology associated a standing army with tyranny or the imminent threat of tyranny.[84] For example, the pamphleteer John Trenchard asked for his readers' continuing attention in the following not-so-subtle fashion: "If any Man doubts whether a Standing Army is Slavery, Popery, Mahometism, Paganism, Atheism,

---

[81] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 182; Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 28-29.

[82] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 107-08.

[83] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 411-12. In a similar vein, John Trenchard commented ironically on the size of the army under both Charles II and William III, a comparison that found William III quite wanting. Trenchard, *A Short History of Standing Armies in England* (1698), 48-56 (pagination from the 1739 reprint edition).

[84] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 105.

Free-thinking, or any Thing which they please, let him read."[85] These sentiments were echoed by another Country Whig pamphleteer, Trenchard's associate Thomas Gordon, who associated the mere existence of a standing army with tyranny, observing: "'Tis certain, that all Parts of *Europe* which are enslaved, have been enslaved by Armies, and 'tis absolutely impossible, that any Nation, which keeps them amongst themselves, can long preserve their Liberties."[86] In addition, the army operated as a crucial site of government patronage, and so served to exacerbate the danger to the balanced constitution that the Country party saw in the Court's patronage system. Finally, Country party members were acutely aware that the army called on the government to extract more from the country in taxes and assume additional debt. These results would in turn increase the opportunities for Court patronage in the offices of tax administration and serve to increase the relative power of financiers in the social order.

The Country party thus stood in direct opposition to crucial features of the fiscal-military state—the financial revolution and the rise of the standing army—and especially to the expanded patronage system that those features made possible. Country Party objections to the fiscal-military state only grew during the twenty-one-year ministry of Robert Walpole, whose relentless use of patronage reached a far higher pitch than what had been occurring under the later Stuarts.[87] Dickinson relates a telling anecdote that reveals both just how central his patronage powers were to Walpole and just how interrelated the agencies of the fiscal-military state and patronage were:

> Walpole concerned himself with even minor appointments because there were plenty of men with political influence seeking some kind of reward for their relatives and clients. In 1730 Walpole

---

[85] Trenchard, *Short History* (1698), 1.
[86] Thomas Gordon, *A Discourse of Standing Armies; Shewing the Folly, Uselessness, and Danger of Standing Armies*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Warner, 1722), 25.
[87] Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*, 74-78.

decided to please the Commons by abolishing the salt duty, but he then discovered that he had put nearly three hundred and fifty salt-duty commissioners out of a job and had thereby inadvertently reduced the amount of patronage at his disposal. Two years later he decided to revive the salt duty, partly in order to restore the number of appointments under his control.[88]

In light of stories like these it is not hard to see why the Country opposition reacted so strongly against Walpole's ministry. Walpole only compounded the problem by extending his means of control beyond patronage to the outright buying of votes on behalf of his preferred candidates.[89]

The Country opposition to Walpole and the Court Whig project was not, however, merely a matter of in-door arguments among various factions of Britain's political and lettered elite. Beginning with the crisis over Walpole's attempt to extend the excise, the Country sought to take its attacks on Court Whiggery out of doors in urban centers like London, York, Bristol, Nottingham, and other towns, as these constituencies joined in calls for an end to patronage and the repeal of the Septennial Act.[90] Moreover, the popular, Country-fueled objections to the Court Whig order manifested from time to time not in the more sedate form of instructions to MPs, but in violent popular outbursts. Paul Langford notes that the opposition to Walpole's Excise Bill became a matter of nearly unprecedented animating public concerns as London mobs besieged Parliament, and while "the resulting furore is one that is not easily captured in retrospect. . . . All that is clear is that contemporaries were unanimous as to its intensity, which they could compare only with that of the Sacheverell affair, nearly a quarter of a century before."[91] Moreover, these

---

[88] Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*, 75. To be fair to Walpole, however, he took some steps that should have met with strong acceptance from the Country party, including a largely peaceful foreign policy and a reduction of the land tax. Plumb, *Origins*, 177.

[89] Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*, 78.

[90] Nicholas Rogers, "The Urban Opposition to Whig Oligarchy, 1720-1760," in *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, Margaret Jacob and James Jacob, eds. (London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1984), 133-35 n. 4.

[91] Langford, *The Excise Crisis*, 45.

riots were not limited to the metropole, as "Up and down the country in the early part of 1733 there were mob demonstrations and meetings involving the ritual burning of government newspapers, and, particularly after the news of the ministry's defeat, riotous celebrations centering on the parading and destruction of ministerial effigies." Taken together, popular instructions and mob action led the Walpole ministry to abandon its attempt at reforming the tax system through an expansion of the excise, demonstrating the power that popular movements could bring to bear against more orderly, elite politics.[92]

Beyond the excise crisis, the Country party and Patriot movement, in particular through the operations of London's Common Council, used the threat of riots to place pressure on the government in response to the Gin Bill, the Jewish Naturalization Bill, and the loss of Minorca to Spain. Although not approaching the levels or effects of popular unrest that England had seen in the previous century or even what would later be seen in the Wilkes riots, it is important to keep in mind that those who lived through these moments had no way of knowing where such mass agitation might lead, nor the full extent of the threat they might have posed to the social and political order. Put simply, the people who lived through the turmoil of those years—Hume among them—had no way of knowing how events might have played out. Moreover, as Nicholas Rogers and Bob Harris have made clear, the Country party's efforts at destabilizing the Court ministries were supported not merely by the urban rabble and those members of the lesser gentry who found themselves on the outs at Court. Rather, middling merchants, contemptuous of the corruption suggested by Court patronage and disgusted by the Court ministers' reluctance to

---

[92] Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, 51; Langford, *The Excise Crisis*, 33-35 and 44-48.

pursue British commercial interests more aggressively, found much to appeal to them in the arguments of the Country party and its successor Patriot movement.[93]

FACTIONS RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL

Given the foregoing threats to good social order and the appeal that the Country party's message held for members of the middling order, as well as Hume's disdain for programs of speculative principle and, as I will demonstrate in the chapters to follow, his own commitment to the stability that the Court ministries had managed to generate, Hume inserted himself into the partisan conflicts of his day. Employing the factional types he developed in "Of Parties in General," Hume saw the Country and Court parties as "a kind of mixed parties [*sic*]" of both principle and interest. Hume regarded both groups as parties of principle because they arose out of differing visions of Great Britain's mixed constitution. Indeed, Hume regarded the conflict between Court and Country as a necessary consequence of the British constitution's mixture of monarchy and republicanism. Given both the "delicate and uncertain" balance between its republican and monarchical elements and basic human psychology, Hume found it inevitable that some of his contemporaries, "those of mild tempers," would be more inclined as a matter of principle to favor the order-producing aspects of monarchy and thus find themselves in the Court party, while "men of bold and generous spirits" would prefer—often passionately, but again as a matter of principle—a more republican form of government and embrace the tenets of the Country.[94] Hume also, however, observed that, principle notwithstanding, the "strength and violence" of the Court and Country parties depended on the relative quality of a particular

---

[93] Brewer, "Commercialization and Politics," in *Birth of a Consumer Society*, 199; Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 50-67, 126-27, and 392-94.
[94] Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 64-65.

ministry: a bad administration would likely swing a majority of MPs into the ranks of the Country, while a good administration had the potential of swaying even many of the most ardent devotees of republicanism into the Court party.[95] Adherence to political principle alone, then, was not what made the Court and Country parties most worrisome to Hume.

Instead, according to Hume the greatest danger posed by the Court and Country parties came from that segment of each party that proceeded not from principle, but from interest. As he saw it, the leaders of the Court party were motivated largely by the desire to secure the favor of the Crown, an interest that would lead them to embrace measures that principle alone would not. More pressingly, Hume saw the leaders of the Country party—and here he must have been thinking of the Viscount Bolingbroke—as malcontents bent on avenging themselves against a Crown that had frustrated their ambition for positions at Court. Like the leaders of the Court party, it was an interest-informed agenda that led the heads of the party to embrace a conception of the Country program that was, at least according to Hume, out of all proportion to any sound political aims. In fact, according to Hume—and again, I think here he was looking squarely in the direction of Bolingbroke—it was the pursuit of their interests, and not the parties' respective principles, that made them so dangerous. As Hume put it, "without [their differences in interest] they could scarcely ever be dangerous or violent."[96] We can thus see that in the case of the Country party Hume saw factions of interest as *more* dangerous than factions of principle.

To be clear, in "Of Parties in General," Hume had described factions of interest as "the most reasonable, and the most excusable." The most obvious reading of this statement is that Hume was describing such factions as fair, moderate, and justifiable across the board, and thus, by extension, the least dangerous to social order. That reading, however, cannot be squared with

---

[95] Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 65.
[96] *Ibid.*

Hume's more specific point in both "Of Parties in General" and "Of the Parties of Great Britain" that it is the interest-seeking leaderships of both religious and political factions that whip mass factions of speculative principle into order-threatening violence.[97] Another reading of Hume's observation about the reasonable and excusable nature of factions of interest must thus be sought, and that reading is suggested in Hume's epistemology. Specifically, what Hume meant in referring to factions of interest as reasonable and excusable is that he found the *ends* those factions pursue to be reasonable and excusable, because what they seek are tangible, perceivable, this-worldly benefits of wealth, power, and status, while factions of principle are more interested in putting certain speculative ideas into practice, an end that may not necessarily bear any relationship to their members' or anyone else's enjoyment of life. That being said, Hume seems convinced that in the *means* by which factions of interest pursue their ends—means that include inciting their more principled followers to acts of violence, fury, rage, and cruelty—and in the *consequences* of such means—threats real or potential to social order—factions of interest are far from reasonable or excusable. Indeed, they are often the real force behind social instability. Accordingly, a better reading of Hume on faction recognizes that Hume saw factions of interest as of paramount danger to social order, especially when united with and leading factions of principle, and that he saw both religious factions and the political factions of Court and Country as such mixed factions. Moreover, contrary to the conclusions of scholars like Arkin, Herdt, Phillipson, and Pocock, both the *Essays* and the *History* and a sound attentiveness to the political debates of his time demonstrate that Hume saw not religious factions, but political factions, and in particular the Country party, as the real threat to social peace and prosperity in his day.

---

[97] Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 61-62; "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 65.

As a preliminary matter, Hume remarked that he had noticed in the preceding fifty years "a sudden and sensible change in the opinions of men" had happened "by the progress of learning and liberty." As a result, he continued, "Most people, in this island, have divested themselves of all superstitious reverence to names and authority: The clergy have much lost their credit: Their pretensions and doctrines have been ridiculed; and even religion can scarcely support itself in the world."[98] On his own terms, then, Hume seems to have rejected the possibility that the clergy could command significant levels of loyalty and that religious impulses continued to operate as a motivation for human action in most instances. While I do not think that Hume's observation means that he was entirely sanguine about the possible danger that religious institutions and commitments could pose to social order, at the very least it suggests that he thought that the threat posed by such institutions and commitments had substantially receded in his own day.

Beyond Hume's apparent confidence in the declining influence of religious impulses and communities, his discussion of religious and political factions in the *Essays* indicate that he regarded the former largely as a problem either of Great Britain's past, or at least of no great present moment, while he discussed the latter as a pressing problem of his day. Issues of religious faction arise in only three of the *Essays*: "Of Parties in General," "Of the Parties of Great Britain," and "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm." His discussion of religious faction in the first of these essays seems not directed to a discussion of political and social conflicts of his day, but instead at his attempt at explaining, first, why religious factions arise at all and, second, why Christianity, among all religions, had historically been so problematic to social order.[99] On the

---

[98] Hume, "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic," in *Essays*, 51.
[99] Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 60-63.

first of these points, Hume began by noting that factions of speculative political principle are fairly easy to understand: as the control of political power is a zero-sum game, differences over who should rule easily and understandably lead to social conflict. As the same problem, Hume held, does not obtain in matters of religious belief, it seemed incredible to him that religious adherents would come into conflict with those who observe other religious practices. Reasoning a bit further, however, Hume concluded that social conflicts over religion were a product of the psychological discomfort people often experience when they encounter those with contrary or different religious commitments, a discomfort that led to an all-too-great readiness to initiate conflict.[100] To be clear, however, although Hume expressed seemingly greater difficulty in explaining the existence of religious factions, he did not suggest that religious factions were in any way more inherently dangerous to social order than political factions, either in the eighteenth century or at any other time.

As for the particular problems that Christianity, among all religions, has posed to social order, Hume pointed to the institutional separation that has traditionally marked the relationship between the church and the civil authorities, the resulting power over religious matters that Christian clergy have historically enjoyed independent of the control of the secular authorities, and the philosophical subtlety that became a part of Christian teachings and that the clergy used as a tool for turning the followers of various sects against each other. Of these four qualities Hume saw the first one as the only one common to all religions and also insufficient to account for the historical violence of religious faction. Only the other three attributes, which according to

---

[100] Hume, "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 60-61.

Hume were unique to Christianity, could account for the reality of religious violence witnessed in modern times.[101]

As for "Of the Parties of Great Britain," Hume discussed "ecclesiastical parties" only as they related to the other divisions of parties in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, with clergy of the established church favoring the Cavaliers, Tories, and Court, and dissenting churches favoring Roundheads, Whigs, and Country. Hume did not, however, associate conflicts between these church parties with threats to the social order of his day. Finally, in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," Hume divided "the corruptions of true religion" into two categories. The first, superstition, he associated with a tendency toward passivity, social quiescence, and priestcraft. On Hume's account, the second form of false religion, enthusiasm, initially lends itself quite readily to social instability and upheaval, but quickly moderates itself and leads to the emergence of forms of liberty. In neither case, however, does Hume discuss these persuasions of false religion as though they were live threats to the social order of his day.

In contrast to his discussion of religious factions, Hume's treatment of the political factions of his day addressed them as obviously live concerns and spoke to the actual and potential problems those factions posed to social stability and sound policy. Indeed, Hume addressed the political factional divisions and the problems they presented for the British state in no less than ten of his essays from 1741 to 1758. This concern with political faction should come as no surprise given the unrest that the Country party had already caused in the 1730s over the Excise Act and the Gin Act and that Hume published the first two volumes of his essays, *Essays,*

---

[101] In a related vein, Hume regarded polytheistic religions as being, by definition, quite tolerant of other cults and devotional communities. Conversely, on his account intolerance only seemed to be a feature of monotheistic faiths, as evidenced by the "implacable narrow spirit of the JEWS," the "still more bloody principles" of Muslims, the "bigots" of Christianity, and the "zeal" of Zoroastrians. Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 48-51.

Moral and Political, in 1741 and 1742, the years of Walpole's fall from power. At various turns in the *Essays*, Hume criticized the unreflective positions and zealous demagoguery of Court and Country;[102] criticized what he regarded as Walpole's overly divisive and self-serving ministry;[103] condemned the Country party's calls for an end to patronage and the institution of instructions by constituents to Members of the Commons;[104] remarked on the potential for discord generated by the Court and Country;[105] warned of the dangers in the British constitution's—and, by extension, the Country party's and Patriots'—inclination towards republicanism;[106] criticized the speculative political theories of the Whigs and Tories;[107] ventured an even-handed adjudication of the relative merits of the Hanoverian and Stuart claims to the English crown;[108] and, in the guise of a debate between seventeenth-century Whigs and Tories, argued for the established political order against appeals to the mythic ancient constitution.[109] The evidence of the attention that Hume paid to political factions, as opposed to religious factions, suggests that, contrary to Phillipson's, Herdt's, Pocock's, and Arkin's claims, Hume's primary factional concern in his own day was not religious; it was the political divide between the Court and the Country and, to a lesser extent, between Tory and Whig. To put the matter even more precisely, his greatest factional concern was the Country program.

---

[102] Hume, "That Politics May be Reduced to a Science," in *Essays*, 27-31.
[103] Hume, "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole," in *Essays*, 574-76.
[104] Hume, "Of the First Principles of Government" and "of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 35-36 and 44-46.
[105] Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 64-65.
[106] Hume, "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic," in *Essays*, 51-53.
[107] Hume, "Of the Original Contract" and "Of Passive Obedience," in *Essays*, 465-92.
[108] Hume, "Of the Protestant Succession," in *Essays*, 502-11.
[109] Hume, "Of the Coalition of Parties," in *Essays*, 495-501. To be clear, in this essay Hume did speak to the politically and socially destabilizing effects of "the fanaticism of religion," but he was doing so in the voice of a seventeenth-century Tory, not an eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher and social commentator. Hume, "Of the Coalition of Parties," in *Essays*, 500.

To be entirely clear, aspects of the Court party's project did occasionally suffer from the business end of Hume's quill. As already noted, Walpole came in for special criticism from Hume, who observed, "As I am a man, I love him; as I am a scholar, I hate him; as I am a BRITON, I calmly wish his fall." That being said, starting with the 1748 edition of the *Essays*, Hume recast this essay as a footnote to "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," and in editions of the *Essays* published from 1770 on, he dropped it altogether. In addition, Hume amended the 1748 through the 1768 versions, expressing regret at its tone and observing that "the not paying more of our public debt was, as hinted in this character, a great, and the only great, error in that long administration."[110]

Indeed, as demonstrated by his essay "Of Public Credit," Hume's greatest complaint with the Walpole government was its willingness to assume the kinds of massive debts discussed earlier in this chapter. In particular, Hume was keenly worried about the way the national debt— or, more broadly, national spending—had led to a large flow of people and resources into London, a circumstance that risked possible mass uprisings, as well as the inflationary effect that deficit spending might have on prices and wages. In addition, Hume was concerned that the need to pay the national debt would ultimately divest everyone in the nation of any independent means, with the sole exception of the financial class, for whom the rest of the nation would end up working. Echoing Country anxieties about the financial class, Hume described those holding the national debt as:

---

[110] Hume, "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole," in *Essays*, 574-75 n. 1. Hume noted his remorse over the essay's estimation of Walpole in the advertisement to the volume of essays that included the piece on Walpole. It was in the 1748 to 1768 editions of the essays that Hume added the language quoted above limiting his estimation of Walpole's great error to the handling of the national debt. Those editions included the essay on Walpole as a footnote to "Of the Independency of Parliament."

men, who have no connexions with the state, who can enjoy their revenue in any part of the globe in which they chuse to reside, who will naturally bury themselves in the capital or in great cities, and who will sink into the lethargy of a stupid and pampered luxury, without spirit, ambition, or enjoyment.

Moreover, Hume expressed grave concerns about the growing power of the Court that accompanied the growth in Great Britain's military might, which would allow the monarch to leverage ever greater concessions from those holding government debt, "a degree of despotism, which no oriental monarch has ever yet attained" that would also place significant strains on British commercial vitality.[111] Accordingly, Hume shared some of the Country party's misgivings about the direction of British policy since the emergence of the fiscal-military state. Nevertheless, as I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter 5, his concerns with the debt differed in significant ways from the complaints of the Country party and should not be read either as embrace of Country ideology or a rejection of the Court project.

For now, I will simply observe that, although Hume expressed some objections to the growing power of the financial class and the prospects of excessive monarchical power, those objections did not inform the bulk of his criticism of the debt, which instead was directed at the effects it might have on commerce and the extent to which it might compromise Great Britain's willingness and ability to respond to international threats. Moreover, on the issue of Crown patronage, which should be seen as the defining issue in the conflict between Court and Country, Hume stood shoulder to shoulder with the Court. On Hume's account, the Commons possessed by far the greater share of power under Britain's mixed constitution and could, if they wished, divest the Crown of all its powers by making every grant of supply conditional. Hume saw such

---

[111] Hume, "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 354-59.

126

a result as far too destabilizing of the balanced constitution to which both the Country party and he professed allegiance.[112]

Where members of the Country opposition saw Crown patronage as imposing on Parliament a corrupt dependence on the Court, Hume regarded the Crown's use of patronage as the best means at its disposal for the constitution's very maintenance. As he put it:

> [B]y what means is this member of our constitution confined within the proper limits; since, from our very constitution, it must necessarily have as much power as it demands, and can only be confined by itself? How is this consistent with our experience of human nature? I answer, that the interest of the body is here restrained by that of the individuals, and that the house of commons stretches not its power, because such an usurpation would be contrary to the interest of the majority of its members. The crown has so many offices at its disposal, that, when assisted by the honest and disinterested part of the house, it will always command the resolutions of the whole so far, at least, as to preserve the antient [*sic*] constitution from danger. We may, therefore, give to this influence what name we please; we may call it by the invidious appellations of *corruption* and *dependence;* but some degree and some kind of it are inseparable from the very nature of the constitution, and necessary to the preservation of our mixed government.

Moreover, he cautioned the Country party to abandon its more extreme rhetoric about patronage and instead recognize that some degree of parliamentary dependence on the Crown was good for the balance of the British constitution.[113] Instead of worrying about the monarch's powers of appointment, Hume noted that the only form of patronage that the Country should have resisted was outright bribery, while giving the monarch immense discretion in the appointment power.[114] Similarly, Hume opposed the call by more radical members of the Country party that Members of Parliament exercise their votes under instructions from their constituents. In making these

---

[112] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 43-44.
[113] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 44-45.
[114] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 45-46 n. 2.

points, he warned members of the Country party that their attacks on Crown patronage risked tipping the British constitution too far in the direction of outright republicanism.[115]

To be sure, some Commonwealth and independent Whigs of the Country party would have had little problem with such a result, and it was on this point that Hume expressed significant disagreement with the more radical expressions of the Country program. By Hume's lights, the prospect of introducing more republican elements into the British constitution was a source of genuine dread, because that prospect brought with it the near certainty of republican rule, "a civil war every election," and the tyranny of a ruling faction that would itself constantly divide into new factions, and, ultimately, the emergence of an absolutist government that would restore much-needed order.[116] As far as Hume was concerned, the British Isles had seen that movie already, and the show had not turned out as billed. As he discussed at length in the fifth and sixth volumes of the *History*, the Calvinistic and republican agitations of the Puritans introduced a cascade of instability and uncertainty into British social life that, rather than the promised Puritan commonwealth, as the popular religious and political movements of the early seventeenth century resulted in almost twenty years of civil unrest.

As Hume told the tale, the Puritans began as the sole party of civil liberty in late Tudor England and secured for themselves in Elizabeth's reign a majority of seats in the Commons.[117] Despite Elizabeth's best efforts at stymying their growing influence, the Puritans remained influential in the Commons under James I and continued to press both for a more republican government and a liturgically and visually denuded church. By the reign of Charles I, the

---

[115] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 45-46; "Of the First Principles of Government," in *Essays*, 35-36.

[116] Hume, "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic," in *Essays*, 51-53.

[117] Hume, *History of England*, 4:123-24, 145-46, 205, and 272.

Puritans were operating as a primary site of resistance both to Charles's efforts at reintroducing aspects of Catholic worship and ecclesiology into British churches and to his more programmatic claims of royal prerogative. When civil war broke out in 1642 between royal and parliamentary forces, the Puritans, along with the government of London, served as one of the most significant elements of the parliamentary party. These facts would likely have resonated with the readers of Hume's day, given the similar relationship between the City of London and Country party agitators.

As the parliamentary forces came to see their chances for victory improve, Hume observed, a fissure within the Puritan ranks emerged between those who favored a presbyterian form of church government and the independents, "who had, at first, taken shelter and concealed themselves under the wings of the Presbyterians," but who later showed themselves to have an even more radical agenda than the Presbyterian Puritans. Much of the difference between the Presbyterians and the Independents, to be sure, involved more particularly religious matters, in particular their respective views on ecclesiology and the toleration of dissenters, but the differences also extended to matters of temporal government. Unlike the Presbyterians who simply sought to restrict monarchical power to certain defined limits, the Independents "aspired to a total abolition of the monarchy, and even the aristocracy; and projected an entire equality of rank and order, in a republic, quite free and independent."[118]

Of particular relevance, given the debates of Hume's day over patronage, was the Independents' support for the self-denying ordinance, an act of Parliament that barred Members of Parliament from simultaneously holding all but a few civil and military offices. Interestingly, Hume pointed out that among the arguments that had been raised against the self-denying

---

[118] Hume, *History of England*, 5:441-43.

ordinance was the notion that the army would be most likely to stay within its proper bounds if there were a commonality of interest between it and Parliament, and that the best way to effect that common interest was to draw the army's officers from the ranks of the Parliament.[119] This argument quite plainly mirrored similar eighteenth-century arguments that the Court—and Hume—had made in favor of patronage. Under that argument, an increasing interdependence between Crown, Commons, and Lords was the single best means of maintaining the balance of the British constitution.[120]

In discussing the self-denying ordinance, then, Hume was most likely thus seeking to make clear to his readers that the Country's calls for an end to patronage would, again, undermine Great Britain's dearly won constitutional balance, just as the self-denying ordinance ultimately destroyed parliamentary authority. As Hume reminded his readers at great length, the Independents ultimately secured the ordinance's passage, thus removing almost all members of Parliament from the direct control of the freshly constituted New Model Army, an army that later not only overthrew and executed Charles I but also took direct control of Parliament, to the exclusion of other factions in the parliamentary forces.[121] Of course, Hume made clear, the convulsions visited upon the three kingdoms did not stop with the subjections of Parliament. Instead, they continued, leading to Parliament's dissolution, the establishment of the commonwealth and, eventually, Cromwell's military dictatorship, only to be followed by the ultimate irony, the return of the House of Stuart to the throne. Indeed, for Hume, the result of the

---

[119] Hume, *History of England*, 5: 447-49.

[120] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 99, 154-55; Mark Goldie, "The English System of Liberty," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 76.

[121] Hume, *History of England*, 5:492-509.

civil war—the Protectorate and the Restoration—was one of the two great ironies of seventeenth-century British history.[122]

In detailing both the instability and the perverse consequences of the Puritans' and Independents' republicanism, and in particular by calling attention to some of the similarities between those movements and features of eighteenth-century politics, Hume was seeking to make clear to his middling readers that, contrary to any appeal the Country's program and principles might have, members of the middling sort should reject the Country party's agenda as at best imprudent and at worst outright dangerous to the polite and refined commercial social order that Britain's middling orders not only enjoyed, but from which they benefitted. Moreover, these passages from the *History*, when read in tandem with his writing on party in the 1740s, reveal not merely an analytical or polemical through line, but a consistent anxiety on Hume's part about the prospects for social order and the threat to that order that the Country party posed. This anxiety was a profoundly deep-seated nature for Hume, and, as I will develop in the next three chapters, it was that worry, coupled with his deep commitment to the polite, bourgeois social order of his day and his rejection of the idealized model of politics relied on in the Country party's propaganda, that led Hume to regard the Country party as a threat to the polite order of his day. These considerations, and not a worry about the destabilizing effects of religious factions, also led Hume to argue, albeit in a philosophically subtle way, for the legitimacy of the Court party's centralizing project. Accordingly, as I will show, when Hume described himself "a

---

[122] The other was what he saw as the link between Puritan enthusiasm and the liberty that emerged under the balanced constitution

Whig, but a skeptical one," an even more precise formulation of the thought would have been for him to have written, "a *Court* Whig, but a skeptical one."[123]

---

[123] Hume to Henry Home, London, 9 February 1748, 1:111, referring to his essay "Of the Protestant Succession."

CHAPTER 3

THE DISEASE OF THE LEARNED

In the third treatise of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Friedrich Nietzsche sought to explain the puzzling and seemingly counterintuitive ubiquity, persistence, and meaning of ascetic ideals in human cultures. Given that, on their face at least, ascetic notions of chastity, poverty, and humility violated the most basic survival urges of all animal life and were "life *against* life," Nietzsche asked how such values could have endured as moral norms for much of recorded history.[1] Nietzsche concluded that ascetic ideals operated as one response to what he described as "the sickness": the human awareness of suffering and the despair that resulted when people considered that "an enormous *void* surrounded man," that is, that human suffering might serve no end or purpose. This sickness, according to Nietzsche, threatened to rob humanity of its will to go on living. It was, on Nietzsche's account, a genuine existential threat to the perpetuation and continuation of the human race.[2]

What allowed humanity to go on in the face of this sickness were, according to Nietzsche, both "innocent" and "guilty" responses to the sickness's potentially fatal *ennui*. Nietzsche identified the "innocent" responses as the deadening of one's physical and emotional sensations; rote activity, especially work; the "small joy" that accompanies altruistic acts; and identification with and valorization of a community or "herd" of others with whom one is associated. Each of these responses, Nietzsche offered, takes the minds of the spiritually sick off of their suffering and its absurdity and enables them to go on living.[3]

---

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemaire Clark and Alan Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 85-86.
[2] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 85-86 and 117-18.
[3] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 94-99.

The "guilty" response, in turn, is the sick's adoption of ascetic ideals at the behest of priests. As Nietzsche explained it, ascetic ideals were attractive to those suffering from the sickness because priests wrapped those ideals in a metaphysical and moral narrative that explained *why* the sick were suffering. That is, the priestly orders of the world convinced the spiritually sick that their suffering was a product of their own sins—the "*whole* pack of wild dogs" of "anger, fear, lust, revenge, hope, triumph, despair, cruelty"—and called on the sick to struggle with and, as much as possible, defeat these basic emotional states.[4] In two ways, then, ascetic ideals overcame the listlessness and nihilism that human suffering and its apparent cosmic absurdity produced. First, they provided the sick with some explanation or meaning for the suffering that they endured, as that suffering was a product of those occasions when the sick succumbed to the various temptations of anger, fear, lust, and the rest. Second, they gave the sick some object for their will and thus something to do other than surrender to despair.

In this chapter, I want to argue that we can understand Hume's anxiety over the Country party and the Patriot movement, his support of Court Whiggery, and his discussion in the *History* of the violence and inconveniences of both the Civil Wars and pre-Tudor English life as products of his experience of and response to something like the Nietzschean sickness, what Hume's personal physician diagnosed as the disease of the learned. That is, based on Hume's 1734 letter to an unnamed physician and his conclusion to the first book of the *Treatise*, the condition for which Hume sought treatment in the letter was a melancholia that proceeded from the path of study his self-described new scene of thought had put him on. That path of study, in turn, had led Hume to the brink of a radical skepticism, a skepticism that left him facing the distinct

---

[4] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 99-103.

possibility of a universe without a foundation for rational judgment of any kind. It was that possibility that led Hume to an existential despair that nearly ruined his health and his career.

Fortunately for Hume, he was able to formulate philosophical responses to the intellectual and existential threats to which his thought had led him, but what interests me most here is Hume's more practical response to his skepticism-induced melancholy. As the conclusion to the first book of the *Treatise* and Hume's subsequent writings attest, Hume found in conversation, conviviality, and urbane politeness a practical therapy for the despair that his philosophical inquiries had precipitated; the practices of that politeness afforded him the opportunity to find some measure of not merely solace but outright pleasure. Hume also, however, recognized that the kind of social and political ecology that permitted such pursuits was contingent and exceedingly fragile. In particular, Hume recognized that the polite conviviality he treasured depended upon the order-producing and expectation-preserving effects of the increasingly centralized state that Court Whiggery had brought into being. The means by which he had escaped from the profound emotional depths into which his studies had cast him thus depended upon a particular set of social and political arrangements, and Hume's *Essays* and *History* show that Hume understood this relationship and sought to share that understanding with other members of the middling orders who might otherwise be inclined to embrace partisan commitments that threatened that order. Those works thus should be seen not as an exercise in impartial commentary on the political issues of his day and the historical questions implicated in them, but instead as Hume's own case for the Court Whig project.[5] Moreover, Hume's concerns

---

[5] As numerous Hume scholars have observed, however, and as I have discussed in the introduction, other ends also motivated Hume's historical work, most notably his desire to put paid to the claim that the constitution defended by Old Whigs and the Country party more broadly was an ancient constitution. In contrast to Country and Old Whig appeals to such a constitution, Hume argued that the constitutional liberties that the eighteenth-century British

over faction, while having proceeded from his worry that faction threatened the Court's power and the social balance that power had managed to achieve, were more fundamentally a product of his worry that popular political factions threatened the stability upon which the culture of commercial politeness was predicated.

Hume made that case in a few different ways. As I indicated in the previous chapter, Hume devoted much of his political and historical writing to a project of delegitimizing the Country party's factional challenge to the fiscal-military, Walpolian, and Court-centered order that made polite urbanity possible. In particular, I read Hume as seeking to underscore the violence, instability, and inconveniences that marked earlier "barbarian" and feudal social forms, forms that polemicists of the Country party all too often celebrated. Beyond his attacks on these overt challenges to the Court and the Whig oligarchy, however, Hume also sought to shore up the ethos of commercial politeness by focusing his readers' attention on the relationship between commercial politeness and the modern centralized state that had emerged under the Tudors, Stuarts, and Hanovers.

The analysis of Hume's argument that I will offer over this and the next two chapters will proceed as follows. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss Hume's experience with the disease of the learned and the relationship between that experience and Hume's commitment to and overt defense of polite and refined urbanity. In the next chapter, I will explore the significant economic and demographic changes in the English social order that gave birth to the culture of commercial politeness to which he was so firmly committed. I will also there flesh out the features of eighteenth-century polite urbanity; in particular, I will argue that eighteenth-century politeness should be regarded as a distinctively bourgeois ethos, and that ideologists like Joseph

---

enjoyed were the product of the settlement that emerged in the wake of the Glorious Revolution. On this, see the eighth chapter of Forbes's, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*.

Addison were seeking to secure for that ethos a hegemonic position within the culture of the middling ranks of Great Britain. In Chapter 5, I will bring to the fore Hume's own commitment to and interest in commercial politeness. I will then underscore that Hume is most productively regarded as a principled supporter of Court Whiggery and draw out those portions of Hume's work in which he linked the norms and practice of eighteenth-century commercial politeness to the modern centralized state that had come into existence over the course of the Tudor, Stuart, and early Hanoverians reigns. Relatedly, I will highlight how the *History* should be read as an effort by Hume to dissuade people from adopting ideological commitments that could undermine his cherished ethos of commercial politeness, in particular as the *History* associated those commitments with the inconveniences and disorder of pre-Tudor England.

A LETTER TO AN UNNAMED PHYSICIAN

In 1776, Hume, facing his impending death, looked back on his life and composed a brief autobiography, *My Own Life*. Little more than a sketch of his character, his employment history, and his life as a man of letters—the full contents occupy less than twelve pages in a conventionally formatted contemporary book—*My Own Life* also contained Hume's passing reference to the health problems that had begun to plague him in his late teens and that continued to hound him well into his twenties. Raising the subject of those difficulties as an explanation for his decision to leave, however briefly, the life of the mind for a foray into the world of affairs, Hume attributed his change of course to his "health being a *little* broken by [his] ardent application to his studies."[6]

---

[6] David Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays*, xxxiii.

Given the record we have from the 1730s, however, the older Hume's characterization of his youthful illness understates the extent and the nature of his problems. Indeed, the fact that, more than forty years later, Hume regarded that illness with such significance that he felt compelled to mention it in such a short autobiography suggests that his health was more than just "a little broken."[7] Apart from *My Own Life*'s reference to his health problems, the most we know about Hume's youthful ailment comes from a 1734 letter to an unnamed physician and, in my estimation, the conclusion to the first book of the *Treatise*. Those sources paint a picture of the illness from which Hume suffered as something that weighed on him far more heavily than *My Own Life* intimates. Moreover, they make clear that the illness from which he suffered was far more emotional and psychological than physical and point to a relationship between Hume's disease and not merely the intensity of his studies but the nature of his studies, the investigations that had been spurred on by what he called in the 1734 letter "a new Scene of Thought."[8]

The 1734 letter to an unnamed physician provides us with a helpful window not only on Hume's illness and his reaction to it, but also on Hume's earliest thoughts on his work and the relationship between his work and his illness. Indeed, the letter is our first insight into Hume's

---

[7] That being said, Hume might have felt compelled to mention his health problems in order to explain away the seeming incongruity of his decision to pursue a career as a merchant in Bristol and to divert attention from another possible reason for that decision. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, another possible reason for Hume's decision to leave Edinburgh for work as a merchant in southern England may have had to do with the pregnancy of Agnes Galbraith and the possibility that Hume might have been the father of Galbraith's unborn child. To the extent that Hume was the father of Galbraith's child and sought to evade his paternal responsibilities, it would have made sense for him to leave Ninewells, first for Bristol and then for France, and to the extent that he had done so, it makes sense for the older Hume to continue to obscure the real reasons for his departure from Scotland behind a reference to the toll his studies had taken on him. Once, again, however, as my discussion in this section should demonstrate, the documents we have from Hume's own hand from the 1730s support the conclusion that Hume's health problems were significant, irrespective of whether they were the reason for Hume's decision to quit Scotland for England and France.

[8] Hume to Dr. George Cheyne (surmised), 1734, 1:13.

decision to pursue a career as a scholar, philosopher, and man of letters, rather than a lawyer. As

he described the matter, upon completing his formal education, Hume was left "to [his] own

Choice in [his] Reading, & found it encline [*sic*] [him] almost equally to Books of Reasoning &

Philosophy, & to Poetry & the polite Authors." In the letter Hume also described what had been

his earlier dissatisfaction with the state of affairs he found in both philosophy and letters, as

neither field had built itself upon solid foundations and so "contain little more than endless

Disputes."[9] Not content with this state of affairs and refusing to bow to the authority of the past,

he set himself upon identifying "some new Medium, by which Truth might be establish [*sic*]."

Around the age of eighteen, "after much Study, & Reflection," Hume's legendary "new Scene of

Thought" opened before him and set him on an even more intense regimen of study, a regimen

that consumed him utterly and that brings me to the 1734 letter.

  The intended recipient of the letter remains unknown, although it was most likely Dr.

George Cheyne, who in 1733 had published *The English Malady*, a then-famed work on

conditions that we today would probably term depression and psychosomatic illness.[10] Whoever

---

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Cheyne, *The English Malady: or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds, as Spleens, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysteric Distempers, etc*. (London: G. Strahan, 1733). The nineteenth-century Hume biographer John Hill Burton narrowed the possible recipients of this letter down to two possible candidates: Cheyne and Dr. John Arbuthnot, given that they seem to have been the only two celebrated physicians of Scottish origin practicing in England in 1734. Burton concluded that the letter was intended for Cheyne, who was a physician, natural philosopher, and mystic. Burton noted that Hume's letter seems to have shared the tone of Cheyne's *The English Malady*, suggesting Hume's familiarity with and respect for the book. For these reasons, and because Cheyne, like Arbuthnot, fit Hume's description of the recipient as "a Scotchman . . . a skillful Physician, [and] a man of Letters," Burton concluded that Hume had written the letter to Cheyne. Ernest Mossner, however, has argued, unconvincingly in my judgment, that the recipient must have been Arbuthnot, who had been Queen Anne's personal physician and was not only a physician but also an accomplished man of letters, writing on ancient coinage, probability theory, and the union between England and Scotland. Mossner, "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, 1734: The Biographical Significance," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (Feb., 1944), 147-48. Mossner insisted on Arbuthnot as

the recipient of the letter was, the report Hume offered in the letter was a desperate one, as he described himself as having suffered for over four years from a succession of physical symptoms, including at various times "Scurvy Spots," "Ptyalism or Watryness in the mouth," "a very ravenous Appetite, & as quick a Digestion," and "Palpitation of the heart in a small degree, & a good deal of Wind in my Stomach;" all of which developed following Hume's headlong charge into his new scene of thought.

Hume also remarked on psychological symptoms that lasted well after the initial physical ones had passed. The scurvy spots came and went over the winter of 1729-30 with the help of medicine and "a very knowing Physician," and his physician treated the bout of excessive salivation with, tellingly, a program of physical activity and calming agents. What remained a constant throughout most of this period was a persistent loss of ardor for his studies, a "coldness," a "weakness," and a "desertion" of the spirit that laid Hume low and stood in the way of his work. Taken together with his earlier symptoms, Hume reported in the letter that his

---

the intended recipient because, according to Mossner, Cheyne and Hume would have regarded each other's philosophical and religious views with distrust and possibly outright disdain and enmity, and because Mossner read Hume's letter as placing the intended recipient in London, while by 1734 Cheyne's medical practice was in Bath. The letter reads: "As I come to London in my way to Bristol. . . ." John Wright has pointed out the weaknesses in Mossner's position, noting that there was likely nothing in Hume's letter that would have offended Cheyne's religious or philosophical commitments and that Hume at that time in his life was not inclined to dismiss those with mystical inclinations from the realm of possible friends and associates. Wright, "Dr. George Cheyne, Chevalier Ramsay, and Hume's Letter to a Physician," *Hume Studies* 29 (2003). Wright rejects Mossner's reading of the line about Hume's being in London as a necessary indication that Hume was writing to a physician who was also in London, although he does not offer much in the way of reasons for this rejection. One possible reason for this line could be that Hume, although heading for Bristol, posted the letter in London and was simply seeking to explain the London postmark to the recipient, who was already likely to be inclined toward suspicion given that Hume sent the letter anonymously. Alternatively, Hume may simply have been mentioning his presence in London incidentally. In any event, the mention of Hume's presence in London is not the necessarily dispositive fact that Mossner seeks to make it. Mossner, "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," 143-44. Hume's most recent biographer, James Harris, sees Cheyne as the "best guess" to the identity of the unnamed physician. Harris, *Hume*, 76-77.

emotional and psychological malaise had led his doctor to diagnose him with the disease of the learned.[11]

The diagnosis likely sounds silly or quaint to modern ears, but in Hume's day and for centuries before it was a commonly accepted affliction of scholars. In broad brushstrokes the condition was usually attributed to the scholar's sedentary life or over-exertion of the mind, which in turn, it was claimed, would throw off the delicate balance of the blood, or bile, or digestive tract, and then present as stomach problems, melancholy, and a loss of ardor for one's intellectual pursuits.[12] According to one eighteenth-century medical commentator, Samuel Tissot, the only treatment for this ailment was "for the mind to be often unemployed, and the body to labour," in particular at either walking or riding.[13] Accordingly, in addition to "a Course of Bitters & Anti-Hysteric Pills," and an English pint of claret wine every day, Hume's physician included in his prescription the instruction to ride every day, which Hume did, for "8 to 10 Scotch Miles."[14]

---

[11] Hume to Dr. George Cheyne (surmised), 1734, 1:14.

[12] For early-modern sources on the disease of the learned, see Bernardino Ramazzini, *A treatise of the diseases of tradesmen, shewing the various influences of particular trades upon the state of health. With the best methods to avoid or correct it and useful hints proper to be minded in regulating the cure of all diseases incident to tradesmen* (London, 1705), 247-49; and Samuel A. Tissot, *An essay on diseases incidental to literary and sedentary persons With proper rules for preventing their fatal consequences. And instructions for their cure* (Dublin, 1772), 16-18. The most extensive scholarly treatment of the condition is M. J. van Lieburg, *The Disease of the Learned: A Chapter from the History of Melancholy and Hypochondria*, (Oss, the Netherlands: Organon International, 1990). Van Lieburg notes that the incidence of discussions of the phenomenon by both physicians and scholars waxed and waned over the centuries, but there were particular increases in such discussions in both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. *Disease of the Learned*, 15-16. Indeed, in the eighteenth century it came to be thought of as somewhat fashionable to suffer from this affliction. van Lieburg, *Disease of the Learned*, 50-51 and 60.

[13] Tissot, *An essay on diseases incidental to literary and sedentary persons*, 46-48.

[14] Hume to Dr. George Cheyne (surmised), 1734, 1:14.

Hume followed his doctor's advice and seemed to improve, but as he reported in the letter, he found himself troubled by new symptoms of heart palpitations and stomach problems, which led him to resume his doctor's prescribed treatment, a course that he reported as having little effect. Through this time, Hume tried to continue his work of identifying a surer footing for moral philosophy, one founded not on hypotheses, invention, fancy, or self-satisfaction, but instead on experience and observation. Unfortunately, Hume reported, he found himself unable to bring his research and thought into any kind of focus or precise relief capable of expression. As he put it:

> I found that I was not able to follow out any Train of Thought, by one continued Stretch of View, but by repeated Interruptions, & by refreshing my Eye from Time to Time upon other Objects. Yet with this Inconvenience I have collected the rude Materials for many Volumes; but in reducing these to Words, when one must bring the Idea he comprehended in gross, nearer to him, so as to contemplate its minutest Parts, & keep it steddily [sic] in his Eye, so as to copy these parts in Order, this I found impracticable for me, nor were my Spirits equal to so severe an Employment.[15]

The spirit that had at first been so enflamed by a new scene of thought had flagged considerably; indeed, in 1734, when Hume wrote to the unnamed physician, it seemed to have departed completely, and Hume's work was languishing as a result. He likened himself to mystics and religious enthusiasts whose souls had once soared but had come to see their spirits grow weak, cold, and listless.[16]

Of course, we now know that Hume overcame, at least largely, his anxious melancholia and completed his *Treatise of Human Nature*. What remains unclear, however, is the precise nature of the affliction Hume was experiencing and how Hume managed to overcome his loss of spirit. In his 1931 biography of Hume, J.Y.T. Greig largely made light of the youthful anxieties

---

[15] Hume to Dr. George Cheyne (surmised), 1734, I:16.
[16] Hume to Dr. George Cheyne (surmised), 1734, I:17.

that Hume reported in the letter but did recognize them as emotional, rather than intellectual,

difficulties, and attributed them to the social and familial isolation Hume must have felt

following his rejection of religious faith.[17] Ernest Mossner, Hume's other significant twentieth-

century biographer, has done a reasonably good job of demonstrating that Hume was already

working on the *Treatise* when he fell prey to the melancholia that prompted the letter to the

unidentified physician. Specifically, Mossner points to a 1751 letter from Hume to his friend

Gilbert Elliot, in which Hume stated that he planned the *Treatise* before he turned twenty-one in

1732 and composed it before he turned twenty-five in 1736.[18] From Hume's remarks to Elliot,

Mossner attributes Hume's emotional distress and loss of ardor to the sheer immensity of the

task Hume had set for himself in writing the *Treatise*, a task so "sustained and intense" that it

was no wonder it led to "a psychosomatic disorder which was to last more than four years."[19]

Assuming that Hume's recollections in his 1751 letter to Elliot were correct, Mossner is

almost certainly right to associate the problems that Hume complained of in the 1734 letter with

his work on the *Treatise*.[20] That being said, I think that Hume's loss of will went well beyond

exhaustion from wrestling with an immense intellectual challenge and extended to an existential

---

[17] Greig, *David Hume* (New York: Garland, 1983), 78-82.

[18] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 73; Hume to Sir Gilbert Eliot, Lord Minto, 1751, 1:158. Mossner also states that Hume *projected* writing the *Treatise* before he left college, thus before he turned fourteen or fifteen in 1725 or 1726. The cite Mossner provides for that claim, however, to the portion of the collected edition of Hume's philosophical works devoted to the *Essays*, says nothing on this point.

[19] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 73,

[20] For another work that has shared Mossner's and my conclusion that the *Treatise* and the letter to an unnamed physician should be read in tandem, see Donald T. Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 170-74. For a contrary reading, see Claudia Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (University Park: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 150-54. Schmidt reads the conclusion to the first book of the *Treatise* not as a statement of a personal crisis, but instead as an effort at guiding his readers "through an expected series of intellectual and emotional reactions to his skeptical arguments." Schmidt, *David Hume*, 150.

crisis prompted by the nature of the inquiry in which Hume was engaged. Moreover, I think Mossner is simply wrong when he suggests that "the very act of putting his symptoms into writing may in itself have provoked a psychological catharsis" that cured Hume of the disease of the learned. As Mossner puts it, "Hume may have come to the realization that all that could be done had been done . . . and the intensive review in the letter of the last several years may have dated the whole distemper definitely of the past."[21]

Mossner's conclusions, no matter how tentatively stated, simply fail to take account of Hume's reflections in the conclusion to the first book of the *Treatise*, reflections that are best read in light of the melancholy about which Hume complained in the 1734 letter. In my estimation, the *Treatise* can provide us with crucial insight into why Hume was suffering from something that was diagnosed as the disease of the learned but that could be more properly characterized in modern terms as an existential crisis. To explain my position adequately, however, I need to engage in what will be—I hope!—a short examination of the *Treatise*'s first book. Understanding Hume's discussion of the seeming philosophical bind in which he found himself and the emotional toll it had taken requires at least a brief statement of what Hume was up to in the *Treatise* generally and the first book specifically.

PHILOSOPHY AND DESPAIR: THE FIRST BOOK OF THE *TREATISE*

As suggested in the work's sub-title—*An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*—and as he noted in its introduction, the *Treatise* served as Hume's effort to apply Baconian empiricism to the study of human life.[22] In the process, Hume

---

[21] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 86-87.
[22] Hume, *Treatise*, xvi-xvii. ('Tis no astonishing reflection to consider, that the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects should come after that to natural at the distance of

also sought to clear away a great deal of what he regarded as philosophical missteps about human faculties and their ability to authorize meaningful statements about the world generally and human nature specifically. To that end, in the first book, Hume insisted that all knowledge of the physical world, whether inanimate objects or living beings, must proceed from sense impressions; that is, from "experience and observation."[23] Hume then proceeded to state that all that the human mind perceives can be divided between impressions, which are the products of our senses and feelings, and ideas, which are the "faint images" of impressions reproduced by thought. Impressions, he explained, enter our minds with a kind of force or sharpness, while ideas are faint images of impressions. At its most basic, the difference between the two, as Hume put it, is "the difference betwixt feeling and thinking." For example, the actual sight of an apple or bicycle would be an impression, while the thought of an apple or bicycle conjured from memory would be an idea. Similarly, the actual feeling of anger or sadness would be an impression, while the thoughts I might have about anger or sadness in the abstract would be ideas.

From these observations, Hume proceeded to argue that the most basic truths to which we cling in structuring our perceptions of reality—truths like causation, the reality and duration of external objects, and even personal identity—cannot be demonstrated either empirically or by *a*

---

above a whole century; since we find in fact, that there was about the same interval betwixt the origins of these sciences; and that reckoning from THALES to SOCRATES, the space of time is nearly equal to that betwixt my Lord BACON and some late philosophers in *England*, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engaged the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public." (Emphases and capitalization in the original.) As one might expect, according to Hume's note the "late philosophers" to whom he was referring were "Mr. *Locke*, my Lord *Shaftesbury*, Dr. *Mandeville*, Mr. *Hutchinson*, Dr. *Butler*, &c." Hume, *Treatise*, xvii n. 1.

[23] Hume, *Treatise*, xvi.

priori reasoning.[24] For example, we actually have no direct impression of causation, as a necessary connection between one prior event and a subsequent event, but instead simply perceive a sequence of events marked by close temporal succession that we have previously perceived as repeating without fail. Hume observed that naked reasoning, in itself, could never tell us how a billiard ball in motion and a billiard ball at rest would respond to each other; only our past experience provides us with any suggestion of how that encounter will play out. As such, our knowledge of the concept of causation depends upon empirical observation. Hume also, however, pointed out that past observations do not necessarily prove that the same results will hold at some point in the future, because by definition we have no sense impressions of future events; rather, past observations only allow us to infer that such results will continue to obtain into the future. Accordingly, empirical observation fails to support the common sense view of necessary causation.

In response to this conclusion, Hume reasoned that fundamental premises of daily existence—like causation—are products of what he termed the imagination, by which he meant the mental power that can combine our ideas of things and that "enlivens some ideas beyond others."[25] According to Hume, the imagination's associating and enlivening power makes what we have previously and consistently perceived as a cause and effect relationship between temporally successive phenomena appear to be a necessary connection in all similar later instances.[26] It similarly leads us to believe that external objects endure even when they are not immediately subject to our senses and that each of us is a subject perceiving our sensory

---

[24] Hume, *Treatise*, 78-82 and 88-92.
[25] Hume, *Treatise*, 265.
[26] Hume, *Treatise*, 92-94.

impressions and ideas.[27] We reach these conclusions not, Hume points out, because reason demands them or because we have hard evidence of them, but because the imagination employs experience, habit, and custom to craft ideas about reality and inspires our minds to embrace these ideas as sound, an operation Hume termed belief. According to Hume, then, it is the imagination upon which all of our memories, senses, and understanding are founded.[28]

Hume did not, however, regard the imagination as a completely beneficial faculty. To be sure, by drawing connections among our perceptions and inciting us to attach special significance to some of those connections, the imagination made possible the store of beliefs that are seen as common sense and that make planning and social life possible. Because the imagination could combine ideas in a variety of ways, however, it was capable of producing incoherent, absurd, and false complexes of ideas. Some of those complex ideas are so ridiculous and counter-factual that they are innocuous: "*that* Caesar *dy'd in his bed, that silver is more fusible than lead, or mercury heavier than gold*."[29] Hume found other associations of ideas—like the ancient philosophical notions of substance, accident, and form—to be far more troublesome, as they provided support to false beliefs about human nature and reality more generally, and "lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become asham'd of our credulity. Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers."[30]

Thus, for Hume, the imagination could and did lead philosophers into analytical errors, and those mistakes deeply confounded their ability to grasp anything like truths about human nature. Unfortunately, as Hume was quick to point out, the understanding—the faculty that

---

[27] Hume, *Treatise*, 193 and 259-60.
[28] Hume, *Treatise*, 265.
[29] Hume, *Treatise*, 95.
[30] Hume, *Treatise*, 267.

revealed as absurd the errors of the imagination—was the very same faculty that, when followed to its logical conclusions, revealed common sense ideas like causation and personal identity as lacking any *a priori* or empirical basis. As Hume observed, "the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life."[31] Accordingly, Hume found himself facing a dilemma. He could, on the one hand, embrace the understanding and reject the imagination, a prospect that would also require rejecting any complex thought involving the conjoining of ideas and "cut off entirely all science and philosophy." On the other hand, he could reject the understanding in favor of the imagination, but then never subject any product of the imagination—irrespective of how absurd—to the exacting scrutiny of the understanding. In that way, he would lose the power of coming closer to what was likely true about the world.

---

[31] Hume, *Treatise*, 267-68. Hume never bothers to define what he means by common life, but it seems fairly clear that in using this term he means to refer to the everyday common experiences of human social life at a given historical moment, experiences that are generative of what might be referred to, non-reflexively, as common sense. See, for example, Hume, *Treatise*, 50 ("In common life 'tis established as a maxim, that the streightest [*sic*] way is always the shortest; which would be as absurd as to say, the shortest way is always the shortest, if our idea of a right line was not different from that of the shortest way betwixt two points."); Hume, *Treatise*, 628-29 (having concluded that the difference between ideas about facts and ideas about fictitious matters must lie in the manner in which such ideas are conceived, Hume confessed his great difficulty in explaining this manner of conception but observed: "its true and proper name is *belief*, which is a term that every one sufficiently understands in common life."); Hume, *Treatise*, 181 (Discussing the option of skepticism, Hume stated: "Since therefore all knowledge resolves itself into probability, and becomes at last of the same nature with that evidence, which we employ in common life, we must now examine this latter species of reasoning, and see on what foundation it stands."); Hume, *Treatise*, 189-90 (discussing the question of personal identity, Hume noted, "So far from being able by our senses merely to determine this question, we must have recourse to the most profound metaphysics to give a satisfactory answer to it; and in common life 'tis evident these ideas of self and person are never very fix'd nor determinate."); and Hume, *Treatise*, 267 (concluding that the relationship of cause and effect and the conviction of the continuing existence of external objects is a product of the human mind and not of the external world, Hume observed: "This deficiency of our ideas is not, indeed, perceiv'd in common life. . . . .").

In the course of these worried remarks, Hume observed, seemingly in passing, that "very refin'd reflections"—the kind in which he had been engaging—"have little or no influence upon us."[32] He then immediately proceeded to correct himself and at the same time reveal that the nature of his work was imposing on him a deep and existential cost:

> This opinion I can scarce forebear retracting, and condemning from my present feeling and experience. The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favor shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty.[33]

Hume's studies—indeed, as he put the matter, reason, itself—thus seem to have led him to question his very identity, his ends, and his place in the cosmic order. Moreover, sounding in a register remarkably similar to the 1734 letter, Hume went on immediately to describe the condition in which he found himself as "this philosophical melancholy and delirium."

Again, based on the 1751 letter from Hume to Gilbert Elliot, it seems likely that Hume was working on the *Treatise* in some fashion at the same time that he wrote the letter to the unnamed physician. The conclusion to the first book seems to support that position, as he described himself feeling "wrought," his brain "heated," in a "deplorable condition," "inviron'd with the deepest darkness," intellectually impotent, and suffering from "melancholy and delirium." This language mirrors that of the 1734 letter in which Hume likened his own psychological state to mystics who, after having experienced an enlarged and soaring spirit, fall

---

[32] Hume, *Treatise*, 268.
[33] Hume, *Treatise*, 268-69 (emphasis in the original).

back down to earth with "a Coldness & Desertion of the Spirit." He complained that, unlike those "Fanatics," he had "not come out of the Cloud so well as they commonly tell us they have done," and had begun "to despair of ever recovering."

Apart from the similar descriptions of his emotional state in both the 1734 letter and the *Treatise*, the letter offers one more piece of evidence supporting a close relationship between Hume's emotional difficulties and his work on the *Treatise*. In the letter, Hume associated his melancholy with his critique of ancient moral philosophy. Apologizing for the tedious nature of the letter, Hume wrote that he would "explain . . . how my Mind stood all this time," at which point he launched into his criticism of pre-modern philosophy, which, as he put it, was:

> Entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every one consulted his Fancy in erecting Schemes of Virtue & of Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend. This therefore I resolved to make my principal Study . . . I believe 'tis a certain Fact that most of the Philosophers who have gone before us, have been overthrown by the Greatness of their Genius, & that little more is requir'd to make a man succeed in this Study than to throw off all Prejudices either for his own Opinions or for this of others.[34]

The work that Hume described in the letter thus seems to mirror perfectly the work that would later see publication as the *Treatise*. Based on that fact and the similarity of emotional states reported in both the letter and the end of the *Treatise*'s first book, the two texts are best read together, and by reading them in tandem we get a much fuller portrait of Hume's mental and emotional state in the mid-1730s. The letter demonstrates that the anxieties from which Hume suffered were so significant that he sought help for them from a stranger, albeit a stranger with substantial and relevant expertise.

---

[34] Hume to Dr. George Cheyne (surmised), 1734, 1:16.

The *Treatise*, in turn, gives us a better grasp of *why* Hume was feeling as he was. Hume's troubled mind proceeded neither, as Greig claims, from the sense of isolation Hume must have felt after abandoning the faith of his fathers, nor, as Mossner holds, from the sheer intellectual gravity of the work that Hume had taken on. Rather, I read Hume's experience of the disease of the learned as the product of a kind of intense epistemological and metaphysical vertigo. As Hume reported in the *Treatise*, he feared that through his work he was losing sight of any foundation for certainty about the world, human existence, or his very selfhood. To say the least, these are heady matters if one sees into them with any depth, and based on his remarks in the *Treatise*, Hume certainly seems to have done just that. To the extent, then, that Hume was a thoughtful, introspective, and sensitive man who also insisted on staring unflinchingly at hard and even terrifying truths, it seems exceedingly plausible that the melancholy and anxiety that suffuse the 1734 letter and the conclusion of the *Treatise* were not the product of a mere intellectual crisis. Rather, they were the product of what we would today call an existential crisis, one that threatened to rob Hume of his ardor for his work, the very source from which Hume had apparently derived his life's meaning. Hume had stared long into the abyss, and the abyss had stared squarely back into him.

Of course, we know that Hume went on to finish the *Treatise* and to become a celebrated man of letters, facts that prompt the question: how did Hume find his way out of the despair to which his studies brought him? Part of the answer has to reside in the simple fact that, as Hume himself reported in the *Treatise* and as his career attests, constitutionally he had no choice but to be a man of letters and apply his critical and philosophical mind to a variety of epistemological, moral, political, and aesthetic problems.[35] Nevertheless, whatever Hume's interests and

---

[35] Hume makes exactly this point in the conclusion to the first book. Hume, *Treatise*, 270-72.

predispositions, the melancholy from which he suffered could still have derailed Hume's best efforts, and so had to be overcome. In my view—and contrary to Mossner's assertion that writing the 1734 letter served as an occasion of catharsis—in the *Treatise*, Hume actually tells us how he at least began to find his way out of his melancholy. As Hume explained, although he was incapable of reasoning his way out of the dread into which he had found his way, another path presented itself.

DESPAIR AND POLITENESS

As Hume put it, nature itself led him back to a more stable state of mind in two ways. First, as anyone who has been deeply anxious can attest, the body simply cannot maintain that state for very long; it tires and forces one into a more relaxed attitude, at least for a while. Hume reported that precisely this happened to him. He went on, however, also to note that nature cured him "by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all of these chimeras." Hume went on to describe those avocations: "I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther."

Irrespective of how cold or strained or ridiculous he might have found his prior musings immediately upon returning to them after a few hours of diversion, Hume did take them up anew and produced one of the most—if not *the* most—significant works of philosophy ever written in English, and the passage just quoted offers helpful insight into understanding this recovery. On the level of his intellectual enterprise, I am persuaded by Donald Livingston's argument that it was Hume's rejection of philosophy as an exercise entirely autonomous from the customs of

"common life" that allowed him to by-pass the dangers of the radical skepticism that so troubled him in the final pages of the *Treatise*'s first book. Instead, Hume came to the view that philosophy must accept common life and its predicates as categories in which philosophy must take place. That move by Hume, Livingston argues, allowed philosophy to maintain its own vitality and enabled it to engage in the process of better understanding, analyzing, and criticizing particular products of common life.[36] Nevertheless, it also led Hume to conclude that politics based on speculative principles and products of the unrestrained imagination—principles and products like the ancient constitution and an original contract—should not serve as the basis for social life, given its tendency to lead its adherents into what Albert Camus has termed metaphysical rebellion.

As above, so below. As Livingston argues, Hume's decision to accept common life as a necessary precondition for "true" philosophy enabled Hume to escape the intellectual cul-de-sac of radical skepticism. Similarly, that common life provided Hume with a way of recovering his personal bearings in the face of the epistemological and existential terror that he was confronting as a result of his inquiries. Specifically, as Hume reported in the *Treatise*, it was the enjoyment of polite pleasures—dining, a parlor game, conversation, conviviality—that, in the face of the most exacting symptoms of the Nietzschean sickness he was experiencing, gave him a means of reviving his spirits and refocusing his attention on his philosophical enterprise.

Hume's next substantial work, his *Essays, Moral and Political* of 1741, provides additional evidence for associating Hume's recovery from his melancholy with his enjoyment of polite conviviality. In "Of the Delicacy of Taste and the Delicacy of Passion," Hume offered a comparison between the two distinct dispositional "delicacies" of taste and passion. By the latter,

---

[36] Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 2-3 and 9-33.

Hume meant the character trait that inclined some people to great joys and appreciation when they receive the slightest benefit or enjoyment and deep anger, sadness, or resentment at the merest insult or injury. Hume observed that "people of this disposition have, no doubt, more lively enjoyments, as well as more pungent sorrows, than men of cool and sedate tempers."[37] Nevertheless, Hume reasoned, any person who was "entirely master of his own disposition" would prefer a more even-keeled disposition. Those with a delicacy of taste, in contrast, derive their respective satisfaction from the experience of pleasures that speak to a refined and well-developed judgment. Similarly, they derive significant unhappiness from offenses against good taste and the display of impolite behavior. As Hume put the matter, "A polite and judicious conversation affords him the highest entertainment; rudeness or impertinence is as great a punishment to him."

Hume's main point here was to argue for the dispositional and characterological benefits of the delicacy of taste and to suggest that the development of the delicacy of taste could counteract a person's natural disposition toward the delicacy of passion. In addition, he pointed out that the development of refined tastes brings with it a more refined judgment, which in turn renders people less susceptible to the emotional excesses of the delicacy of passion, and so more likely to live a happy life. As such, Hume saw the delicacy of taste as a corrective to the emotional heights and troughs of the delicacy of passion.

I take it that the manner in which Hume discussed the delicacy of passion and the effects that the delicacy of taste can have on it reveals that he experienced such effects in his own life. When Hume, writing of those who approach life with a delicacy of passion, stated that their pleasures are sweeter and their pains more poignant, it strikes me that this observation proceeds

---

[37] Hume, "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion," in *Essays*, 3-4.

not merely from his general observations of human behavior, but was subtly relating the results

of his own experience. Moreover, when he wrote that a calm disposition is clearly preferable to a

passionate one, I take him to have been writing with the benefit of having personally felt the

relative merits of both dispositions. Further, I find it especially salient when he notes:

> Good or ill fortune is very little at our disposal: And when a person, that has this sensibility of temper, meets with any misfortune his sorrow or resentment takes entire possession of him and deprives him of all relish in the common occurrences of life; the right enjoyment of which forms the chief part of our happiness. . . . Not to mention, that men of such lively passions are apt to be transported beyond all bounds of prudence and discretion, and to take false steps in the conduct of life, which are often irretrievable.[38]

Reading this passage, I cannot help but think of the ardor with which Hume initially approached

his studies, as reported in the 1734 letter, and the profound sense of despair he came to as a result

of those studies, as both the letter and the *Treatise* attest. It seems likely that Hume regarded that

time in his life exactly as a case of having been transported "beyond all bounds of prudence and

discretion" and having almost taken some intellectual and existential "false steps" that, at the

time at least, he well could have perceived as irretrievable, as far as his mental and emotional

well-being were concerned.

Similarly, when he raised the salutary benefits that a delicacy of taste can bring to one

burdened with a delicacy of passion, he was relying in no small measure on his own receipt of

those benefits, as gestured toward previously in the *Treatise*. As he put the matter, "I am

persuaded, that nothing is so proper to cure us of this delicacy of passion, as the cultivating of

that higher and more refined taste, which enables us to judge the characters of men, of

---

[38] Hume, "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion," in *Essays*, 4.

compositions of genius, and of the productions of the nobler arts."[39] Hume knew of what he spoke, because it was his own cultivation and enjoyment "of that higher and refined taste" that brought him back from the emotional excesses that plagued him in his work on the first book of the *Treatise*.

The salutary effects that polite and refined pleasures provided to Hume came to have a profound effect on the high personal premium he placed on polite refinement; that is, they led him to a self-aware embrace the conventions and pursuit of politeness, especially polite sociability and conversation. A commitment to politeness is, I recognize, an attitude toward which his class, era, and more general life experiences would have predisposed Hume. Nevertheless, particular events can sometimes set a value one already holds or is inclined to hold into stark relief, and that is what happened with Hume in this instance. Moreover, I read Hume's *Essays* and the *History* as indicating that he recognized the social and political contingencies upon which that polite social order rested, most notably a strong centralized state. That recognition, in turn, led Hume to assume the role of defender of both the polite social order and of the Court Whig project with which he associated that order, a project that was under regular attack from the speculative political principles of Commonwealth Whigs, the Country party, and their later Patriot successors. For Hume, then, the Country-instigated mobs, riots, and unrest of the mid-eighteenth century thus endangered not only a particular political faction's control of the levers of power, but an entire polite and refined way of life, one upon which Hume had come to rely on an existential level. For these reasons, he became a defender of the polite social order of his day and of the Court party with which he associated it. As we will see in the next chapter,

---

[39] Hume, "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion," in *Essays*, 6.

however, the norms of politeness, oddly enough, were themselves instrumentalities through which the project of the Court party had been defended by an earlier generation of essayists.

CHAPTER 4

THE EMERGENCE AND DEFENSE OF A POLITE AND COMMERCIAL PEOPLE

The politeness I discussed, albeit largely obliquely, in the last chapter—as well as polite refinement, polite urbanity, and other permutations on this theme—refers, first of all, to the consumer revolution that arose in the urban spaces of Great Britain at the end of the seventeenth century and grew significantly over the course of the eighteenth century. This phenomenon was marked by the flourishing of commerce and a consumer society in the cities of Great Britain; a class of merchants, financiers, professionals, and government officials with the means to partake in that consumption; and an accompanying ethos of informed, modest taste. Those members of the emergent commercial and professional classes who embraced this polite ethos sought to educate and guide their preferences toward goods like books, periodicals, and tasteful clothing and decorations; activities like coffeehouse conversations and play-going; values like modesty; and manners like self-restraint and good humor; all of which—merchants, professionals, bureaucrats, and their families were told—exhibited the most desirable qualities of refinement, elegance, and sound judgment.[1]

Politeness, if embraced and mastered, promised to differentiate its practitioners in the middling orders from, on the one hand, the gentry and aristocracy and their attendant idle vices, and, on the other hand, to undermine the more conventional association of the commercial and

---

[1] On this point, see Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 4-5 ("In theory politeness comprehended, even began with, morals, but in practice it was as much a question of material acquisition and urbane manners."), 68-71, and 90-99; and *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from THE TATLER and THE SPECTATOR*, ed. Erin Mackie (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1998), 7-16.

professional with the vulgar.[2] As Erin Mackie has observed, in seeking to train the consumption habits of members of the middling order, advocates of politeness like Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, and the third Earl of Shaftesbury sought to help them overcome the prevailing stereotype that members of commercial and professional families were "pretentious, excessive, and vulgar" "Cits"—that is, residents of the City of London—marked by "coarse manners, low birth, and [a] bottom-line mentality."[3] This expression of politeness sought not only to cultivate the judgment, mores, and tastes of members of the commercial and professional middling sort, but also to combat the idea that they were uncultivated vulgarians.[4]

According to scholars like John Brewer and Lawrence Klein, however, eighteenth-century politeness described not simply an exercise in the formation of refined and tasteful consumption habits, an antipode to vulgarity. Rather, on their accounts, politeness spoke to a total ethos—a language and a practice—that sought to cultivate a disciplined way of living and of approaching the world in the commercial society that was developing in England. Brewer has noted that the "language and values [of politeness] permeated every aspect of cultural life;" politeness came to define the very essence of a refined gentleman—who might be either of the actual gentry or instead a member of the urban middling sorts—and was the method of personal presentation for those who hoped to be seen as of that rank.[5] Lawrence Klein suggestively put

---

[2] Terms like the middling orders, the middling ranks, and the middling sort were commonly used starting in the late seventeenth century to refer to those "who occupied the middle ground in the hierarchies of wealth, status [*sic*] and power, and aspired to some social and economic independence." Nicholas Rogers, "The Middling Orders," in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. H. T. Dickinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 172.

[3] Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 7.

[4] Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 6-8.

[5] John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 100-02. In the remainder of my discussion of politeness I am indebted to Brewer for his concise statement of the ethos in *Pleasures of the Imagination*. In addition, and as is about to become clear, like Brewer's my discussion of

the cultural significance of politeness this way: "politeness was an important eighteenth-century idiom. Indeed, it was one of the myths of the age."[6] Elsewhere, Klein had this to say on the matter: "The English eighteenth century was an age of politeness, at least to judge by those contemporaries who used the word 'polite' to describe not only their era, but themselves, their civilization and some of its important elements."[7]

As Klein has identified, eighteenth-century politeness can be viewed as a social and interactional practice; it has been described as the art of being agreeable, pleasing, or suitable to company and conversation, albeit in ways that also inured to one's own benefit.[8] Put a bit more specifically, one contemporary commentator described politeness as "a dexterous management of our Words and Actions whereby we make other People have better Opinions of us and

politeness as a social norm has benefitted immensely from the work of Lawrence Klein. Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 674. Works by Klein that I have relied on in the preparation of this chapter and the next include: "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness," *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Winter, 1984-85); "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *The Historical Journal*. 32, no. 3 (Sep., 1989); "The Political Significance of 'Politeness' in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Politics, Politeness, and Patriotism*, ed. Gordon J. Schochet (Washington D.C.: The Folger Institute, 1993); *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); "Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, eds. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (New York: Routledge, 1995); "Property and Politeness in the Early Eighteenth-Century Whig Moralists: The Case of the *Spectator*," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, eds. John Brewer and Susan Staves (New York: Routledge, 1995); "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century, *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (Dec., 2002); and "Sociability, Solitude, and Enthusiasm," in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850*, eds. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa, (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 2002).
[6] Klein, "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth-Century," 870; Klein, "Politeness for Plebes," 362-63 ("The English eighteenth century was an age of politeness, at least to judge by those contemporaries who used the word 'polite' to describe not only their eras, but themselves, their civilization and some of its important elements."); Klein, "Political Significance," 89.
[7] Klein, "Politeness for Plebes," 362.
[8] Brewer, 100-03; Klein, "Progress of Politeness," 190; "Political Significance," 89; Property and Politeness," 228.

themselves."[9] Underscoring the social and self-limiting agenda of politeness, Klein has also described it as "the submission of the self to the disciplines of social interaction."[10] On Klein's account, then, politeness can be seen as the creation of a certain type of self-presentation and inter-subjectivity, both of which were called into being in response to potential and actual frictions that eighteenth-century England's commercial and consumer social order might generate and, it was hoped, would earn for one the acceptance and approval of others.[11]

There was, however, even more to politeness beyond simultaneously refined and restrained consumption and self-presentation. Specifically, politeness should be seen as serving to constitute a defining and disciplining ethos for an emergent urban commercial élite, an élite that, unlike its predecessors, was marked neither by birth nor by any particular relationship to real property nor by displays of chivalric or noble bearing, but instead by both material prosperity and the appearance of refined gentility in conversation, social engagements, and public dealings.[12] To be clear, Klein stresses the role that politeness played in coordinating the different elements—landed, non-landed, and urban commercial—of English society.[13] The fact that Klein emphasizes this coordinating function makes sense, given that elsewhere he notes that although politeness came to be a distinctively urban ethos, it emerged out of the norms of the

---

[9] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*," 3-4; here Klein points to an eighteenth-century source—Abel Boyer's *The English Theophrastus*—which he elsewhere describes as "a scrapbook of both topical and timeless remarks, some by Boyer but many gathered from other writers, on the moral and social life of men and women." Klein, "Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness," 189-90.

[10] Klein, "Property and Politeness," 228.

[11] Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 65-67; Klein, "Progress of Politeness," 191.

[12] On the commercial, urban, and non-bourgeois nature of politeness in eighteenth-century England, see Klein, "Politeness for Plebes," 371-75; Klein, "Property and Politeness," 226-30; and Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 5-9.

[13] Klein, "Politeness for Plebs," 366; Klein, "Property and Politeness," 229. On this point, see also Klein, "Political Significance," 95-96, where he observes that politeness served to generate a cohesive national elite culture with London as its center, one in which the middling orders were able to partake but that the aristocracy continued to dominate.

Italian, French, and English courts.[14] While I cannot discount the relationship that both courtly and aristocratic politeness on the one hand and commercial, urban politeness on the other bore to one another, Klein has failed to entertain the possibility of discontinuities or at least distinctions between the older forms of courtly and landed politeness and a newer, urban form of politeness, which operated to constitute an emergent bourgeois social order.

I find this interpretation of late seventeenth and eighteenth-century politeness especially compelling given the people to whom lessons on such politeness by figures like Addison and Steele were addressed—urban merchants, professionals, and men of affairs—and the spaces in which this form of politeness was intended to play out—coffeehouses, urban clubs, and the town more generally. In short, Klein fails to consider the extent to which the politeness of the more urbanized eighteenth century—what I would call commercial or bourgeois politeness—operated as something materially different from courtly and landed politeness. This commercial politeness should in turn be read as an exercise in constructing and marking a particularly bourgeois identity, one of a disciplined and refined nature suited for and an urban and enterprising—rather than courtly or martial—milieu.[15] While Jürgen Habermas's bourgeois public sphere could present itself in ways either crude or elegant, garrulous or reserved, confrontational or accommodating; the norms of politeness served to construct a more refined and restrained bourgeois identity.[16]

---

[14] Klein, "Political Significance," 85-86. See also Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 102.

[15] Erin Mackie comes down squarely on reading eighteenth-century politeness as a new and decidedly bourgeois ethos in her introductory essay in *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, and Paul Langford at the very least gestures in the same direction in *A Polite and Commercial People*, 4-5.

[16] Klein makes a similar point, noting that the entirety of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere was not polite, but that "ideologists" of politeness like Addison, Steele, and Shaftesbury "came to understand its workings in terms of politeness." Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, 13-14. For whatever reason, however, in describing a polite public sphere—as

In its production of these norms, bourgeois politeness came to function as a pivotal technique for maintaining and reproducing first an English and later an increasingly British social order that had become organized around commerce, manufacturing, and international trade, with a government concerned primarily with the preservation and promotion of those activities.[17] John Pocock in particular has observed that while politeness initially arose in the Restoration as an attempt to replace more enthusiastic religious forms with those more amenable to reserved and orderly social life, it ultimately proved itself useful as an antidote to the potential appeal of a variety of ideological commitments—"Puritan, Tory, and republican"—that could undermine or overtly threaten the stability of the commercial order.[18] Pocock also provocatively notes that the ideals of politeness had the effect of making these ideological challengers appear "curiously similar." In this way, politeness should be seen as a cultural and ideological line of defense for late seventeenth and eighteenth-century Great Britain's commercial order, securing social life from the threat of what I would call non- or anti-bourgeois alternatives, in particular Puritan enthusiasm, civic republicanism, and Country ancient constitutionalism, while simultaneously constituting what was to become a decidedly bourgeois ethos and order.

---

distinguished from the broader Habermasian public sphere—Klein fails or refuses to adopt the Habermasian term "bourgeois."

[17] On this issue, see Klein, "Property and Politeness," 227-29; Phillipson, "The Scottish Enlightenment," in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, eds. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 26-28; Phillipson, *David Hume*, 24-25; Pocock, "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology," in Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 114-15 and Pocock, "The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse," in Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 234-39.

[18] Pocock, "Varieties of Whiggism," 236. For more on this point see Klein, "Political Significance," 86-88. Brewer adopts in passing this view of politeness. *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 102.

According to Klein, that line of defense also served to demarcate the values and practices of a new unified élite and pacified, at least partially, a possible site of élite discord.[19] The English élite of the period was no longer composed solely of the landed nobility and gentry that had traditionally occupied the pride of place in England's social order. Rather, it was increasingly coming to include the so-called middling sort mentioned above: the battalions of merchants, financiers, professionals, and bureaucrats who populated the growing towns of Great Britain and who had emerged in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in response to both the growing fiscal-military state discussed in the last chapter and England's transformation into a genuinely commercial nation. Although this development might have exacerbated tensions between town and country, Klein has argued that polite cosmopolitanism came to appeal to members of the landed class and thus served to create a cohesive élite culture. Moreover, through its celebration of a tasteful urban culture and commercial cosmopolitanism, Klein reports, politeness "transvalued provincial identity into provincialism." In other words, with their assimilation into urbane politeness the aristocracy and gentry came to abandon their local allegiances in favor of a commitment to a larger world in which the idiom and ethos of politeness were both *lingua franca* and social marker.[20]

The emergence of this bourgeois politeness thus should be seen as both effect and reinforcing cause of a transformation in Great Britain's social and cultural order, one in which the complex of polite norms became hegemonic, an ideology for commercial society. That circumstances might have called for the development of some ethos capable of generating a commitment to a bourgeois commercial order seems evident. England's status as a major commercial nation was a relatively new phenomenon, one that, as gestured toward in Chapter 2,

---

[19] Klein, "Political Significance," 95-96.
[20] Klein, "Political Significance," 93-95.

caused seismic shifts in its economic, demographic, and social life. Indeed, it has become a commonplace among historians of Great Britain that, starting in the late seventeenth century and accelerating over the eighteenth century, the social and economic orders of England, and Great Britain more broadly, underwent both a process of commercialization and a consumer revolution, as trade expanded, manufacturing and commerce came to occupy an increasing share of national output, and the range of and demand for consumer goods grew to an unprecedented degree.[21]

As recently as the sixteenth century, England had been one of the economic backwaters of Western Europe, with over 80 percent of its population working in agriculture. By the end of the seventeenth century, in contrast, less than 60 percent were so employed, a level of non-agricultural labor that rivaled the levels reached at that point by the trailblazing Dutch Republic.[22] Concomitantly, by 1688, 27.7 percent of the population was engaged in manufacturing and commerce, and by 1700 fully one-third of English national income was being produced in those sectors of the economy, again on the same approximate level as that attained by the "precocious" Dutch.[23] These trends only continued into the eighteenth century, as by mid-century the percentage of the entire British workforce devoted to manufacturing and commerce had risen to 36.8 percent, and the percentage employed in all non-agricultural work had risen above 50 percent.[24] Similarly, by 1750, manufacturing and commerce may have accounted for as much as 50 percent of national income, with agriculture's share having fallen to as low as 25

---

[21] Two of the classics in this area are McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb; *Birth of a Consumer Society* and Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*.

[22] Pincus, *1688*, 52. According to E. Anthony Wrigley, the percentage of the English population engaged in agriculture fell from 69.2% in 1600, to 60.4% in 1670, to 54.9% in 1700, and by 1750 was down to 45.8% of the population. Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period," in *The Eighteenth-Century Town, 1688-1820*, ed. Peter Borsay (New York: Longman Group, 1990), 54-55.

[23] John Rule, "Manufacturing and Commerce," in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. H. T. Dickinson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002) 127; Pincus, *1688*, 52.

[24] Rule, "Manufacturing and Commerce,"127; Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 181.

percent.[25] In the realm of manufacturing specifically, 18.5 percent of England's population was engaged in such work by the beginning of the eighteenth century, exceeding continental Europe's average of 12.6 percent. By 1800, the difference was to expand even further, with 29.5 percent of England's population engaged in manufacturing and only 18.6 percent on average on the continent.[26] If by 1680, as Pincus puts the matter, England had become *a* nation of manufacturers, over the course of the eighteenth century it became *the* nation of manufacturers.

URBANITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF A MIDDLING ORDER

These changes in the composition of England's economic activity were accompanied by corresponding demographic and social changes. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the number of people living in towns is estimated to have grown from 340,000 to 850,000.[27] Beyond these absolute numbers, from 1600 to 1670 the percentage of the population living in towns rose from 8.2 percent to 13.7 percent, and from 1670 to 1700, the percentage of the population living in towns grew to 16.8 percent, thus more than doubling as a share of the population in the span of only one hundred years. By 1750, the number of people living in towns had risen to 1.22 million people, or 21.4 percent of the total population.

---

[25] John Rule, *The Vital Century: England's Developing Economy, 1714-1815* (New York: Longman Group, 1992), 93. For these figures Rule cites N. F. R. Crafts, *British Economic Growth during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 93. To be clear, Rule states that Crafts's 50%/25% figures might be an "overcorrection" to previous underestimates, but he nevertheless points to relatively modest increases in per capita national income as evidence that "early industrialization was relatively labour intensive and 'low tech' in comparison with the heavy industry based spurts of later industrializing economies, an observation that supports a significant shift in the share of population devoted to manufacturing and trade." Rule, *Vital Century*, 93.

[26] Rule, "Manufacturing and Commerce," 127.

[27] Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change," 45, 54-55. In calculating the absolute numbers and percentages of the population composed of urban dwellers Wrigley refers only to towns with populations of 5,000 or more.

London's growth was especially significant. As Pincus notes, in 1550 London was, at best, a secondary European city; its population of 75,000 put it on par with places like Lyon, Milan, and Palermo, and well below the population levels that had then been reached in Lisbon, Antwerp, Paris, Venice, and Naples.[28] By 1600, however, Anthony Wrigley estimates that London's population had already swelled to 200,000 people; by 1670, its population had reached 475,000; and by the end of the seventeenth century, London was home to 575,000 souls. By that point, it was the largest city in Western Europe, outstripping Paris, its closest competitor, by 65,000; claiming more than twice as many people as Amsterdam, Lisbon, or Naples; and more than five times the population of Vienna or Madrid.[29] By 1750, the rate of London's growth had slowed, but it remained the largest city in Europe with a population of 675,000.[30]

Although not on the level of London's growth, England's urban population was increasing elsewhere, as the total population of other towns and cities grew from 135,000 in 1600 to 275,000 in 1700 and to 540,000 in 1750.[31] England's increased urbanization over the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries sets it apart from the rest of Europe in the same period. Wrigley has calculated that from 1600 to 1700 the portion of the English population living in towns of 10,000 people or more went from 6.1 percent to 13.4 percent, while for the rest of Europe the percentage of the urbanized population increased much more modestly, from 8.1 percent to 9.2 percent. The increase in the European population living in towns of at least 10,000 people was even more modest for the first half of the eighteenth century, as the urbanized share of the population rose to only 9.4 percent; England, in contrast, saw an increase to 17.5 percent

---

[28] Pincus, *1688*, 60.
[29] Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change," 45; Pincus, *1688*, 60.
[30] Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change," 45.
[31] *Ibid*.

of its population.[32] Wrigley therefore estimates that England accounted for no less than 33 percent of the total increase in Europe's urbanized population from 1600 to 1700 and 57 percent of the total increase in Europe's urbanized population from 1700 to 1750.[33]

From 1600 to 1750, England thus was becoming urbanized at a rate unlike that of any other European country. The reason for this level of urbanization has been laid squarely at the feet of the already mentioned increasing pace, scope, and complexity of England's economic life, as ever more people were drawn to the opportunities provided by the commercial, manufacturing, and port towns that operated as centers of England's new economic dynamism.[34] As Pincus puts the point, late seventeenth-century London "not only was . . . a larger city than most of its Continental rivals, it was also a different *kind* of city."[35] That is, London had become a distinctly—to use Pincus's word—*bourgeois* city. Absent were the kinds of indicia of nobility that marked Paris of the time, "the great noble palaces with their enclosed courtyards." Rather, Pincus explains, "London had merchants' houses, shops, and taverns . . . London was a shopper's paradise."[36] At the same time, Newcastle, Norwich, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Halifax, and Sheffield all grew substantially as a product of the growing importance of manufacturing in England's economic life. Similarly, the importance of overseas trade, especially the Atlantic trade, led to population booms in towns like Liverpool, Whitehaven,

---

[32] Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change," 63.
[33] Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change," 64-65.
[34] Pincus, *1688*, 60-64; Rule, *The Vital Century*, 97-101.In his study of urbanization trends in England and on the continent, Wrigley makes the point that, given the limited extent to which England imported food, its increasing urbanization was only possible because of an increase in England's agricultural productivity, which permitted more people to pursue forms of productive activity—like manufacturing and commerce—more common to urban areas. Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change," 74-78. Of course, another crucial factor that more than any other consideration caused the urbanization of English society was the expropriation of land from peasant farmers under England's enclosure movement.
[35] Pincus, *1688*, 60 (emphasis added).
[36] *Ibid*.

Falmouth, Exeter, Bristol, Sunderland, and Yarmouth. This trend of urbanization only continued over the course of the eighteenth century as ever more people were drawn into manufacturing and trading centers.[37]

The population expansion in English port towns in particular signified the growth in the volume and the scope of English trade in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Nuala Zahedieh reports that over the course of the seventeenth century, English imports grew sixfold while exports grew by 650 percent.[38] She further notes that, from 1640 to 1686, merchant shipping tonnage expanded from about 150,000 tons to 340,000 tons.[39] English trade only continued to grow over the first half of the eighteenth century. From 1714 to 1760, merchant shipping tonnage increased by 30 percent, the average annual value of imports grew 40 percent from the beginning to the middle of the century from £5.849 million to £8.203 million, and the average annual value of exports and re-exports grew from 85 percent in the same period from £6.419 million to £11.909 million.[40]

Accordingly, in the roughly five decades proceeding and the five decades following Hume's birth, England experienced a massive shift in its economic base as the country became increasingly commercial, in its demographic makeup as it became increasingly urbanized, and in its engagement in far-reaching trade. These changes were accompanied by two additional

---

[37] Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change," 63; O'Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 113-16.

[38] Nuala Zahedieh, "Overseas Expansion and Trade in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Nicholas Canny, vol. 1, *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 399.

[39] Zahedieh, "Overseas Expansion and Trade," 407.

[40] O'Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 108; Ralph Davis, "English Foreign Trade, 1770-1774," in *The Growth of English Overseas Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. W.E. Minchinton (London: Meuthen & Co. Ltd., 1969), tables of imports and exports immediately following 118.

developments in English life: the rise of a middle class and the increasing ubiquity of luxury and an economic life directed toward its consumption. These developments, when taken together with the shift from a rural and agricultural society to an urban and commercial one, help to explain why a new ethos of politeness, one suited to this developing commercial order, emerged in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century England.

The eighteenth century in England witnessed the development of a decidedly urban and urbane middle class. By the end of the seventeenth century, the notion of the middling orders, the middling ranks, and the middling sort had become increasingly common in English usage.[41] According to Nicholas Rogers, by the early eighteenth century—when additional terms like middle class, middling class, and middling walk of life were being seen more frequently—a tripartite conception of society was "commonplace."[42] Moreover, as Rogers explains, while at

---

[41] See footnote 2, above.

[42] Rogers, "The Middling Orders," 172. . In using the term "middle class" in my discussion I do not mean to claim that the members of this eighteenth-century English middle class shared a well-defined sense of politically engaged class identity or class consciousness that can be understood as arising out of a class struggle, a claim that has been expressly rejected by such historians as Eric Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson. *See* Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1963), 10-11; Hobsbawm, "Class Consciousness in History," in *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, ed. István Mészáros (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 5-6; Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History* 3, no. 2 (May, 1978) 146-50. For example, on Hobsbawm's understanding, "class and the problem of class consciousness are inseparable. Class in the full sense only comes into existence at the historical moment when classes being [*sic*] to acquire consciousness of themselves as such." Hobsbawm, "Class Consciousness in History," 6. Hobsbawm does, however, also observe that the signifier "class" can "stand for those broad aggregates of people which can be grouped together by an objective criterion—because they stand in a similar relationship to the means of production—and more especially by the groupings of exploiters and exploited which, for purely economic reasons, are found in all human societies beyond the primitive communal and, as Marx would argue, until the triumph of the proletarian revolution." Hobsbawm, "Class Consciousness in History," 5-6. It is something like this sense of class that I mean when I refer to the eighteenth-century English middle class, a collection of people that was clearly not the landed nobility or gentry, in that its members had to engage themselves directly in some profession or trade to support themselves. Nevertheless, such individuals were not usually called upon to get their own hands dirty in manual labor and were in

the start of the eighteenth century the term middling orders was used to describe both agrarian capitalists and urban merchants and professionals, over the course of the century the term came to privilege urban over rural occupations.[43]

Although merchants, professionals, tradesmen, and bureaucrats had been a common feature of town life in the later middle ages and the early modern period, it was only in the late seventeenth century and over the course of the eighteenth century that an urban middling order truly became a presence in English social life, largely through the already mentioned expansion of international trade and the opportunities for economic growth and diversification that accompanied that trade.[44] To be sure, not every individual involved in these pursuits can fairly be

---

a position to save some portion of what they earned while also enjoying some disposable income. In these ways then they could be distinguished from mechanics, common laborers, or the outright destitute. Peter Earle seems to adopt an understanding of the middle class similar to mine. On Earle's description, the middle class was made up of those who, at the very least, managed "to accumulate on a regular basis and so improve themselves." Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 4-5. On this statement, the English middle class were simply those who managed to accumulate and maintain capital and put both that capital and laborers to work in the accumulation of even more capital, irrespective of any sense they might have as a group that their interests were in opposition to those of laborers, the gentry, or the nobility.

[43] Rogers, "The Middling Orders," 173. Specifically, Rogers identifies an urban middling order composed of "merchants, tradesmen, substantial shopkeepers and master manufacturers, as well as the emergent professions of medicine, teaching, the law, and the civil and armed forces." He also points to a threefold increase in the number of English professionals and merchants over the course of the century—from 170,000 in 1700 to 475,000 in 1801.

[44] *Ibid*. This growth in trade, the rising per capita income that accompanied it—developments that were only reinforced by the stagnant population growth of the late seventeenth century—and the growth in government bureaucracies all attracted ever more people to the English metropole and towns for work in trading companies, counting houses, shops, government offices, and what we today would call the service industry, not to mention jobs in manufacturing, construction, and shipping. For helpful brief discussions of this point see Pincus, *1688*, 81-87; Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 18-20; and Robert Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 200-12. See also Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 4. Brewer makes a similar point about the growth of the fiscal-military state discussed in Chapter 2. Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 167-75. That is, just as Brewer regards the emergence of England's more centralized fiscal-

described as occupying the middle sphere in eighteenth-century England's social and economic cosmos. Rather, the members of the middling order should be seen as those who had to work for their bread but who, in performing that work, were able to spend more than a *de minimis* portion of their income on non-essential—and even luxury—goods and who were actually able to accumulate capital and use that accumulation to employ others in pursuit of even more accumulation.[45] In short, the eighteenth-century English middle class was a class of people which, by virtue of their work, their thrift, and the economic tenor of their time, was able to show some "improvement in their lot."[46] In perhaps more descriptive terms, this urban middle class was composed of successful merchants, tradesmen, shopkeepers, manufacturers, professionals, bureaucrats, and naval and military officers.[47]

The best estimates we have indicate that, during the first half of the eighteenth century roughly 20 percent of the urban population fell into this middle rank of life, and that percentage was only growing over the course of the century.[48] As Margaret Hunt puts the matter, the middle

---

military state as a consequence of the expansion of its naval and military might, he sees the growth in English naval power as a result of the embrace, albeit sometimes in fits and starts, of a mercantilist conception of national power. That conception, Brewer argues, led to the development in the seventeenth century of England's so-called blue-water policy of using naval power to maintain existing shipping lanes while opening new ones, a policy that continued into the eighteenth century and that spurred the growth in Court power that so concerned Bolingbroke and the Country party and that attracted Hume's qualified defense. The expansion of trade thus played a crucial role in both the rise of the middle class and the emergence of the fiscal-military state. Hume also saw that the latter development was vital to the security of the middle class's place in the world.

[45] See footnote 41, above, and Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 4-5.
[46] Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 4.
[47] Rogers, "The Middling Orders," 173; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 204-12.
[48] Rogers, "The Middling Orders," 173; Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 16-18; Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 80-81. As already noted, Rogers observes that the number of the urban middling heads of household likely tripled over the course of the eighteenth century. Rogers, "The Middling Orders," 173. Oddly, however, less than a page after identifying the disproportionate growth of the middling population over the course of the eighteenth century,

class, "fueled by the spread of commerce, a rising standard of living, the appeal of towns, and an expanding government bureaucracy, was growing very fast indeed in the eighteenth century."[49] In light of this growth, although still relatively small by nineteenth- and twentieth-century standards, the size of the middling order over the course of the eighteenth century came to dwarf that of the aristocracy, gentry, and non-landed upper classes.[50] Moreover, because of the economic opportunities and accompanying rising standard of living, eighteenth-century middling sort households were enjoying comfortable incomes in the range of £50 to £139 per year.[51] According to Earle, even in London, an annual household income of £50 was anywhere from three to five times that of a manual laborer and would "allow a family to eat well, employ a servant, and live comfortably."[52]

Given this growth in middling incomes during this period, the purchasing power of the middling order increased substantially, so much so that Daniel Defoe observed that the "trading, middling sort of people . . . are the life of our whole commerce . . . it is by their expensive, generous, free way of living that the home consumption is rais'd to such a bulk, as well, of our own, as of foreign production."[53] On Defoe's account, middle-class consumption operated as a significant source of the growth of consumption in eighteenth-century England. In describing the

---

Rogers then goes on to remark that "it is doubtful that the middling sort increased dramatically in the course of the eighteenth century, at least relative to the total population."

[49] Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 17-18.

[50] Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 16-18. Hunt observes that there were 173 peers in 1700 and 267 a century later, approximately 3,000 families in the upper and lower gentry and another 10,000 families among the gentlemen, or what I am calling the non-landed upper class. Assuming an upper-class family size over the course of the eighteenth century, the total size of the English upper class would have been less than 110,000 people. In contrast, Hunt, providing figures relied upon by Rogers, estimates that the number of middling income-earners was already 170,000 in 1700 and potentially as high as 475,000 a century later. Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 17.

[51] Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 16; Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 14.

[52] Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 14.

[53] Daniel Defoe, *A Plan of the English Commerce* (London, 1728), 144, in Berg, *Luxury & Pleasure*, 22.

English "Urban Renaissance"—his term for eighteenth-century England's burgeoning consumer and commercial life—Peter Borsay corroborates Defoe's claim: "If the gentry and pseudo-gentry provided a solid foundation of support for the Urban Renaissance, it was the expanding middling ranks whose wealth was the dynamic and decisive force behind it. . . . . Though not as well off individually as most of the landed élite, together they generated a total demand that may have rivalled, and even eclipsed that of their superiors."[54]

Accordingly, middling consumption served as a crucial driving force in the English economy, and as already suggested, a portion of that consumption was composed of goods beyond bare subsistence. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, the consumption of non-necessities and even luxury goods was becoming commonplace among the middling order; during the first half of the eighteenth century, this trend only continued, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, England was in the midst of what has been termed an outright consumer revolution. As McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb put the point, during this time, "'luxuries' came to be seen as mere 'decencies,' and 'decencies' came to be seen as 'necessities.'"[55]

This growth in the consumption of luxury goods and other non-necessities included products like coffee, tea, tobacco, sugar, ceramics, and glassware. It also, however, extended to a growing interest in fashionable clothing, jewelry, ornaments, and household items by a larger share—the middling share—of the English urban population.[56] As Maxine Berg has reported, earthenware and looking glass ownership doubled from 1670 to 1725; the ownership of pewter plates, clocks, pictures, and window curtains increased three to five times; and probate inventories showed that the ownership of utensils, china, and containers for hot drinks went from

---

[54] Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 204-05.
[55] McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb; introduction to *Birth of a Consumer Society*, 1.
[56] Berg, *Luxury & Pleasure*, 24 and 237-38.

"virtually none to 10 or 15 per cent."[57] Given this development, and the fact that it only accelerated over the course of the eighteenth century, the apparent dismissal of the English commonly attributed to Napoleon—"a nation of shopkeepers"—should come as no surprise. Even more, the growth in middling incomes during this period contributed to a veritable renaissance—in Borsay's words—in urban architecture and to a thriving commerce in leisure services, most notably the growth in resort towns like Bath, "the queen of the spas."[58]

It is in response to these economic, demographic, and social changes that, I propose, a new ethos of politeness arose in the late seventeenth and through the first half of the eighteenth centuries. This form of politeness referred both to the consumption practices and, more fundamentally, to the very ethic of the middling orders, an ethic that stressed bourgeois virtues like moderation, civility, gentility, urbanity, toleration, and self-restraint. Members of the middling ranks were encouraged to eschew the excessive, the tasteless, and the enthusiastic. In their social relations, the practice of politeness trained—I might even say disciplined—members of the middling order to conduct themselves in a fashion that both reflected well on themselves and brought them genuine pleasure; that pleased those with whom they dealt and socialized; and that cemented ties among the members of the middling ranks. As Lawrence Klein has observed, all of these polite virtues were directed at offering the members of eighteenth-century commercial society with guidance, as they sought to negotiate the new, more dynamic, and thus often more confusing, social terrain of the commercial society increasingly dominated by the middle class.[59] Not only, however, should politeness be seen as a particular set of virtues to be cultivated, but also, in formal terms, as a set of activities and practices that served to train people

---

[57] Berg, *Luxury & Pleasure*, 219.
[58] Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 28-37 and 47-59.
[59] Klein, "Property and Politeness," 229-30.

in those virtues. It is on those activities I would like to focus here, a focus that will then return

my discussion to the relationship between politeness, ideology, and, ultimately, Hume's political

thought as a site for the defense of reproduction of bourgeois ideology.

Key among the disciplining exercises of politeness were the enjoyment of periodicals

dedicated to the development of refined taste; the sociability of clubs and coffeehouses; and,

especially, the definitive polite activity of conversation. Publications like the *Tatler*, the

Spectator, and, later in the century, the *Gentlemen's Magazine*, offered readers a vision of

politeness upon which they could model their manners, tastes, and outlook. The *Tatler* and the

Spectator, the first edited by Richard Steele and the second by Steele and the profoundly

influential Joseph Addison, were the vanguard of this movement in refining tastes and manners;

Erin Mackie, for example, sees in both publications a project for the generation of "new manners

for new classes."[60] Phillipson takes the significance of politeness in the Scottish context even

---

[60] Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 5. Judging from the ample evidence she collects from both the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, it seems clear that at least part of the project of advocates of politeness like Steele and Addison was to craft a commercial middle class that rose above its common association with "coarse manners, low birth, and bottom-line mentality." As Mackie argues, the new manners that the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* sought to cultivate were directed at negotiating a compromise between the values of "the more puritanical middle class and the stylistic refinement of the upper crust." Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 8. That is, concerned that members of the rising middling orders might be inclined to use their newfound wealth to imitate the excesses that were all-too-common among the aristocracy—a "glittering beau monde of fans and fancy dress, of card games, gossip, masquerades, duels, and sexual intrigue," as Mackie puts the point—she argues that Steele and Addison sought to encourage fashions of consumption marked by "modesty, benevolence, temperance, honesty, chastity before and within marriage;" the virtues that have come to be regarded as quintessentially bourgeois. As far as the middle class was concerned, then, Mackie sees politeness as an education and disciplining of tastes and preferences so that members of the middling orders might develop into subjects who were cultured, temperate, and responsible. Mackie goes on to note that "This new standard of genteel society served as a way of consolidating a polite public comprising reasonable, decent people from the middle and upper classes as well as the gentry and aristocratic elite." On this point, see also Terry Eagleton, whom Mackie quotes, as holding that the "major impulse" of publications like the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* "is one of class consolidation, a codifying of the norms and regulating of the practices

further, arguing that, following their loss of political independence in 1707, the Scottish adopted politeness—as modeled in *The Spectator*—as a form of civil participation and civic virtue that could serve as an alternative to the kind of active political participation and civic and martial virtue advocated by thinkers like Andrew Fletcher. This depoliticized, polite form of civic virtue was played out in the realm of coffeehouses, clubs, and conversation, rather than in courts, parliaments, or battlefields.[61]

That the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* served and were sought out as models of middling-order instruction in and reinforcement of polite refinement seems beyond dispute. Mackie reports that subscription lists from the period indicate that professionals, bureaucrats, merchants, and bankers made up the largest share of subscribers to these publications.[62] Moreover, Addison boasted in the *Spectator*'s tenth issue that three thousand copies were sold daily, and that each copy changed hands twenty times, claims that Brewer reports as supported by the surviving evidence:

> Clubs in Lincolnshire and groups of Highland lairds gathered to discuss the paper's contents. It was read as far afield as New England and the East India Company's fort in Sumatra. The *Spectator* taught Benjamin Franklin good prose and was used by Voltaire to improve his English.[63]

---

whereby the English bourgeoisie may negotiate an historic alliance with its social superiors." Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 8, quoting Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the* Spectator *to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), 10. See also Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture: the Constitution of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2-3.

[61] Phillipson, "The Scottish Enlightenment," 27-28. On this point, also see his *David Hume*, 23-30, and the works cited there.

[62] Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 12-13.

[63] Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 100. As a sign of the effects that the development of the fiscal-military state discussed in the preceding chapter was having on British society, Donald Bond reports that, in reviewing a list of subscribers to *The Spectator*, "one is impressed immediately by the number of names drawn from the financial and mercantile world of London," and also observes that "the largest single group of subscribers…includes the great body of secretaries, commissioners, clerks, and agents in the various branches of government, civil and

The *Spectator* was so popular that it was even regarded as a good financial investment: when Steele and Addison decided in 1712 to sell their copyright for the collected edition, they received £1,150, which Brewer reports to have been a sizeable sum. In addition to its popularity and commercial success, however, the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* also seem to have had their desired effect on British manners, and not only in the eighteenth century. As C. S. Lewis put the matter more than two hundred years later, "the sober code of manners under which we still live today, is in some important degree a legacy from the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*."[64]

While such journals can be seen as the primers from which the lessons of politeness were studied and disseminated, more applied training in politeness—not to mention occasions for the display, participation in, and enjoyment of polite refinement for those more fully versed in the ethos—came through the practices of polite sociability and conversation. Indeed, as the content of politeness was directly concerned with how one related to others and only realized through one's engagement with others, it necessarily follows that sociability and conversation were integral to the development and demonstration of one's command of polite refinement: sociability offered occasions for the practice of politeness, and conversation was the activity in which one developed, honed, and demonstrated one's command of politeness.[65]

Not surprisingly, the importance that the advocates of politeness placed on conversation led them to formulate fairly specific expectations for the enjoyment of polite conversation.

---

military, required to carry on the war abroad and manage affairs at home." Bond, introduction to *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 1: lxxxix and xcii.

[64] Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 13, quoting C. S. Lewis, "Addison," *Essays on the Eighteenth Century Presented to David Nichol Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1-14, 7.

[65] Klein, "Political Significance," 76; Klein, *"Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness,"* 4-5; Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 10-13; and Phillipson, *David Hume*, 24-25.

Participation in such conversation required a willingness to be drawn out of oneself. As Klein puts it, "conversants were warned against taciturnity, stiffness, self-effacement, and withdrawal." Polite conversation also required self-discipline and cordiality so that all those present could feel comfortable and included as active members of the discussion. According to Klein, writers on conversational norms "warned against excesses of assertiveness and sociability, which killed conversation more efficiently [than silence]."[66] Richard Steele, writing in *The Spectator*, did not shy away from calling to account boorish, overly loud, argumentative, or dishonest participants in coffee-house discussions.[67]

Rather than controlling the field of engagement, then, polite conversationalists were called to put their own interests and agendas aside for the greater good of creating a conversational experience that could be gratifying to all concerned. In short, the advocates and adherents of polite conversation recognized that, like any other social activity, conversation was most likely to be enjoyed by a single individual if those with whom one was spending time also were able to enjoy themselves in the activity. In this way, conversation was only a success if the participants learned how to suppress some of their own desires and interests. In short, by calling people to embrace polite conversation as a pastime, its proponents were also calling people into a disciplining of their appetites and enthusiasms. It was by definition an activity that rewarded and encouraged sociability and agreeableness.

According to John Brewer, the coffeehouses that proliferated in eighteenth-century Britain—places like Child's, Will's, Button's, St. Paul's, and the Bedford—could serve as sites of such sociability; and the *Spectator*, *Tatler*, and *Guardian* all identified coffeehouses as ideal

---

[66] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, 4-5.
[67] Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 1:71-74, 1:81-85; and 3:313-16.

centers of polite conversation where "the improving effects of decorous sociability formed men of morality of taste."[68] To be clear, however, the coffeehouses should not be confused with an exclusively polite public sphere. Although partisans of politeness often frequented coffeehouses, we have little reason to believe that in most instances conversation in these establishments usually remained within the bounds of dispassionate and restrained politeness. Indeed, it was just such a concern about the tenor and tone of conversation in the public sphere that motivated Addison, Steele, and—in a more rarified form—the third Earl of Shaftesbury to attempt to educate the emergent bourgeois public in politeness as a discursive form, a form that would lend order, decorum, and moderation to what might otherwise have been—and almost certainly usually were—discussions of an especially loud, argumentative, or garrulous—not to mention outright combative—nature.[69]

For conversation and sociability of a more consistently polite nature, one would need to have looked to the variety of private clubs like the Whigs' Kit-Cat, Johnson's Literary Club, and the Scottish Rankenian Club. In these places members' conversations and conviviality appear to have come far closer to the model of the polite, rather than the boorish, uncivil, or eristic. Such clubs were a favorite of some of the leading lights of bourgeois politeness; although decades apart, both Bolingbroke and Hume participated in what Klein has described as "the quintessence

---

[68] Brewer, *Pleasures*, 34-39. Brewer reports that coffeehouses first appeared in England in the 1650s, and by 1739 a total of 551 coffeehouses could be found in London alone. Brewer, *Pleasures*, 34-35. For a *Spectator* essay extolling the value of coffeehouses, see Steele, *The Spectator*, 1:208-11.

[69] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, 12-13. For examples of efforts in *The Spectator* to impose polite norms in the coffeehouses, see Steele, *The Spectator*, 2:71-74, 2:81-85; and Eustace Budgell, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 2:271-75.

of politeness," the founding of clubs.[70] In 1711, Bolingbroke founded the Brothers' Club as a Tory counterweight to the Kit-Cat, an effort that demonstrates that the ethos of politeness transcended at least some party lines, while in 1754 Hume was a founding member of Edinburgh's famed Select Society, where gentlemen could come together to debate almost any topic, provided it did not "regard revealed Religion, or . . . give occasion to vent any Principles of Jacobitism."[71]

Whether being practiced in coffeehouses, clubs, or some other forum, politeness and polite conversation were defined not simply by formal requirements of gracious, pleasant, and disinterested discussions, but also by substantive restrictions on the ideological commitments to which those aspiring to politeness could submit themselves or even consider as reasonable alternatives. In this way, I take the project of *The Spectator* in particular to have been not merely aesthetic and ethical but also decidedly political.[72] To be clear, the restrictions that the Select Society put on itself were at least understandable in terms other than the imposition of a kind of bourgeois ideological orthodoxy. Given the fault lines present in the Church of Scotland that have been discussed in the first chapter and the skepticism that members like Hume had

---

[70] Klein, "Political Significance," 73, and Roger L. Emerson, "The Social Composition of Enlightened Society: The Select Society of Edinburgh, 1754-1764," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 114 (1973), 323. Klein makes the point that—in contrast to the stricter expression of civic humanism found in Old Whig and Commonwealthmen like Charles Davenant, Walter Moyle, and Andrew Fletcher—Tories like Swift and Bolingbroke and Whigs like Shaftesbury shared a commitment to politeness, but that they differed on its social and political predicates, with Swift arguing that politeness could not long endure under Whiggish licentiousness, and Shaftesbury responding that "true" politeness could be found not at court and in the church, but instead in the liberty that flowed from Whig ministries following the Glorious Revolution. Klein, "Political Significance," 78-82 and 84-86.

[71] Emerson, "Social Composition," 294; Select Society, "Rules and Orders of the Select Society, Instituted on Wednesday the 23rd Day of May, 1754," Rule IX.

[72] In this way my interpretation of Addisonian politeness runs contrary to the reading offered by Nicholas Phillipson who read the work of *The Spectator* as being solely an apolitical, non-partisan project in "the reformation of manners." Phillipson, *David Hume*, 22.

expressed about traditional monotheism, it makes a certain sense that the society's members would avoid discussions of revealed religion. Such discussions could lead to remarks that might reflect poorly on those members of the society who were members of the clergy, even if they, themselves, did not utter them. Moreover, given the split within the society between skeptics and rationalists on one side and adherents of more conventional Protestantism on the other, discussions of revealed religion could become, if nothing else, an unending distraction. Similarly, given the actual threat that Jacobitism had historically posed to simple civil order as recently as 1745, one could understand why the society's founders would want to specify that support for Jacobitism had absolutely no place in the Select Society's proceedings.

Nevertheless, it strikes me that the conversational practice of commercial politeness more generally included among its aims the construction and reproduction of an even more narrowly circumscribed ideological uniformity than what might have been suggested by the Select Society's Rule IX. Indeed, John Pocock has observed that eighteenth-century commercial politeness as represented in Addison's and Steele's *Spectator* can be read as a project in delegitimizing a variety of ideological challengers—whether Christian enthusiast, zealous atheist, revanchist Tory, or Harringtonian republican—to the emergent commercial order.[73] To the extent that *The Spectator* can be fairly regarded as the quintessential arbiter of polite opinion and as a crucial vehicle for modeling the types of conversations that generated and reproduced such opinions, both the ethos and practices of politeness, as adjudicated by *The Spectator*, seem to have called on members of the middling order to embrace a particular set of ideological commitments, commitments that I will make clearer below, after first examining the rhetorical techniques Addison employed in *The Spectator* furtherance of those ends.

---

[73] Pocock, "Varieties of Whiggism," 236.

BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY: THE CASE OF *THE SPECTATOR*.

The means by which Addison sought to advance the ideological commitments of politeness can be seen in his *Spectator* essays in three distinct but related ways: an overt effort at discrediting both Tories and Whigs—albeit the latter understood in a particular way—and, by extension, the possibility of commitments to either by the broader public; a more general advancement of political neutrality as a quality to be embraced by *The Spectator*'s polite readership, with neutrality nevertheless also understood in a particular sense; and a presentation of commerce and refined pleasures as proper commitments and concerns of the polite middling order. On the first of these, from its very outset, *The Spectator* sought to cast Toryism and Whiggery as, at best, expressions of self-deluded buffoonery and at worst a threat to the very foundations of a stable and flourishing commercial order.[74] In *The Spectator* No. 50, Addison purported to publish a translated account said to have been penned by one of four visiting Native American "kings" during their time in London.[75] This dignitary—of course, really Addison— reported being perplexed by the two guides assigned to him, who "were great Enemies to one another, and did not always agree in the same Story." The first of these guides, obviously a Tory stand-in, warned the foreign king to be alert because Great Britain was plagued by "a monstrous Kind of Animals [*sic*], in the Shape of Men, called *Whigs*," who would be inclined to attack the visitors simply "for being Kings." The other guide—a caricature of a Whig, naturally—"used to

---

[74] Addison also expressly warned his readers against the dangers of both religious zeal, to which he attributed a "History . . . with so many Scenes of Slaughter and Bloodshed," and zealous irreligion, which he described as marked by "Fierceness and Contention, Wrath and Indignation, as if the Safety of Mankind depended on it," and further as being "possessed with the Spirit of Bigottry [*sic*]." Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 2:227-30. Addison further decried religious enthusiasm. Addison, *The Spectator*, 2:287-90.

[75] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:211-15. As Bond explains, in April 1710, four Indian sachems had visited London to seek assistance from the British against the French; the visit became a point of fascination for the London press and reading public. Bond, *The Spectator*, 1: 211 n. 4.

talk very much of a kind of Animal called a *Tory*, that was as great a Monster as the *Whig*, and would treat [the native kings] as ill for being Foreigners." The message here should be clear: Whigs and Tories, according to Addison, were reflexive in their partisanship and—at least from a polite eighteenth-century English perspective—harbored irrational resistance to, in the case of the more radical Whigs, monarchs, and, in the case of pro-Stuart Tories, foreigners.[76] More tellingly, Addison, still in the visiting chief's voice, continued in his description:

> These two Creatures, it seems, are born with a secret Antipathy to one another, and engage when they meet as naturally as the Elephant and the Rhinoceros. But as we saw none of either of these Species, we are apt to think that our Guides deceived us with Misrepresentations and Fictions, and amused us with an Account of such Monsters as are not really in their Country.

Using the voice of the Native American king, then, Addison painted a portrait of Whigs and Tories as reflexively—even congenitally—contentious, in clear violation of the norms of politeness. Moreover, he suggested to his readers that Whigs and Tories labored under profoundly distorted visions of the world, visions that led them to regard their opponents as non-human, and encouraged others to join in their partisan confusion, "Misrepresentations[,] and Fictions."[77] Indeed, so obviously wrong-headed were the Tories' and Whigs' visions of each other and the world that even the uncivilized were able to see them as fantasies, a conclusion that called on Addison's refined and educated readership to do likewise. Simply put, a self-respecting

---

[76] For a discussion of the Tories' isolationism and xenophobia during the reign of Queen Anne, especially in relation to the Dutch, see Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (London: Hambledon, 1987), 64-70.

[77] In a subsequent number Addison called upon his readers to recognize the Tories' and Whigs' penchant for systematic dishonesty, a tendency that passed itself off as principle in coffeehouses, periodicals, and taverns, but that had the unintended effect of ensuring that those who traded in such "Party-lying" would have what they said discounted by their audiences. Addison, *The Spectator*, 4:298-301.

polite person could not, according to Addison, align himself or herself with either of the English parties, at least as they were as described by Addison.

In addition to the absurdity and duplicity with which he hoped to mark the Tories and Whigs, Addison also sought to give his polite readers an impression of the deeper dangers that the struggles between Britain's parties might visit upon commercial society. In an especially vivid essay in the *Spectator*'s third issue, Addison reported that on the night following a visit to the great hall that housed the Bank of England, he dreamt of the same scene. In his dream, however, the bank was occupied not by bankers and clerks but instead by a virgin named "Publick Credit," seated on a golden throne.[78] Behind her throne were "prodigious Heaps of Bags of Mony [*sic*]," and the floor was covered in gold "that rose up in Pyramids on either side of her." In place of the bank's customary decorations, the walls instead featured Magna Carta, the Act of Uniformity, the Act of Toleration, the Act of Settlement, and various acts of Parliament directed toward public funding, presented as the foundations of British civil and commercial order.

Despite all of the trappings of financial and civil security that surrounded her, however, all was not well with Lady Credit. Addison reported that although she displayed a certain pleasure when she regarded the various acts of Parliament adorning the bank, she appeared ill at ease whenever she witnessed "any thing [*sic*] approaching that might hurt them." Indeed, on Addison's account of his dream, Publick Credit struck him as "infinitely timorous in all her Behaviour," and in a passage that would sound familiar to anyone even passingly familiar with the history of financial markets, he described Lady Credit as an extreme hypochondriac, "subject to such Momentary Consumptions, that in the twinkling of an Eye, she would fall away from the

---

[78] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:15.

most florid Complexion, and the most healthful State of Body, and wither into a Skeleton." He went on, observing that "Her Recoveries were often as sudden as her Decays, insomuch that she would revive in a Moment out of a wasting Distemper, into a Habit of the highest Health and Vigour." Her moods, he noted, were particularly attentive to and affected by reports received from all over the world; depending on the news they contained, "she changed Color, and discovered many Symptoms of Health or Sickness."[79] This portrait of high finance as possessing an exceedingly sensitive nature would have been more than clear to Addison's middling readers.

In addition to what were apparently the more customary threats to Lady Credit's health, however, Addison introduced an even greater menace: the partisanship of the Whigs and Tories. As he continued to describe his dream, the bank's doors burst open and three pairs of "hideous Phantoms" entered, whom Addison identified as Tyranny and Anarchy, Bigotry and Atheism, and "a young Man of about twenty two Years of Age," the Young Pretender of the Stuart line, who was paired with the "Genius of Common-Wealth." Three of these figures—Tyranny, Bigotry, and the young man—represented reputed features of Toryism, while the remaining three were references to the Whigs as Addison sought to construct them in his essays. Addison went on to recount that the three pairs indulged in a bizarre dance, with the partners having "no end but to eclipse one another."[80]

In response to this scene, Lady Credit fainted dead away, but the consequences of the entrance of Toryism's and Whiggery's avatars extended beyond Publick Credit herself; nine in ten of the bags of money shriveled and were revealed to contain nothing but air, while the gold took on the appearance of paper or sticks. The message to his readership, again, could not have been plainer: the partisan conflict between Tories and Whigs posed a mortal threat to the

---

[79] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:15-16.
[80] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:16.

integrity of Great Britain's entire system of public credit and the commercial order that depended

upon it.[81] It would be difficult to imagine a more damning critique of the spirit of Tory and Whig

partisanship being presented to the middling element by a polite journal.

Fortunately, as Addison was able to report, in the final scene of his dream, Lady Credit

was revived, and the earlier tableau was restored by the entry of three new pairs of dancers:

Liberty and Monarchy, Moderation and Religion, and the future George I paired with "the

Genius of *Great Britain*."[82] On Addison's account, the answer to the instability, uncertainty, and

risk of public and personal financial ruin posed by the Whigs and Tories was for all publicly

minded and polite British men and women to engage in a two-part movement: reject the

pointless and destructive partisan conflicts of the Whigs and Tories and embrace the established

order, an order consisting of support for the Bank of England, public finance more generally,

limited monarchy, the Hanoverian Succession, religious toleration, and the Church of England.[83]

On the account of *The Spectator*, a polite and commercial order required no less, and a polite and

commercial people should accept nothing else.

The second way in which Addison's political essays in the *Spectator* sought to model the

content of polite political commitments can be seen in the more overt claims of and calls in *The*

Spectator for political neutrality. From the very first issue, the character of Mr. Spectator assured

readers that "I have never espoused any Party with Violence, and am resolved to observe an

---

[81] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:17. For a further discussion of this issue of *The Spectator*, see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 452-56. Pocock, however, situates Addison's treatment of public credit in the context of civic republican anxieties about the nature of credit, failing to see that the true focus of Addison's discussion of credit was the destabilizing danger of the struggles between the Tories and the Whigs.

[82] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:17 (emphasis in the original).

[83] Addison suggested much the same in a later issue when he wrote: "I look upon it as a peculiar Happiness, that were I to chuse of what Religion I would be, and under what Government I would live, I should most certainly give the Preference to that form of Religion and Government which is established in my own Country." Addison, *The Spectator*, 3:18-22.

exact Neutrality between the Whigs and Tories, unless I shall be forc'd to declare my self by the Hostilities of either side."[84] When he resumed publication of *The Spectator* in June of 1714 after an eighteen-month hiatus, Addison renewed his assurances of *The Spectator*'s neutrality, claiming in the voice of Mr. Spectator that he "is of no Faction, that he is a Friend to no Interests but those of Truth and Virtue, nor a foe to any but those of Vice and Folly." Addison's Mr. Spectator continued, stating:

> It is not my Ambition to increase the Number either of Whigs or Tories, but of wise and good Men; and I could heartily wish there were not Faults common to both Parties, which afford me sufficient Matter to work upon, without descending to those which are peculiar to either.[85]

Indeed, as Addison purported to see things, partisanship needed to be rejected, given that "Politicians of both Sides have already worked the Nation into a most unnatural Ferment." The job of *The Spectator* and its readers, then, was to follow the path of neither the Whig nor the Tory, but instead that of "mutual Good-will and Benevolence."[86]

Addison made this point even more forcefully elsewhere when he decried the scourge of "furious Party Spirit," which in the best cases produced only deception, slander, and a government concerned with the well-being of select portions of its people; and in the worst case generated outright civil war.[87] In response to the seeming threat that partisanship presented, Addison called on all "Honest Men" to form an association, "an honest Body of Neutral Forces" that would "single every Criminal"—that is, partisan—"out of the Herd and hunt him down, however formidable and overgrown he might appear. . . . In short, we should not any longer regard our Fellow-Subjects as Whigs or Tories, but should make the Man of Merit our Friend,

---

[84] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:5.
[85] Addison, *The Spectator*, 4:500-01.
[86] *Ibid*.
[87] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:510; and 2:1-4.

and the Villain our Enemy."[88] Addison thus presented his readers with a choice between, on the one hand, a partisanship that threatened social order or, on the other, the claimed disinterestedness of Mr. Spectator. On Addison's account, partisan neutrality should be pursued as a polite virtue, one that would also mark the polite subject as honest and honorable men and women and loyal Britons.

Third, beyond the critique of party and the claims and celebration of political neutrality, the articles in *The Spectator* advanced a set of values that were decidedly bourgeois. The vast majority of topics addressed in *The Spectator* bore no overt relationship to politics or social ordering, dealing instead with topics like opera, theater, poetry, classical literature, manners, fashion, and relations between the sexes. Moreover, *The Spectator* also promulgated articles praising bourgeois norms of frugality, modesty, and even the love of money.[89] *The Spectator* also celebrated the merchant and all those engaged in "the private Business of Mankind," as well as the great benefits that arise from international trade.[90] *The Spectator*, as the tribune of politeness and those aspiring to it, sought to assert, maintain, and reproduce a view of these values and pursuits as normative. This enterprise, in turn, can best be read as revealing a dedicated project for the justification and legitimization of bourgeois social norms and a bourgeois social order. Indeed, even the more customary topics in *The Spectator* can be read as material in the construction of a bourgeois ethos; if not part of an outright ideological project, these activities can at the very least be read as of a type that would incline people to the bourgeois virtues of industriousness, thrift, and self-control. Even more, the embrace of such qualities and pastimes would carry with it an attachment to and support for the political order and

---

[88] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:509-12; and 2:1-4.
[89] Budgell, *The Spectator*, 3:1-5; Steele, *The Spectator*, 3:288-91; Steele, *The Spectator*, 4:81-86; and Steele, *The Spectator*, 4:215-18.
[90] Addison, *The Spectator*, 1:88-92 and 1:292-96.

elites that had created the conditions under which the adoption of such qualities and the pursuit of such pastimes were even possible.

COUNTRY WHIGGERY, COURT WHIGGERY, AND ADDISON'S CLAIMS OF NEUTRALITY

The denunciation of the Whigs and the claims of neutrality in *The Spectator* might be a bit surprising, given that Addison and Steele were, themselves, Whigs. The *Spectator*'s apparent blanket criticism of Whigs and the seeming contradiction that criticism presents, however, should be understood in terms of the division that had arisen among Whigs since the Glorious Revolution, a division that set Country Whigs on one side and Court Whigs—broadly understood—on the other.[91] As I discussed in the second chapter, eighteenth-century British politics saw a division between those who were inclined to situate greater power in the Court and those who believed that the maintenance of liberty and virtue depended upon the preservation of the purportedly traditional perquisites of the nobility and gentry and limits on the power of the Crown. The Whig party was similarly divided.

Specifically, the Country Whigs—also referred to as Commonwealthmen, Old Whigs, True Whigs, or Real Whigs—were, in broad-brush strokes, an anti-monarchical, sometimes crypto-republican faction within the broader Whig coalition, composed mostly of the lesser

---

[91] Geoffrey Holmes distinguishes between Court Whigs and the Whig Junto. Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, 224-41. As I read Holmes, however, this distinction does not proceed from any substantive differences in the respective ideological commitments of the Court Whigs and the Junto Whigs, but instead from differences over who among these more monarchically inclined and order-preferring Whigs should wield power; their respective sites of authority, with the Whig Junto sitting in the Commons and the Court Whigs centered in the House of Lords; and the relative willingness of the two groups' members to submit themselves to more formalized party discipline. In light of the ideological and programmatic overlap between the Court and Junto Whigs, when I use the term Court Whigs in my discussion of Addison's and Steele's political project, I mean to refer both groups, as well as the establishment Whigs who emerged with the ascendance of Walpole to the ministry.

gentry, dedicated to social contract theory and popular sovereignty, and opposed to the developments in the English state discussed in the second chapter: Crown patronage, the taxes and government debt required to finance late Stuart and early Hanoverian wars with France, the standing army, the attendant rise of the financial class, and the increasing concentration of power in the Court that accompanied all of these developments.[92] In light of these concerns, the Country Whigs favored bills limiting Crown patronage, measures at reducing the political influence of the financial class, efforts at eliminating the standing army, and, perhaps most importantly, the adoption of frequent elections.[93] As discussed previously, this final point was particularly crucial for the Country Whigs, as it was thought that MPs who would have to stand for re-election more frequently would be more inclined to resist the Crown's efforts through patronage at swaying them to its side on votes in Parliament.

In contrast to this more republican strain of Whiggery stood the bulk of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Whigs, who supported both the post-1688 constitutional settlement and the project of Court Whiggery described in Chapter 2; that is, as H. T. Dickinson reported, these Court or Modern Whigs favored not just "the privileges of Parliament and the civil liberties of the people," but also "the prerogatives of the Crown," seeing all three as the mutually reinforcing means by which the achievements of the Glorious Revolution could be preserved.[94] Well represented in the ranks of the aristocracy, these more monarchically inclined Whigs were far less troubled by the growth of the fiscal-military state under William III and Anne, and by extension less troubled by the accompanying emergence of a standing army and the financial

---

[92] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 81; Plumb, *Origins of Political Stability*, 132-33 and 139-40.
[93] Plumb, *Origins of Political Stability*, 140-46.
[94] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 79 and 81.

revolution.[95] Moreover, although they favored some limits on royal power, they saw little problem with Crown patronage, and, indeed, were quite happy to have a monarch "who was not averse to employing them in offices of profit and trust."[96] Relatedly, they favored less frequent parliamentary elections and thus opposed the Triennial Act of 1694, ultimately effecting its repeal and replacement with the Septennial Act of 1716.[97] Finally, Court Whigs were quite comfortable with the rising financial class, the Bank of England, and the social and economic innovations that accompanied both. Given his support for the Septennial Act of 1716, his commitment to the financial revolution, and his complete devotion to Whig ministers and the regular party leadership, as well as the polemical support for the established order that I have noted, it only makes sense to count Addison among the ranks of what I am calling Court Whiggery.[98]

---

[95] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 81, 85-86, and 154-57; Plumb, *Origins of Political* Stability, 134-38. Plumb observes that, at the time of its passage, the more conservative Whigs actually opposed the Act of Settlement of 1701 because, as Dickinson explains, they saw in it a threat to the prerogatives of the Crown. Plumb, *Origins of Political Stability*, 134; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 81. One would expect, however, that by 1710 the more conservative Whigs had made their peace with the act, especially given that, as Dickinson reports, after the adoption of the Act of Settlement much of it was repealed or ignored. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 81.

[96] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 79 and 154-55; Plumb, *Origins of Political Stability*, 134-35. This is true of most establishment-minded Whigs, although it is an issue upon which Steele and Addison differed, at least in the context of the Crown's power to appoint peers: Steele opposed the Peerage Bill of 1719, which would have limited the monarch's power to appoint new members to the House of Lords, while Addison favored it. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 145-46.

[97] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 147; Plumb, *Origins of Political Stability*, 134-35. Although Addison opposed the Peerage Bill of 1719, he did support the Septennial Act, a decision that shows him to have been at least somewhat disposed to resist efforts at limiting the Crown's patronage powers. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, *Joseph Addison's Sociable Animal: In the Marketplace, on the Hustings, in the Pulpit* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971), 129-30.

[98] For more on Addison as an inveterate supporter of the Whig establishment, particularly the Whig Junto, see Bloom, *Joseph Addison's Sociable Animal*, chapter five, and Bertand A. Goldgar, *The Curse of Party: Swift's Relations with Addison and Steele* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 65-66 and 161.

In light of what appear to be Addison's sympathies for the substance of Modern or Court Whiggery, discussion of the Whigs in his *Spectator* essays should be read as his efforts at bolstering the standing of the Court Whigs' project in the eyes of the middling order, while undermining that of the Country Whigs; it was a decidedly partisan project. In particular, I take it that Addison's efforts at both discrediting and disclaiming the "Whigs" and his claims of partisan neutrality were part of a deliberate effort to lead the readers of *The Spectator* to three conclusions. First and most obviously, Addison was calling on his readers to conclude that *The Spectator* spoke from a non-partisan position, and so could be trusted to adjudicate fairly the political conflicts of the day. Second, Addison's description of all Whigs as anti-monarchical invited the conclusion that any member of the political class or polemicist who was neither a Tory nor an anti-monarchical Whig was not a member of any party at all. Instead, such members of the political nation, that is, Court Whigs, were simply neutral, disinterested, and loyal subjects of the British crown, and thus more properly trusted by good, patriotic Britons.[99] Third, this exercise at concealing the partisan nature of the Court Whigs similarly invited Addison's readers to regard the political ends pursued by Court Whigs—and *The Spectator*—not as the ends of self-interested partisans, but instead as simply the political ends sought by all right-thinking British subjects.

Accordingly, Addison was attempting to lead his readers to the view that, to the extent that they were loyal British subjects, they, too, should prefer those ends and support those ministers, MPs, and other government officials committed to them. Similarly, as the arbiter of

---

[99] As Reed Browning notes in his seminal study of Court Whig thought, a foundational claim of Court Whiggery was the assertion that they stood in an ideal political middle ground between a pre-Glorious Revolution authoritarianism and a republican Britain with all power vested in the House of Commons. Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 178-79. Addison's polemics in *The Spectator* against the Stuart-aligned Tories and the radical Whigs certainly fall into the pattern that Browning identifies.

politeness, *The Spectator* was ratifying the project of the Court Whigs as the political project appropriate for a truly polite member of the middling order. To the extent that the readers of *The Spectator* looked to it for instruction on the substantive commitments of the polite, those readers invested in the project of middling commercial politeness would feel some inducement to adopt the Court Whigs' agenda as the properly polite one.

In this way, the project of Addisonian politeness can be seen as political, one with the task of convincing the readers of *The Spectator* that the project of the Court Whigs was not partisan, but simply the only outlook for anyone who enjoyed—and especially for anyone who benefitted from—the polite, commercial order of early eighteenth-century Great Britain. The commercial politeness of *The Spectator* thus should be regarded as an exercise in the construction of a hegemonic conception of the Court Whigs' vision of British social life, as well, of course, as the Court Whigs' necessary place in the maintenance of that social life. Moreover, to the extent that Addison's *Spectator* essays were where members of the middling orders looked for their substantive commitments, the conversation of such polite individuals became sites where the reproduction—and the resulting hegemonic quality—of such commitments would occur and gain reinforcement. Echoing Pocock, then, I hold that Addisonian and *Spectatorial* politeness and the broader conversations they modeled should be seen in terms of the manufacture of middling-order common sense: they delegitimized ideological competitors to the Court Whigs while simultaneously constructing and reproducing support for both the predicates and products of the Court Whig consensus and, concomitantly, a particular notion of proper bourgeois social life. As I will take up in the next chapter, Hume adopted this association of the Court Whig project, and the polite commercial order of his day, and much of his political and

historical writings, I submit, can be read as his development of that association and his defense of what he regarded as the commercial order's predicate of Court Whiggery.

CHAPTER 5

A POLITE HISTORY FOR A POLITE PEOPLE

As I have developed in the last two chapters, British social life of the eighteenth century came to be defined by an ethos of politeness, an ethos that operated as a marker of membership in Great Britain's commercial middling order, and Hume's experience of the disease of the learned led him to a deeply self-aware embrace of this ethos. As I also developed in the last chapter, the *Spectator* essays of Joseph Addison, the virtual manifesto of commercial politeness, operated not merely as a serialized instruction manual in consumption habits and the polite social virtues of moderation, sociability, and toleration; they also sought to delegitimize ideological competitors to the emergent Court Whig order. Like Addison's *Spectator* essays, Hume's writings, I will argue in this chapter, should be seen as similar efforts at defending the project of Court Whiggery, a project to which Hume was, himself, committed, and which, relative to the project of the Country party, Hume regarded as a necessary requirement for the maintenance of eighteenth-century commercial politeness.

That Hume was a committed participant in Britain's ethic of politeness does not strike me as open to serious dispute. In Chapter 3, I argued that we should read both the conclusion of the first book of the *Treatise* and Hume's discussion of the delicacies of passion and taste as evidence of the role that refined pleasures played in Hume's recovery from the disease of the learned, but additional evidence of Hume's enduring dedication to the culture of commercial politeness is not hard to come by. As I also noted there, when writing to the unknown physician, Hume observed that since his mid-teens his twin loves had been philosophy and polite literature.[1] Hume showed his deep interest in and attentiveness to politeness in one of his earliest extant

---

[1] Hume to Dr. George Cheyne (surmised), 1734, 1:13.

letters, in which he described to his life-long friend Michael Ramsay the differences between the politeness of the French and the English, observing that in his estimation the French were more genuinely polite in temperament, while the English were better practiced in agreeably and pleasingly expressing themselves to "Strangers and indifferent Persons" and in conversing in an understated fashion.[2]

This last point should not be undervalued, because for Hume the enjoyment of refined conversation likely stood as the finest form of human intercourse.[3] He was a founding member of Edinburgh's famed Select Society, which concerned itself with polite conversation on moral, aesthetic, philosophical, and political questions of the day. In this way, then, we can see Hume's embrace of two quintessentially polite activities: participation in both clubs and polite conversation.[4] In the letter to Michael Ramsay to which I just referred, we find Hume complaining about his command of French, as his deficiencies in the language hindered his participation in conversation, a disability that he characterized as a "great Vexation."[5] Similarly, in one of his earliest published essays, Hume celebrated the French mastery of the polite arts, observing in particular that they had, "in a great measure, perfected that art, *the most useful and*

---

[2] Hume to Michael Ramsay, Rheims, 12 September 1734, 1:20.

[3] In case one thinks I am overstating the importance Hume placed on more polite pleasures in relation to those of a more basic nature, consider a 1753 letter to his friend Dr. John Clephane, in which Hume remarked that he had obtained all that he needed in life and, apparently anticipating some objections from Clephane, asked rhetorically whether he was also in need of a wife. He responded to himself by stating "that is none of the indispensable requisites of life." Hume to John Clephane, Edinburgh, 5 January 1753, 1:170.

[4] Moreover, Hume's club memberships also included Edinburgh's celebrated Poker Club, which he described in a 1763 letter to Adam Ferguson as possessing a "plain roughness," in contrast with the "complaisance [and] exaggeration" of French manners. Hume to Adam Ferguson, Fontainebleau, 9 November 1763, 1:410. Apparently the artificial nature of the French mode of expressing politeness had come to wear on Hume in his later years.

[5] Hume to Michael Ramsay, Rheims, 12 September 1734, 1:20.

agreeable of any . . . the art of society and conversation."[6] Writing at the end of his days, Hume described himself in terms that cast him as ideally suited for the enjoyment of polite conversation, that is, as "a man of mild dispositions, of command of temper, of an open, social, and cheerful humour. . . . and of great moderation in all my passions." Perhaps even more tellingly, Hume's dear friend Adam Smith, in describing Hume's final days to the publisher and MP William Strahan, remarked that Hume's spirit never wavered, "and he continued to divert himself, as usual, with correcting his own works for a new edition, *with reading books of amusement, with the conversation of his friends*; *and, sometimes in the evening, with a party at his favourite game of whist*."[7] Even in the course of dying from colon cancer, Hume's natural impulses led him to the enjoyment of typically polite pleasures.

Beyond his own participation in and affection for the activities of commercial politeness, the bulk of Hume's writings came in the form of essays and his *History*, two quintessentially polite genres, and with respect to the essays in particular, Hume noted that he was at least in part following in the footsteps of the polite publication *par excellence*, Addison's and Steele's *Spectator*.[8] Indeed, it strikes me that at least one already discussed essay can be read as an

---

[6] Hume, "Of Civil Liberty," in *Essays*, 91.
[7] Adam Smith to William Strahan, Kirkaldy, 9 November 1776, in Hume, *Essays*, xliv (emphasis added).
[8] Given that Addison's and Steele's periodical essays in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* can be read as the unofficial manifestos of commercial politeness, the essay stands as *the* quintessential polite literary form. Indeed, writing in the preface to the original volume of the essays, Hume stated that he had originally conceived of the essays as "WEEKLY-PAPERS . . . intended to comprehend the Designs both of the SPECTATORS & CRAFTSMEN." Hume, *The Philosophical Works*, eds. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London: Longmans, Green and Co.; 1882), 3:41. Similarly, with the possible exception of the novel, histories stood as the next most typically polite genre in eighteenth-century Britain. Although the quality of history-writing in England before Hume's *History* was, on his account at least, depressingly bad, see Hume to John Clephane, Edinburgh, 5 January 1753, 1:170.; it was an exceptionally popular genre. Paul Langford reports that the middling market for popular histories was so substantial that from 1729 to 1784 the publishers of the *Universal History* were able to publish a sixty-four volume series

argument for the pleasures of Addisonian politeness. With "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion," not only can we see Hume's maturation from a young man plagued by the delicacy of passion to one whose passions were tempered and restrained by the delicacy of taste, we can also see the same essay as having been directed at those polite readers who might have found themselves wavering between the two delicacies. Regarded in that light, "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion" stands as an effort by Hume at persuading his readers that the benefits offered by the delicacy of taste greatly outweighed those offered by the delicacy of passion. Indeed, it is not by accident that this essay led the very first collection of essays Hume published. At least as much as it was a way for him to work through the benefits commercial politeness had brought to him, he was also making his case for a continuing commitment by the middling orders to that ethos. Beyond that overt promotion of the benefits of Addisonian politeness, several of Hume's essays addressed the kind of typically polite topics treated in the *Spectator*, from a philosophical and allegorical commentary on manners in "Of Impudence and Modesty"; to discussions of the relations between the sexes in "Of Love and Marriage" and "Of Polygamy and Divorces"; to meditations on refined enjoyments and pastimes in "Of Eloquence," "Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing," "Of the Standard of Taste," and "Of Tragedy."[9]

chronicling the ancient and modern worlds. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 96-99. Similarly, John Brewer has examined the records from the Bristol lending library for the period from 1773-1784 and determined that histories were by far the genre most lent during that period, totaling 6,121 loans of 283 titles. The next closest category was that works of the *belles-lettres*, which accounted for 3,318 loans of 238 volumes. Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 180-81.

[9] In one of these essays, "Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing," Hume went so far as to invoke Addison as an authority on the nature of fine writing. For some reason, in collections of his essays published after the 1760 edition Hume withdrew from publication "Of Impudence and Modesty" and "Of Love and Marriage." A clue to this decision might be found in a letter from Hume to William Strahan, in which Hume observed that he suppressed certain unidentified essays "not because they coud [sic] give any Offence, but because . . . they coud [sic] neither give Pleasure nor Instruction: They were indeed bad Imitations of the agreeable *Triffling* of Addison." Hume to William Strahan, 7 February 1772, 2:257. According to Greig's note an

In addition to these more conventionally Addisonian topics, however, Hume also made clear that he was employing the form of the polite essay in an effort at improving the quality of his reading public's conversation. In "Of Essay-Writing" Hume observed that the "elegant Part of Mankind" were divided between the learned and the conversible, the former being marked by a devotion to the "more difficult Operations of the Mind," while the latter were of a "sociable Disposition" and inclined toward "more gentle Exercises of the Understanding, to obvious Reflections on human Affairs, and the Duties of Common Life."[10] Continuing, Hume bemoaned the historical separation between the learned and the conversible and the effect that separation had effected on the conversation of the latter. As he put the matter:

> For what possibility is there of finding topics of Conversation fit for rational Creatures, without having Recourse sometimes to History, Poetry, Politics and the more obvious Principles, at least, of Philosophy? Must our whole Discourse be a continued Series of gossiping Stories and idle Remarks? Must the Mind never rise higher, but be perpetually
>
> > Stun'd and worn out with endless Chat
> > Of WILL did this, and NAN said that.[11]

Hume thus offered his essays as a means of bridging the divide between the learned and conversible worlds.[12] In doing so, Hume thus was engaged not only in replicating Addisonian

---

earlier compiler of Hume's letters, George Birkbeck Hill, had concluded that the essays to which Hume must have been referring in this letter were the essays "Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul," which Hume suppressed in 1755 after their printing and which Hume had mentioned in an earlier letter to Strahan. Hume to William Strahan, 25 January 1772, 2:252-53. Greig, however, challenges Hill's conclusion, suggesting that Strahan might have written Hume about bringing some of the lighter essays—like "Of Love and Marriage" and "Of Impudence and Modesty"—back into print. Given Hume's characterization of the essays in question as Addisonian "Trifflings," which more aptly describes essays on love, marital relations, and manners than those on death, taboos, and conventional religious beliefs, Greig's conclusion strikes me as a sound one.

[10] Hume, "Of Essay-Writing," in *Essays*, 533-34. For whatever reason, Hume only included this essay in the collection published in 1742. It never again saw publication during his lifetime.

[11] Hume, "Of Essay-Writing," in *Essays*, 534.

politeness, and in particular Addison's work in educating the public in proper polite practice and opinion, but also, as he saw it, in an effort at extending and deepening that project. That is, the instruction Hume sought to provide in aesthetics, morality, and politics was of a more substantial and philosophically informed nature than the "agreeable *Triffling* of Addison."[13] Although Hume met his goal of providing instruction in politeness that was of a greater intellectual subtlety and sophistication than that of Addison, as with Addison, Hume also sought to convince his polite middling readers to commit themselves to the project of Court Whiggery and provided that curriculum in typically polite and conversible literary forms as well as in his more demanding work in the *Treatise*.

Such efforts should not surprise us. Beyond his personal affinity for the ethos of politeness and especially polite conversation, Hume regarded the emergence of politeness and the refined arts as a great benefit to society as a whole. As Hume explained in "Of Refinement in the Arts"—and contrary to more than one opposition Whig, republican, or Country polemicist of his day—commerce, polite refinements, and luxury, rather than disrupting social bonds, actually served to draw people together in the fashion of a natural law. As Hume put the matter, "ages of refinement are both the happiest and the most virtuous."[14] Such ages, Hume argued, provide people with a steady source of work, which kept their minds sharp, their appetites natural, and their tendency toward indolence in check. Moreover, ages of commercial refinement bring with

---

[12] In the same essay Hume again followed Addison and paid homage to women, whom he described both as "much better Judges of all polite Writing than Men of the same Degree of Understanding" and as the very sovereigns of the conversible world. Hume, "Of Essay-Writing," in *Essays*, 535-37.

[13] Hume to William Strahan, 7 February 1772, 2:257. As I noted above, Hume actually used this phrase to refer to some of his own essays, which, following Greig, were probably essays in the vein of "Of Impudence and Modesty" and "Of Love and Marriage." On this interpretation of the "trifflings" letter, Hume apparently regarded the withdrawn essays as lacking the requisite gravity and intellectual seriousness of those essays that he allowed to remain in print.

[14] Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," in *Essays*, 269.

them improvements in the liberal arts and encourage the development of deeper and more extensive social ties. As Hume observed:

> The more these refined arts advance, the more sociable men become: nor is it possible, that, when enriched with science and possessed of a fund of conversation, they should be contented to remain in solitude, or to live with their fellow-citizens in that distant manner, which is peculiar to ignorant and barbarous nations . . . Particular clubs and societies are every where [*sic*] formed: Both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behavior, refine apace. So that, beside the improvements which they receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but that they must feel an encrease of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other's pleasure and entertainment.[15]

For Hume, then, the material improvements that came with commerce and manufacturing were intimately tied to the growth of the polite arts and the opportunity to engage in constructive, rewarding, and enjoyable social life.[16]

On Hume's account, however, the possibility for enjoying such benefits depended upon a particular social order. Hume saw the enjoyment of polite pleasures as dependent upon the growth of commerce. As he put the matter, ages of refinement show that "*industry*, *knowledge*,

---

[15] Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," in *Essays*, 271.

[16] An instance that reveals in somewhat amusing fashion the importance that Hume placed on the benefits of the conventions and venues of polite conviviality can be found in the final volume of the *History*, where Hume identified as an example of the strength of the English constitution the salvation of the coffeehouses. Seeing that coffeehouses were serving as sites of political agitation, Charles II issued a proclamation suppressing them. Hume noted that prior to the rise of the Commons in the reigns of James I and Charles I, such an exercise of royal power would have been regarded as simply a matter of royal prerogative and in no way questionable. In contrast, Charles II received only the feeblest of support from the courts of his day, which based the legitimacy of Charles's order on an excise statute instead of royal power. Confronting the popular disapproval of his order and the feeble legal basis that had been provided by the courts, Charles rescinded his proclamation, and so the coffeehouses were saved. Hume, *History of England*, 6:296. At the outset of his relating this episode he discounted it as trivial, but if he—or his polite, coffeehouse-going readers—were genuinely inclined to have thought so, one wonders why Hume bothered to include it.

and *humanity*, are linked together by an indissoluble chain."[17] In addition to Hume's association of politeness with commerce, he identified another crucial element in the flourishing of a polite bourgeois social order: a powerful and regular central authority, an authority that we would call a state, although Hume did not have the concept available to him. It was Hume's devotion to regularized social order and to the centralized authority that made such order most possible, coupled with an opposition to the speculative political projects of radical Whiggery, the Country party, and the Patriot movement, that marks him as a Court Whig.

HUME AND THE PROJECT OF COURT WHIGGERY

As I have noted in the introduction, when I associate Hume with the project of Court Whiggery, I am not claiming he was some crass, self-promoting partisan. Similarly, I am not arguing against all evidence that Hume was an active political figure, in some way on Walpole's or the Pelhams' party rolls, a loyal retainer to be called upon when pressure needed to be exerted upon a less-than-compliant MP, bureaucrat, or local grandee. Instead, what I mean is that his writings reveal that he associated a strong, centralized authority with the emergence and maintenance of commercial politeness and that, by extension, he, himself, was ideologically committed to the established order that had made that emergence and maintenance possible in Great Britain. For Hume, all of the foregoing translated to his support for the Court Whig project and his efforts at bringing his polite readers to a recognition of the same relationship.

Hume's political, historical, and philosophical works offer substantial material evidence of his devotion to the Court Whig project. Nevertheless, if we were to try to think about Hume as a practical beneficiary of Court patronage, if not an outright rank-and-file member of the Court

---

[17] Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," in *Essays*, 271 (emphases in the original).

party, at least some evidence in support of that position is available. To be clear, Hume had friends among all of the political factions of his day and counted as his oldest friend William Mure of Caldwell, who served in the Commons as a Whig in opposition to the Court party.[18] That being said, Hume's biography shows him to have been involved in Court Whig patronage networks. As I noted in the first chapter, Hume was the candidate of the Scottish Argethelian party in the ill-fated attempts to appoint him to the chair in moral philosophy at Edinburgh and that of logic at Glasgow and in the successful effort to appoint him as librarian of Edinburgh's Faculty of Advocates, and the Argethelians—especially Archibald Campbell, earl of Islay, later the duke of Argyll, and the so-called "king" of Scotland—were the chief Scottish agents of the Court party.[19]

In addition, Hume's kinsman James St. Clair, for whom Hume served overseas as secretary and aide-de-camp on two occasions, was promoted to the rank of general under Walpole and was part of the Court party patronage network maintained by Walpole, the Pelhams, and Campbell.[20] Finally, in the 1760s, Hume twice benefitted from the patronage of two Old Corps Court Whigs, Francis Seymour Conway, the first marquess of Hertford, and General Henry Seymour Conway, lord Hertford's younger brother.[21] In 1763, Lord Hertford, having been

---

[18] On the breadth of the political commitments in Hume's personal network, see Roger L. Emerson, "The 'Affair' at Edinburgh and the 'Project' at Glasgow," 6. Nevertheless, even a friendly letter between Hume and Mure, itself, demonstrates the extent to which Hume can be regarded as committed to the Court Whiggery. Hume to William Mure, 14 November 1742 (surmised), 1:43-44.

[19] Emerson, "The 'Affair' at Edinburgh and the 'Project' at Glasgow," 1-22; and John B. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 10 n. 7

[20] Emerson, "The 'Affair' at Edinburgh and the 'Project' at Glasgow," 16.

[21] Emerson, "The 'Affair' at Edinburgh and the 'Project' at Glasgow," 16; Harris, *Hume*, 411-12 and 422; Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-c. 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 108 n. 16; Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 304-05.

named ambassador to France following the end of the Seven Years' War and having had no previous acquaintance with Hume, invited Hume to serve as his secretary and later, from July to November of 1765, as the embassy's *chargé d'affaires*. In 1767, when General Conway was named secretary of state in the northern department, at Lord Hertford's suggestion, the general had Hume named as his deputy. Although not extensively so, when Hume was engaged in the patronage networks of mid-eighteenth-century British politics, they were the networks of the Court Whigs.

Aside, however, from these connections, Hume's stated political views and policy preferences reveal him to be best understood as a supporter of the Court project. Both H. T. Dickinson and Reed Browning in their leading studies have shown Court Whig ideology to have been a coherent set of principles, and from a very early date, Hume's political thought embraced those very same principles. Specifically, Court Whig thought emphasized the legitimacy of established authority as well as the need for and subjects' obligation of obedience to that authority. This need and obligation obtained utterly irrespective of the extent to which a government, including the British government, comported with any speculative, abstract, or dogmatic formulation of political authority.[22] In particular, Court Whigs rejected John Locke's

---

[22] Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 176-77; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 125-32 and 140-42. See also Goldie, "The English System of Liberty," 75. Browning acknowledges agreement with Dickinson "on many discrete points," but notes that, in his estimation, Dickinson's analysis suffers from four "distorting" flaws: (1) Dickinson assumes the primacy of the Court-Country divide, while Browning regarded the Whig-Tory axis as "at least of equal significance;" (2) Dickinson assumes the centrality of private property in Court Whig thought, while Browning sees property as "merely one of a cluster of goods" that the Court Whigs were committed to protecting; (3) Dickinson, according to Browning, ignores the central role that the ministry played in making policy and mediating between the Crown and Parliament; and (4) Dickinson cited sources on Court Whiggery, including Hume, who were not, according to Browning, Court Whigs. Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 176 n. 2. On Browning's final point, which is, of course, particularly germane to my argument, Browning seems to be engaging in a distortion of his own. That is, in the course of Dickinson's

more radical Whiggish doctrine of a right of resistance as well as other theoretical and idealized favorites of radical Whigs, the Country party, and the Patriot movement: contract theory and the ancient constitution. That being said, the Court Whigs were utterly committed to the constitutional settlement that emerged following the Glorious Revolution and to the Hanoverian succession. For those reasons, the Court Whigs, although a party of the Court, must also be understood as unapologetic Whigs, rather than reconstructed Tories. In addition, Dickinson has pointed out that despite their rejection of Locke's social contract theory, the Court Whigs nevertheless embraced the traditional Lockean Whig position that government existed to protect private property and required at least the tacit consent of the propertied classes.[23]

---

discussion of Court Whig ideology he observed the substantial relevance that Hume's political thought bore to efforts by the Court Whigs to justify the established order. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 132-36. Dickinson did not, however, contrary to what Browning implies, actually characterize Hume as a Court Whig. Rather, Dickinson stopped short of describing Hume as a Court Whig, pointing to the Whig establishment's refusal to consider him as one of its own given his public statements about the national debt and his apparent ambivalence toward a standing army. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 138. Accordingly, I am not convinced that Dickinson's position is as different from Browning's as Browning suggests. Moreover, in arguing against the idea—whether held by Dickinson or not—that Hume was a Court Whig, the only effort Browning makes at supporting his position is a single article that read Hume's views as supportive of the Country party, in particular those opinions Hume expressed in his quickly regretted "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole." Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 176 n. 2, citing M. M. Goldsmith, "Faction Detected: Ideological Consequences of Robert Walpole's Decline and Fall," *History* 64, no. 210 (1979), 17. I will have more to say about the place of this essay in my argument shortly.

[23] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 125-32. As I just noted, Browning believes that Dickinson went too far in insisting on the centrality of private property to Court Whig thought. Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 176 n. 2. Instead, Browning notes, while the Court Whigs placed a high value on property rights, there is also "considerable evidence" that property rights were only one of a "cluster of goods" the Court Whigs valued. In making this point Browning also seems to suggest that the only way that Dickinson could have reached his conclusion about the place of property rights in Court Whig thought is if Dickinson were "*a priori* committed to the notion that Court Whiggery was a cover for the protection of property." *Ibid*. As Dickinson, however, does not argue that the Court Whigs' emphasis on property rights was mere ideology, Browning's dismissal of Dickinson's positions seems more than a little misplaced. Either way, while Browning holds that the Whigs valued goods in addition to private

In addition to these more general principles, Court Whig thought was marked by a fairly specific understanding of Great Britain's balanced constitution and the means by which that balance was maintained. That is, while Court Whigs and members of the Country party both professed the deepest regard for the constitutional balance between Crown, Lords, and Commons that had resulted from the Glorious Revolution, the Country party's and Court Whigs' formulae for maintaining that balance differed dramatically.[24] Members of the Country Party held that the balanced constitution depended upon each constitutional estate's total independence from the other two. This independence, the Country partisans argued, was a key feature of the treasured ancient constitution, which, they claimed, could be traced back to Anglo-Saxon England.[25] Country Whigs and other Patriots thus held that efforts by the Court to exert greater influence on the Commons and the Lords through the patronage power had to be resisted, both directly through statutory limits on royal patronage and more indirectly with at least triennial elections and the subjection of MPs to binding instructions from their constituents.[26]

The Court Whigs rejected both the Country's conception of the balanced constitution and, consequently, the accompanying diagnosis of what threatened the constitution and the best way to maintain its balance. Specifically, the Court Whigs held that an excessive independence among the three estates was the greatest danger to the constitutional balance and social stability. That is, following James Harrington's observation that political power followed property, the Court Whigs argued that because a disproportionate share of the kingdom's property—as well as

---

property, he does not reject the more fundamental point that, at the very least, property rights were among the most basic of the goods that the Court Whigs valued.

[24] Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 179-82; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 142-48.

[25] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 99 and 145-46.

[26] *Ibid*; chapter 2, 101-03; and chapter 4, 178, above. As Dickinson observes, it was this concern with royal patronage that also greatly informed the Country party's concern about the growth of the standing army. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 181.

the government's purse strings—was controlled by the House of Commons, the Commons could, if the membership were so inclined, overwhelm the Crown and the Lords. Such a move would by definition bring to an end the constitutional equilibrium the Glorious Revolution had achieved between the country's monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic elements, and transform the British government into an "unrestrained democracy," which would, in turn, abolish the liberty that the balanced constitution had enabled the British to secure and enjoy.[27]

As the Court Whigs saw matters, then, the best way to preserve the constitutional balance and, by extension, British liberty, was for the Crown to exert more direct influence over the members of the Commons, thus increasing the interdependence of the three and reducing or eliminating the danger that the Commons might seek to overpower the other two estates. In short, the Court Whigs conceived of constitutional balance in terms of linking the Commons' to the Court, thus centralizing government power in the Court. Indeed, it is this effort at centralizing power in the Court that stands as the defining feature of the Court project. To that end, the Court used Crown patronage to create in the Commons a reliable phalanx of supporters who could help the Court influence parliamentary decision-making. Even more, the Court employed the king's patronage power to reward with government posts the friends and relatives of cooperative members of the Commons.[28] Out of a similar desire to preserve their understanding of constitutional balance and stymie efforts at limiting the Court's influence in Parliament, the Court Whigs opposed, as best they could, the already mentioned efforts at limiting the patronage power and making the Commons more responsible and responsive to their constituents, the latter

---

[27] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 153-54; Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 181-82, 185; Goldie, "The English System of Liberty," 76. Hume raises exactly this same point in rejecting the idea of subjecting members of the Commons to constituent instructions. Hume, "Of the First Principles of Government," in *Essays*, 35-36.
[28] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 99, 154-55; Goldie, "The English System of Liberty," 76.

sought by means of more frequent parliamentary elections and a proposal that MPs operate under

constituent instructions.[29]

Hume's statements about politics and history in the *Treatise*, the *Essays*, and his *History*,

when read in light of the foregoing, reveal him to have been not, as he is most commonly

regarded, the ideologically neutral philosopher of British politics, but, instead, as a reflective but

still ideologically committed proponent of the Court Whig vision of politics generally, and of the

Court Whig project for Great Britain's political and constitutional order specifically. On the

general level of the Court Whigs' vision of politics, Hume rejected abstract and idealized

conceptions of political legitimacy like radical Whig social contract theory and the Country

party's commitment to an ancient Saxon constitution.[30] Moreover, like the Court Whigs, Hume

---

[29] Dickinson, 99, 156-58; Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 185-87.

[30] Unsurprisingly, Hume also rejected the Tory and Jacobite notion of a divinely mandated passive obedience that favored the claims of the Stuart pretense, observing—likely more than a bit ironically—that any divine grant of authority could only be traced to a general providence and God's desire that human beings flourish. As Hume put the matter, "As it is impossible for human beings to subsist, at least in any comfortable or secure state, without the protection of government; this institution must certainly have been intended by that beneficent Being, who means the good of all his creatures…since he gave rise to it, not by any particular or miraculous interposition, but by his concealed and universal efficacy; a sovereign cannot, properly speaking, be called his vice-gerent, in any other sense than every power or force, being derived from him, may be said to act by his commission. *Whatever actually happens is comprehended in the general plan or intention of providence; nor has the greatest and most lawful prince any more reason, upon that account, to plead a peculiar sacredness or inviolable authority, than an inferior magistrate, or even an usurper, or even a robber and a pyrate*. The same divine superintendant [*sic*], who, for wise purposes, invested a TITUS or a TRAJAN with authority, did also, for purposes, no doubt, equally wise, though unknown, bestow power on a BORGIA or an ANGRIA. The same causes, which gave rise to the sovereign power in every state, established likewise every petty jurisdiction in it, and every limited authority. A constable, therefore, no less than a king, acts by a divine commission, and possesses an indefeasible right." Accordingly, one could fairly say that the bare existence of any government that served the ends of human security and comfort was divinely ordained, but that no particular ruler or family could claim a specific, sacred right to rule. As such, divine sanction did not attach to any particular individual or office, but to anyone who comes to hold power, no matter how he or she has been invested with that power. Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 466-67 (emphasis added).

held that political legitimacy and subjects' attendant duty of political obligation proceeded not from a political system's compliance with any such theoretical system or ideal form, but simply from the established fact of political power and the order-producing and expectations-protecting functions that established governments served, in particular as those functions related to the protection of subjects' interests in property. Finally, Hume fully supported the Court Whig project in maintaining political and constitutional order through an increasing interdependence between Crown, Commons, and Lords, in particular as that interdependence was effected through the Crown's exercise of its patronage power.

That Hume rejected political projects and claims of political legitimacy based on abstract theories or idealized formulations of social organization is fairly clear.[31] In both the *Treatise* and his 1748 essay on the topics, "Of the Original Contract," Hume characterized as utterly incredible the idea that modern governments derive their legitimacy from a bilateral contract between it and the governed and the attendant notion that a government continues to enjoy legitimacy and a resulting obedience only for as long as it continues to honor the terms of such a contract.[32] While Hume was willing to concede that the earliest human governments, those that had been founded in "woods and desarts," were based on agreements between rulers and subjects, according to Hume, those instances of consent belonged exclusively to the distant and forgotten past, and bore no relation to the legitimacy of government or subjects' duties of

---

[31] Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 465-87, 466-67 and 469-74. See also Hume's less than approving discussion of factions of speculative principle in "Of Parties in General," in *Essays*, 60.

[32] Hume, *Treatise*, 542; "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 468. In the 1753 revisions to "Of the Original Contract," Hume did note that in writing the essay he did not mean to suggest that an original contract could not operate as a legitimate foundation for government, for, as he put it, such a basis "is surely the best and most sacred of any." Nevertheless, he continued, there must be some other basis for government because an original contract "has very seldom had place in any degree, and never almost in its fullest extent." Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 474.

obedience in his day.[33] Instead, the governments of eighteenth-century states had their origin, as

he flatly put it, "on usurpation, or conquest, or both, without any pretence [*sic*] of a fair consent,

or voluntary subjection of the people."[34]

As evidence for his position that the legitimacy of government and subjects' derivative

allegiance had no basis in consent or an original contract, Hume simply pointed to the various

countries of the world where consent was never actually given by the governed, but where the

subjects nevertheless operated as though they had a duty to obey their rulers, a duty observable

"in PERSIA and CHINA; in FRANCE and SPAIN; and *even in HOLLAND and ENGLAND*."[35] Hume

went on, observing that it was nonsensical to argue that consent had been granted by people who

actually had no awareness of such a grant and who would have regarded such a precondition for

political obedience as outlandish. He even went so far as to point out that the reality of obedience

under the absolute governments of the eighteenth century demonstrated that the source of civil

obligation must be something other than an original contract, as such a government was "as

natural and *common* a government as any."[36] Indeed, as Hume put the matter, not even the

---

[33] "Hume, *Treatise*, 541-42; Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 468 and 470. At the end of his life Hume made a couple of final revisions to "Of the Original Contract"; in one of these he further qualified his concession to contract theory and observed that even the primordial consent he had described in no way established a regular or general system of submission to rulers. Instead, potential rulers enjoyed authority only in those moments when they were able to persuade potential subjects to assent to their command. As occasions for such requests of power increased, Hume continued, the utility of having a governing authority eventually became apparent to subjects. This recognition, coupled with the increased frequency of requests for obedience, led to the development of a habit of obedience. Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 468-69.

[34] Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 471. Hume made a similar point in the *Treatise* when he identified conquest as a source of a sovereign's legitimacy and of subjects' allegiance. Hume, *Treatise*, 558-59.

[35] Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 470 (emphasis added).

[36] Hume, *Treatise*, 549. See also Hume, "Of the Original Contract," 486-87.

prophet of social contract theory, John Locke, had regarded the absolute governments of the continent as undeserving of their subjects' allegiance.[37]

Like the Court Whigs, then, Hume rejected more radical Whiggish arguments that political legitimacy depended on the government's ongoing compliance with an original contract and went so far as to regard the idea as simply absurd. Consequently, he also rejected contract theory's seemingly constant companion, the idea that subjects enjoyed a right of resistance when the government violated the terms of the deal. Instead, he only recognized a right of resistance in response to the most manifest tyrannies, that is, those that threatened public order and security in its most basic form, a position that put him at odds with doctrinaire Tories who insisted on passive obedience to established authority. As examples of such tyrannies meriting active resistance, Hume cited Dionysius of Syracuse, Nero, and Phillip II, but conspicuously omitted any mention of Charles I and refused to situate James II among the tyrants of history in any conclusive fashion.[38] Instead, Hume only went so far as to suggest in hypothetical terms that when a magistrate in a mixed government seeks to invade the powers and privileges of a coordinate branch of government, those efforts could be resisted. He was quick to observe, however, that he did not intend to apply those principles necessarily to the Glorious Revolution and made his approval of his present constitutional order express.[39]

Hume similarly had no regard for Old Whig and Country party appeals to the existence of a normative ancient constitution that situated Parliament above the king in Britain's

---

[37] Hume, "Of the Original Contract," 486-87.

[38] Hume, *Treatise*, 549-54; "Of Passive Obedience," in *Essays*, 489-91. Hume's reluctance to identify as justified in unqualified terms the Glorious Revolution, as well as his sympathetic portrayal of Charles I in the first Stuart volume of the *History*, informed much of the Whiggish invective against him as a Tory or even a Jacobite. Such attacks, however, simply failed to take account of Hume's rejection of passive obedience, as already mentioned above and discussed in this chapter at note 30.

[39] Hume, *Treatise*, 563-66.

constitutional order. Hume devoted much of the *History* to discrediting the historical existence

and very idea of the ancient constitution, to which Country partisans and Patriots of all stripes

pointed as the basis of the British government's legitimate authority. As Hume put the matter to

his publisher, Andrew Millar, in a discussion of the Stuart volumes of the *History*, he had found

the English constitution at the time of the early Stuarts to have been not an unbroken tradition of

Saxon liberties, but instead "very ambiguous and undetermin'd."[40] Hume gestured in the

direction of this assessment in the first Stuart volume, where he observed that around the time of

the accession of James I, "the minds of men, throughout Europe, especially in England, seem to

have undergone a general, but insensible revolution. . . . In consequence of this universal

fermentation, the ideas of men enlarged themselves on all sides; and the several constituent parts

of the gothic governments, which seem to have lain long unactive, began, every where [*sic*], to

operate and encroach on each other."[41]

Throughout the remainder of the *History*, Hume put paid to any claim that the eighteenth-

century British constitution had an ancient pedigree. Instead, he marked at least four discrete

periods in English constitutional history: from the Saxons to Magna Charta, the post-Magna

Charta baronial period through the War of the Roses, the period of the Tudors and Stuarts

through to James II, and the post-1688 settlement.[42] As he noted at the completion of the

History's Tudor volumes, the constitutional settlement England enjoyed in the middle of the

eighteenth century had been preceded by that of Tudor and Stuart absolutism, which itself had

---

[40] Hume to Andrew Millar, Edinburgh, 12 April 1755, 1:217.
[41] Hume, *History of England*, 5:18. Although this passage could be read as suggesting that at least elements of the ancient constitution were in place, albeit in a confused fashion, at the time James I took the throne, that, in itself, would undermine the claims of the Country party, as the ancient constitution in total would not have stood as an intact tradition of government and liberty immediately before the House of Stuart came to power in England. On either reading, the claims of the Patriots are thus shown to have been historically unfounded.
[42] Hume, *History of England*, 4:355 n. l.

been preceded by a period under which both the king and the people were subject to the depredations of the nobles, and an even earlier period in which the power of government fell almost entirely to the king, so long as he was an able one.[43] Although differing in some of the particulars, Hume made the same broad point about the constitution's fluctuating nature in the second volume covering the pre-Tudor period, in which he observed that during that time no ruler "was ever entirely absolute and uncontrolled," and that the balance of power shifted radically from one order to another, going from a broad swath of the people in the early Saxon period to the aristocracy during the period of the Heptarchy to the king in the early Norman period—albeit subject to some correction by the barons—to the aristocracy again following the adoption of Magna Charta.[44] Hume was especially careful to note that, from the reign of Edward I through that of Richard III, the House of Commons enjoyed no serious power in the English constitutional order.

Moreover, as Hume made clear, the Commons' disproportionately subordinate role in the constitutional arrangement did not improve with the accession of the Tudors. Indeed, as Hume described matters, in taking the throne, Henry VII ushered in a form of absolute monarchy rarely seen in English history, one that Hume saw as being perfected in the reigns of Henry VIII and

---

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] Hume, *History of England*, 2:524-25. This account obviously modifies the account that Hume offered in the final Tudor volume, where he, again, seemed to indicate that before Magna Charta a sufficiently talented king was able to wield the greatest share of power. Presumably Hume's subsequent researches into the pre-Norman English past led him to conclude that the years before 1215 were more complicated than he had initially understood. I should also note that this account differs from that given by Bolingbroke in at least one regard: according to Bolingbroke, the Commons assumed substantial power in the English government following the Norman Conquest. Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *Remarks on the History of England*, Letter 12, in *Lord Bolingbroke: Historical Writings*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 231. Bolingbroke's *Remarks* were originally serialized in his *The Craftsman* periodical in 1730 and 1731.

Elizabeth I and as continuous with the claims of royal prerogative that the Stuarts advanced.[45]

Hume described Elizabeth I, a particular favorite of the Country party, as lacking both "a tender regard for the constitution, and a concern for the liberties and privileges of her people." Contrary to the accounts that the Country party and Old Whigs gave of Elizabeth's reign, Hume argued that she was instead the epitome of early modern absolutism and "exercised the royal authority in a manner so contrary to all the ideas, which we at present entertain of a legal constitution."[46] In Elizabeth's defense, however, Hume observed that she was simply carrying on in the tradition of her predecessors, and that:

> She believed that her subjects were entitled to no more liberty than their ancestors had enjoyed: She found that they entirely acquiesced in her arbitrary administration: And it was not natural for her to find fault with a form of government, by which she herself was invested with such unlimited authority.[47]

Hume continued, observing that if one wished to understand England's ancient constitution, no period could be more illustrative than the reign of Elizabeth. That is, he reasoned that the fact that Elizabeth enjoyed such immense popularity as queen, even though she frequently employed extensive powers with great rage and violence, proved that there was little in the way of established liberties under the English constitution at the time of her reign. Indeed, so customary was her use of near absolute power, contemporary historians did not remark on them as violations of any existing constitutional limits.[48] After detailing the arbitrary powers Elizabeth enjoyed through the Court of Star Chamber, the Court of High Commission, and the courts martial, Hume went so far as to liken Elizabeth's reign to that of the eighteenth-century Ottoman

---

[45] Hume, *History of England*, 3:73-74 and 3:321-22.
[46] Hume, *History of England*, 4:354.
[47] *Ibid*.
[48] *Ibid.*

Turks.[49] His point was simple: the ancient constitution that the Country party celebrated was not the regular and long-lived system of ordered liberty that they claimed it was, and this reality was no clearer than under the reign of their beloved Elizabeth.[50]

Hume made similar points about the extent of royal power under the Tudors and the continuity between Tudors and Stuarts in that regard in a letter to Adam Smith. There he noted that the change that occurred in modern public affairs, by which I take him to mean a more regularized and forceful administration by the monarch, began with Henry VII, not the Stuarts, and that the Commons only really began to emerge as a power under the constitution during the reign of James I.[51] It was that emergence, he argued, that led to the great upheavals of the seventeenth century. Contrary, then, to the partisans of the ancient constitution, Hume embraced the view that the reigns of James I and Charles I had not instituted any material departures from England's previous constitutional order, and that, at the time James I took the throne, the English constitution had been tending toward absolutism for more than a century. Moreover, the historical record demonstrated that, contrary to the claims of Old Whigs, the Country party, and Patriots, there had never been a point in the English past in which "the people" stood as the primary power in the constitutional order, with the possible exception of stretches of the Saxon period. Even there, however, Hume noted that such a constitution was a departure from the vast

---

[49] Hume, *History of England*, 4:356-61.
[50] For example, Bolingbroke held that Elizabeth's conduct as queen was ideally suited to the nature of the English constitution, in light of the great difficulties she faced, while that of James I ran clearly contrary to English constitutional principles, given the advantages he enjoyed upon coming to the throne. Bolingbroke, *Remarks on the History of England*, Letter 13, in *Lord Bolingbroke: Historical Writings*, 238-43.
[51] Hume to Adam Smith, 24 September 1752, 1:167-68.

bulk of English history, and that in such times the norms of refined life were not just unknown, they were impossible. I will return to this point in the final section of this chapter.[52]

Accordingly, in line with the position of the Court party and in opposition to the claims of the Country party, radical Whigs, and Patriots, Hume rejected any effort to predicate the legitimacy of the eighteenth-century British government on its compliance with any system of speculative politics, including either an ancient constitution or an original contract. Instead, Hume argued that the legitimacy of government and subjects' duty of obedience depended not on the satisfaction of any speculative theory, but simply on the grounds of self-interest, utility, convention, and the habits of obedience that had emerged over time. As Hume explained the point in the *Treatise*, governments arise out of human self-interest, as people establish or accept a governing agency that will protect them from those among them who might be inclined to defect from the conventions of property rights and the performance of contracts—which Hume regarded as the very basis of natural justice—when such violations would be to the defectors' advantage.[53]   Governments thus serve humanity's interests by providing their subjects with reliable security in their person, property, and contractual expectations, allowing them "to taste at ease the sweets of society and mutual assistance." Moreover, governments' power to command the performance and compliance of their subjects creates the conditions by which subjects are able to escape traditional collective action problems. As Hume observed, two neighbors could recognize the mutual interest they might have in cooperating in the formulation and completion of a joint project, but more extensive and complicated projects faced serious obstacles:

> There is no quality in human nature, which causes more fatal errors
> in our conduct, than that which leads us to prefer whatever is

---

[52] Hume, *History of England*, 2:525.
[53] Hume, *Treatise*, 526 and 533-39. Hume made the same point in the last of his essays, "Of the Origin of Government," which was published posthumously in 1777.

present to the distant and remote, and makes us desire objects more according to their situation than their intrinsic value . . . 'tis very difficult, and indeed impossible, that a thousand persons shou'd agree in any such action; it being difficult for them to concert so complicated a design, and still more difficult for them to execute it; while each seeks a pretext to free himself of the trouble and expence, and wou'd lay the whole burden on others.[54]

"Political society," however, "easily remedies both these inconveniences," Hume explained, both because rulers tend to identify their interest with the interest of large numbers of their subjects and because the number of relevant decision-makers within a governing agent is much smaller than the body of interested subjects. Consequently, not only do governments protect property and contract rights, they are also able to see to it that "bridges are built; harbours open'd; ramparts rais'd; canals form'd; fleets equip'd; and armies disciplin'd."[55]

As with the origins of government, Hume situated subjects' duty of obedience in self-interest. Countering the radical Whig notion of the original contract, Hume recalled in the *Treatise* that because it is impossible in "large and polished societies" that property rights and contracts will always be honored by all, governments arise to protect those rights. As a result, he noted, there must be "a separate interest in the obedience to government, from that in the performance of promises." That interest, in turn, creates an obligation of obedience to government that bears no relation to any contractual duty. Simply put, as Hume saw it, "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." Subjects' duty of obedience thus arises out of the fact that the existence of government serves their interest; that

---

[54] Hume, *Treatise*, 538.
[55] Hume, *Treatise*, 539.

service—not compliance with an original contract or ancient constitution—obligates subjects to support their governments.[56]

Hume's thoughts on the origins of government and the duty of obedience translated to a customary Court support for established authority. As Hume saw the matter, *any* government was due obedience, provided that it operated to protect subjects' security in their property, person, and contract rights. While Hume recognized some right of resistance on the part of subjects, that right was extremely circumscribed, and Hume even avoided a clear statement on the propriety of the Glorious Revolution under his statement of government legitimacy and the duty of loyalty. Beyond rare cases of outright tyranny—again, a Nero or Philip II—Hume held "in the ordinary course of affairs nothing can be more pernicious or criminal" than resistance to established authority, both for the immediate disorder it causes and because of the damage it does generally to respect for government. Hume explained that, "As numerous and civiliz'd societies cannot subsist without government, so government is entirely useless without an exact obedience," and is commonly owed "blind submission."[57] That submission, moreover, obtains even if one's discrete self-interest is not served by any form of government or particular set of rulers; as Hume saw the matter, the generalized advantages that accrue to subjects through the very existence of government impose on subjects an obligation of obedience to whatever form a government takes and to whoever happens to occupy a position of government authority.[58]

---

[56] Hume, *Treatise*, 544-47. On this point, see also Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 479-81. As Hume stated there, "If the reason be asked of that obedience [to established government], which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer, *because society could not otherwise subsist:* And this answer is clear and intelligible to all mankind." "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 481 (emphasis in the original).

[57] Hume, *Treatise*, 554.

[58] Hume, *Treatise*, 554-56.

In taking this position on the source and nature of government and by rejecting notions of the radical Whig original contract and its accompanying right of resistance, Hume showed himself to have been committed to the maintenance of established authority, in whatever form it took, and "an exact obedience" to that authority. As far as Hume was concerned, established government, *any* established government, was legitimate and deserving of obedience to the extent it served the generalized ends of stability and security, irrespective of the deliberately given consent of the governed, or the extent to which the structure of government comported with some real or imagined past set of institutions, or any other proffered justification.[59] As he put the matter in the *Treatise*, "No maxim is more conformable, both to prudence and morals, than to submit quietly to the government, which we find establish'd in the country where we happen to live, without enquiring too curiously into its origin and first establishment."[60] Hume made the same point in the final Tudor volume of the *History*, where he observed, "in the general distribution of power among the several members of a constitution, there can seldom be admitted any other question, than *What is established?*"[61] Again, that conclusion held true for Hume even with respect to the absolutist governments of his day, as he observed in both the *Treatise* and almost ten years later in "Of the Original Contract."[62]

Of course, in Hume's day, established authority meant the Hanoverian succession and the Crown-in-Parliament, which he saw as a relatively new order brought into existence by the

---

[59] Hume, *Treatise*, 541-46, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 480-81. Indeed, for Hume tyranny was understood not as a form of government that departed from some pre-established form or conditions of speculative philosophy, but instead was so oppressive and over-reaching that it subverted the very security in personal expectations that Hume saw as the grounds for political obedience and legitimacy. Hume, *Treatise*, 551-53. Hume makes largely the same point in the essay "Of Passive Obedience," in *Essays*, 490.

[60] Hume, *Treatise*, 558.

[61] Hume, *History of England*, 4:354-55.

[62] Hume, *Treatise*, 549; "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays*, 486-87.

Glorious Revolution, not one that comported with an ancient constitution, and also not a government beholden to the terms of an imagined original contract. In both the *Treatise* and the *Essays*, Hume made it abundantly clear that they owed their allegiance to that established order. As he explained in the *Treatise*, although William III's accession to the throne might have been contestable at the time of the Glorious Revolution, the passage of time and the two intervening reigns in the same general line of parliamentary-authorized succession had invested George II with a clear title to the throne that required the obedience of his subjects.[63] Hume thus demonstrated his unqualified support for the post-1688 constitutional settlement, thus making his position a Whiggish one, while rejecting any absolute right of resistance predicated upon social contract theory, thus making his position that of a Court Whig. Hume arrived at the same point in the essay "Of the Protestant Succession," where the fact of the Hanoverian succession, coupled with the Hanoverian line's "mildness, equity, and regard to the laws and constitution," demonstrated the legitimacy of their rule.[64] To be clear, however, Hume's statement of that settlement in the Hanoverian line did not take a radical Whiggish, or Country, or Patriot form. Instead, Hume, once again, articulated a clear preference for Court Whiggery's understanding of the British constitutional order.

The Country insisted that the British constitutional order required that the king, the Commons, and the Lords each operate without interference from the other two estates in the performance of their constitutional duties. Their efforts at securing this independence on the part of the Commons, in turn, translated to a resistance to the influence of Crown patronage over the members of the Commons and the Lords, resistance that found expression in an insistence on more frequent elections, limitations on the use of the Crown's patronage power, and, in more

---

[63] Hume, *Treatise*, 566-67.
[64] Hume, "Of the Protestant Succession," in *Essays*, 511.

extreme cases, the imposition of constituent instructions on members of the Commons. In contrast, the Court party took the view that, because the Commons controlled a disproportionate amount of the property—and thus, as most in the eighteenth century saw it—the power within the constitutional order, the Crown was constantly in jeopardy of being overwhelmed by the Commons. Consequently, the Crown needed to use its patronage power to bring members of the Commons and the Lords onside, thus safeguarding the Crown's position in Britain's constitutional order and providing the Court with a means of directing affairs in ways more to its liking. This effort at centralizing power in the Court through the exercise of Crown patronage, more than any other issue, defined the divide between Court and Country.

In "Of the Independency of Parliament," originally published in his first collection of essays in 1741, Hume made it clear that he stood on the Court side of the divide, as he considered the means by which a constitutional order could be maintained while preserving the influence and interests of the three classical estates of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Hume noted the skepticism with which a Cicero or Tacitus regarded such a possibility; on their account, no government could ever be truly mixed, because at some point one of the coordinate elements would come to dominate the other two.[65] Nevertheless, Hume insisted that the British constitution had realized exactly such an achievement. It had done so, Hume insisted, thanks to the Court's use of the patronage power.

As Hume explained, the Crown's power rested largely in its executive function, and those functions depended entirely upon grants of funds by the Commons. Similarly, the Lords' power within the constitutional order depended upon the support and cooperation of the Crown. Consequently, Hume reasoned that the Commons could have very easily used its exclusive

---

[65] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 43.

power to approve money for the Crown's use to bring the monarch—and by extension the Lords—totally under its power, thus overwhelming the coordinate estates in the British constitution and destroying its mixed and balanced nature.[66] Patronage, however, operated to keep the Commons within its proper constitutional limits by linking the interests of the Crown with those of members who benefitted from royal patronage. This linkage—what the Country party, Hume noted, gave "the invidious appellations of *corruption* and *dependence*"—rendered those members who benefited from Crown patronage reluctant to anger their patron—whether the king, himself, or his prime minister—and thus inclined to cooperate with the Court, cooperation that resulted in a more interdependent and stable constitutional order.[67]

In his general political principles and in his position on the singularly defining question of the relationship between the Court and Parliament, Hume demonstrated himself as supporting the Court's positions. In particular, his approval of and advocacy for the Court's project of consolidating to itself greater control over the Commons through the patronage power reveal him to have been of a decidedly Court persuasion. Hume might not have been an active participant in

---

[66] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 44.

[67] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 44-45. Hume expressed similar support for the Crown's freedom to exercise its patronage power in a 1742 letter he wrote to his friend William Mure, who, as I noted above, was one of the Whigs in opposition to Walpole in the Commons. In that letter Hume affected the posture of a constituent providing his MP with instructions on how to vote on various measures, an effort at influencing Parliament became a common Country party and opposition Whig tactic in 1742. Turning this Country practice on its head, Hume expressed his opposition to a triennial bill and a bill that would have excluded from the Commons any recipient of a royal pension. Hume to William Mure, 14 November 1742 (surmised), 1:43-44. Both bills were customary efforts by the Country and Whig opposition to limit the extent of the Court's patronage power. See Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 187; P. J. Kulisheck, "Pension and Place Bills," in *Britain in the Hanoverian Age: 1714-1837*, ed. Gerald Newman (New York: Garland, 1997), 540-41. Although Hume adopted an ironic tone in the letter, the irony is best read as having been directed not at the substantive positions communicated in the letter, but at the notion that Mure, as an opposition Whig, would have adopted those positions. I take Hume's irony here to also have operated at a less-than-subtle dig at one formulation of the Country party's call for constituent instruction, which demanded that Members of the Commons to accept their constituents' instructions as in some way binding.

the day-to-day efforts of the Court interest as such, but the substantive positions to which he publicly committed himself reveal Hume to have been an ideological fellow traveler with Court partisans. Given the substantial overlap between Hume's political and constitutional outlook and that of the Court Whigs, we should regard Hume as ideologically committed to the Court Whig project of consolidating political power in the Court.

HUME: NEUTRAL OR PARTISAN? COURT OR COUNTRY?

I anticipate two general objections to the idea that Hume should be regarded as ideologically committed to the Court Whig project of centralized power. First, there is the commonly held scholarly view discussed in the introduction that Hume's political and historical project was one of philosophical and ideological neutrality and substantive moderation. Second, some might point to a few of Hume's essays—"Of Civil Liberty," "Of Public Credit," and "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole"—as evidence that Hume stood opposed to the project of Court Whiggery. Ultimately, none of these objections soundly respond to the reading I am offering of Hume as having been ideologically committed to the Court Whig project. Indeed, when read carefully they offer no real support to the proposition that Hume had Country sympathies.

On the first of these points, the evidence that Hume was neutral or non-partisan as between Court and Country would seem to be little more than Hume's own statements about his impartial nature and his self-presentation as occupying a neutral point outside of the partisan conflicts of his day. As early as the preface to his first volume of essays, Hume was remarking that his writings evinced a "Moderation and Impartiality in . . . handling POLITICAL SUBJECTS,"[68] and one can see this posture of neutrality expressed again in one of his earliest published essays,

---

[68] Hume, *The Philosophical Works*, 3:41.

"That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," where, in adjudicating between Court party support for and Country party opposition to the Walpole ministry, Hume remarked that he would "always be more fond of promoting moderation than zeal."[69] Similarly, in "Of the Coalition of Parties," Hume's discussion of the possible end to the conflict between Whigs and Tories, he observed that in two other essays, "Of the Original Contract" and "Of Passive Obedience," he had sought to lead his readers to "moderate opinions" on the speculative principles of both Whigs and Tories and that in the instant essay he was going to "exercise the same moderation" in his adjudication of the historical disagreements between the two parties.[70] Such moderation, Hume assured his readers, would effect a desired coalition of Whigs and Tories, and work to stabilize the established state of affairs.[71]

Hume made similar attestations of neutrality in his private correspondence. While preparing the first volume of the *History* devoted to the Stuarts, Hume wrote to his friend John Clephane and bemoaned the state of the historian's craft in England: "You know that there is no post of honour in the English Parnassus more vacant than that of History. Style, judgment, impartiality, care—everything is wanting to our historians."[72] The clear implication is that Hume aimed to correct all of those deficiencies, including partiality. The next year Hume wrote to his friend and translator the Abbé Le Blanc about the imminent publication of the first volume of the *History* and observed that the public anticipation over the work's release ran high because Hume was known to have kept a "great Distance . . . from all Party & Dependance."[73] Around the same time, Hume sent to his friend William Mure a copy of the first volume of his history of the

---

[69] Hume, "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," in *Essays*, 27.
[70] Hume, "Of the Coalition of Parties," in *Essays*, 494.
[71] Hume, "Of the Coalition of Parties," in *Essays*, 500.
[72] Hume to John Clephane, Edinburgh, 5 January 1753, 1:170.
[73] Hume to the Abbé le Blanc, Edinburgh, 12 September 1754, 1:193.

Stuarts. In the accompanying letter, Hume expressed his hope to Mure that his work would prove to be "true & impartial," which Hume identified as the "first Quality of an Historian."[74] Years later, writing to James Dunkirker, Hume described himself as "a philosopher, a man of letters, nowise a courtier, of the most independent spirit, who has given offence to every sect, and every party…."[75]

Even when he was not expressly attesting to his own neutrality, he consistently spoke of the parties of Great Britain—whether Court, Country, Whig, Tory, or Jacobite—in an overtly detached fashion, as though he were a stranger to all of them, hovering above the fray and writing about them with the benefit of a view from nowhere.[76] This is especially notable in "Of the Parties of Great Britain," where in the original published version he discussed all five factions from the perspective of a political neutral, an utterly disinterested outsider.[77] Similarly, although in "Of the Independency of Parliament" Hume expressed support for the Court's use of Crown patronage as a means of keeping the House of Commons within its proper constitutional bounds, he did so while presenting himself as a neutral in the struggles between Court and Country.

---

[74] Hume to William Mure, October 1754 (surmised), 1:210.

[75] Hume to James Oswald, Paris, 2 June 1765, 1:504.

[76] Hume adopted such a posture toward the Court and Country divide in "Of the First Principles of Government" (1741) and "Of the Independency of Parliament" (1741); toward the Whigs and Tories in "Of the Original Contract" (1748), "Of Passive Obedience" (1748), and "Of the Protestant Succession" (1752); and toward Court, Country, Whigs, Tories, and Jacobites in "Of the Parties of Great Britain" (1741). As Ryu Susato has pointed out, in the pre-1764 editions of "Of the First Principles of Government," Hume took special pains to observe that the Court and Country parties were not as far apart on the question of constituent instructions to Members of Parliament as their rhetoric might suggest. Hume removed that final paragraph from the essay from the 1764 edition forward. Ryu Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 192-93.

[77] This was the case until the publication of the 1770 edition of the *Essays*. In that edition and the one additional edition published before his death, Hume removed his discussion of the Jacobites from the essay. The tone of disinterested impartiality, however, remained.

The foregoing claims by Hume of moderation, neutrality, and impartiality, and his detached attitude toward the partisan conflicts of his day, however, simply do not approach the level of dispositive evidence against my conclusion that Hume was ideologically committed to Court Whiggery. As a preliminary matter, attestations of moderation and neutrality were—and remain—common tropes in political discourse, a point already evidenced in my discussion of Addison and Court Whig rhetoric more generally. Moreover, and as I have also noted in the introduction, several of his avowals of neutrality are properly read as directed exclusively toward the disputes between Whigs and Tories over the English past. This certainly seems to be the case in the letters just cited. The same can also be said of the moderate and neutral attitude that Hume assumes in "Of the Original Contract," "Of Passive Obedience," "Of the Protestant Succession," and "Of the Coalition of Parties." Similarly, the methodological neutrality he embraced in the *History*, as identified by Forbes, Phillipson, and others, is properly seen as relating to the ideological and historiographical disputes between Whigs and Tories. Hume's neutrality with respect to that dispute, however, has no bearing on the question of whether he was similarly disinterested in the disputes between the Court and the Country. Of course, on the point of Court-Country conflict, Hume did at the very least appear to adopt, either expressly or by implication, a similarly neutral and moderate position in four essays: "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," "Of the First Principles of Government," "Of the Independency of Parliament," and "Of the Parties of Great Britain." Nevertheless, I see little basis for relying either on Hume's self-descriptions or general posture of moderation and neutrality in these essays as evidence that he was not committed to the ends of Court Whiggery.

Hume's remark concerning moderation in "The Politics May Be Reduced to A Science" should be read not as a rejection of partisan commitments of one kind or another in favor of a

kind of split-the-difference, moderate non-partisanship, but as a rejection of a particular tone or style of partisan politics. That rhetorical style encouraged partisan zeal among the members of the political nation, directed them not toward the common good, but that of their particular party, and divested such partisans of any commitment to—and perhaps even the capacity for—independent judgment and political self-reflection. Hume thus took to task these zeal-generating polemicists of the Court and Country, whose respective statements about Robert Walpole, according to Hume, "always carry matters to an extreme, and exaggerate his merit or demerit with regard to the public." The Country, according to Hume, "charge him with the greatest enormities, both in domestic and foreign management; and there is no meanness or crime, of which, in their account, he is not capable . . . his pernicious conduct, it is said, will extend its baleful influence even to posterity, by undermining the best constitution in the world." Hume went on to note that, "on the other hand, the partizans of the minister make his panegyric run as high as the accusations against him, and celebrate his wise, steady, and moderate conduct in every part of his administration."[78]

What Hume proposed in response to these partisan excesses was not an outright abandonment of commitments to either Court or Country and the replacement of those commitments with the embrace of an ill-defined public good. Instead, Hume suggested that both parties should moderate their expressions of resistance or support for the Court. The Country, to the extent a minster was objectionable, could properly oppose him "with a *suitable* degree of zeal," while the Court, for its part, "may be allowed, upon the supposition that the minister were good, to defend, and with *some* zeal too, his administration."[79] Accordingly, Hume was calling not for the moderation, compromise, or desertion of any particular substantive commitment of

---

[78] Hume, "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," in *Essays*, 27-28.
[79] Hume, "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," in *Essays*, 30-31.

Court or Country parties, but instead simply a moderation in the tone of partisans' respective attacks on or defenses of a given ministry, whether Walpole's or otherwise.[80] Indeed, Hume made a substantially similar point in his prefatory remarks to "Of Civil Liberty," where he opined that "Those who employ their pens on political subjects, free from party-rage and party-prejudices, cultivate a science, which, of all others, contributes most to public utility, and even to the private satisfaction of those who addict themselves to the study of it." That type of moderation, it seems to me, in no way requires the conclusion that Hume bore no substantive and principled commitment to either Court or Country, but instead simply that he rejected the employment of extreme rhetoric in the discussion of topics, like Walpole's ministry, over which partisan tempers usually flared.[81] Moreover, given his commitment to established authority, the popular upheaval that English urban scenes had witnessed in the 1730s in response first to the Excise Bill and later the Gin Bill, and the continuing alarmism and invective Country polemicists aimed at the ministry, Hume's concerns about the dangers of extreme political rhetoric are eminently understandable.

This appeal to a moderation in rhetoric can be seen in the three remaining essays that speak to the struggle between Court and Country. In the originally published version of "Of the First Principles of Government," Hume injected himself into the debate over the validity of constituent instructions to Members of Parliament, cautioning that any effort to impose binding instructions on MPs would effect "a total alteration in our government," and expressing his hope that the people of Great Britain would reject "such dangerous novelties."[82] In this way, Hume

---

[80] Hume, "Of Civil Liberty," in *Essays*, 87.
[81] To be sure, Hume had his own views on the Walpole ministry, which I will discuss shortly, and which did sometimes lead him to the same kind of rhetorical excesses that he decried in "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science" and "Of Civil Liberty."
[82] Hume, "Of the First Principles of Government," in *Essays*, 35-36

was defending Great Britain's balanced, mixed constitution in a fashion consistent with Court Whig concerns over the power of the Commons. Nevertheless, Hume continued, the actual debate over instructions in his day was "a very frivolous one," because—at least as he described the matter—the positions of the Country and Court were really not all that far apart. According to Hume, members of the Country party were not arguing that Members of the Commons "should be absolutely bound to follow instructions, as an ambassador or a general is confined by his orders." Similarly, he noted that the Court had not taken the position that the views of the British people should have no weight in the Commons or that a Member should ignore the views of his particular constituents.[83] Consequently, the only real issue was the weight to be afforded to constituent instructions. On that point, however, Hume indicated such a determination would have been exceedingly difficult, which I take in its own way to have been a sideways expression of his dissatisfaction with the idea of instructions even in the modified form he presented.[84]

---

[83] For discussions of the dispute over constituent instructions, see Harris, *Politics and the Nation*, 76, and Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 240-46. Hume might have been straining mightily to claim that the positions between Court and Country were not particularly far apart. While he was correct that the Country party was not seeking to turn Members of the Commons into little more than the shills of their constituents, there were Country polemicists who did take the fairly aggressive view that Members of the Commons who failed to heed constituent instructions on a pending place bill should be voted out of office, a position that Hume fails to mention. On this, see Hugh Hume, Earl of Marchmont, *A Serious Exhortation to the Electors of Great Britain* (London, 1740). Similarly, it is not at all certain that partisans of the Court accepted the idea that electors had any right to express their preferences to their MPs. Instead, it was the view of supporters of the ministry that Members of Parliament represented the entire nation, and so were not beholden to the particular constituencies that had elected them. Harris, *Politics and the Nation*, 76. To take a contrary view, polemicists of the Court argued, risked elevating the people as electors to an unprecedented fourth estate within the British constitution, an estate that risked bringing with it all of the dangers of democracy. Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 241, and Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 187.

[84] Hume, "Of the First Principles of Government," in *Essays*, 606-07. In editions of the *Essays* published from 1764 forward, however, Hume removed the final paragraph of "Of the First Principles . . . ," which had sought to argue that the Court and Country were not as far apart on the issue of instructions as the partisans seemed to believe, or at least present it publicly. Instead, in later editions the essay simply ended on Hume's rejection of the idea of constituent

In the two remaining essays in which he overtly addressed the disputes between Court and Country, Hume continued to strike a seemingly neutral stance toward the Court-Country divide while modeling the kind of discursive moderation he had counseled in "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science." That said, in both essays he also adopted views that comported with the positions of the Court party. In "Of the Independency of Parliament" Hume did not represent himself as a supporter of the Court interest and addressed himself to the issue of Crown patronage in exceedingly measured tones. He nevertheless argued, in customary Court fashion, that the only way to preserve Great Britain's balanced constitution was through the use of patronage.[85] Similarly, in "Of the Parties of Great Britain," Hume presented himself as standing outside each of the five parties he discussed there and further avoided the vitriolic rhetoric that so often characterized treatments of both party as a concept and parties in the particular that were on offer from other political writers of Hanoverian Britain. In the same essay, however, Hume adopted, although in markedly measured tones, a position conventionally associated with the Court and expressly rejected by Country writers, namely, that the distinction between Whigs and Tories survived the Glorious Revolution.[86] Accordingly, while Hume maintained a relatively

---

instructions, presumably in light of the more strident position on instructions that Patriots embraced in the 1750s onward. Ryu Susato also notes that the final lines of the original version seem to suggest some degree of skepticism on Hume's part about the extent to which constituent instructions were even capable of adequate and definite demarcation, although Susato ultimately reaches very different conclusions from mine. Susato, *Hume Skeptical Enlightenment*, 192-93.

[85] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 44-46.

[86] Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 69-72. Most famously, Bolingbroke had argued in *A Dissertation upon Parties* that that any meaningful distinction between Whigs and Tories had vanished from British politics since the Glorious Revolution, except for self-interested efforts by the Court to drive a wedge between members of the opposition by resuscitating this pre-Revolutionary division. See Bolingbroke, *A Dissertation upon Parties*, 71-75 and 185-91. Hume discussed this very point in a footnote to the originally published version of the essay, although he dropped this discussion in his revisions to the 1770 and 1777 editions. See Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 611-12. Contrary to Bolingbroke, ministerial writers insisted that Tories—usually presented in terms of Jacobitism—continued to

even-handed and discursively moderate position between Court and Country in these essays, the substantive commitments he advanced were not, themselves, moderate in the sense of being divested of a commitment to or preference for a particular political faction.

A final point about Hume's claimed even-handedness bears mentioning. Before he turned to his discussion of the patronage issue in "Of the Independency of Parliament" in the essay's original published version, Hume opened with a discussion of the different discursive styles of Court and Country partisans. The latter, Hume observed, "are apt to fly out upon any opposition, and to regard one as a mercenary designing fellow, if he argues with any coolness and impartiality, or makes any concessions to [the Court]." The former, in contrast, Hume found to have been "commonly less assuming and dogmatical in conversation, more apt to make concessions; and tho' not, perhaps, more susceptible of conviction, yet more able to bear contradiction than the latter." Hume then proceeded to consider precisely why this difference obtained, concluding that it must have had something to do with the conventional and popular nature of the Country party's positions relative to those of the Court. Given that popularity, Country partisans simply were not in the habit of encountering people with whom they disagreed, and so were more inclined to fly off the handle when they did. Court partisans, in contrast, knew they were surrounded by people who objected to Court views, and so had to

---

plague Britain's social and political stability well into the eighteenth century. Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 178-79. Similarly, the Court Whigs were inclined to characterize Commonwealth or Old Whigs as radical republicans. *Id.* As I discussed in Chapter 4, these Court positions can be seen in Addison's *Spectator* essays, which provided inspiration for Hume's own work in the essay genre. All this being said, Hume's engagement with the continued presence of Tories and Whigs in the British political mix assumed a far more measured tone than that of the Court polemicists. Rather than associating all post-revolution Tories with outright Jacobitism, Hume described a Tory as "*a lover of monarchy, though without abandoning liberty; and a partisan of the family of* STUART." Hume simply defined a Whig as "*a lover of liberty though without renouncing monarchy; and a friend to the settlement in the* PROTESTANT *line*." Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 71 (emphasis in the original).

present them in a palatable and reasonable manner.[87] Interestingly, Hume then went on to engage

in his analysis of the substantive question of patronage in non-dogmatic and measured tones.

Although Hume might have been using this prefatory discussion simply as a framing device for

the essay, it seems to me that it is also at least possible that he was using his initial discussion of

the conversational styles of the two parties to signal to his readers that his own reasonable, non-

dogmatic, and accommodating style marked him as a partisan of the Court.

On the potential objection that some of Hume's essays indicated sympathy for the

Country or animosity toward the Court, on a close inspection none of these essays support either

conclusion.[88] To briefly summarize the three, in the first public version of "A Character of Sir

---

[87] Hume, "Of the Independency of Parliament," in *Essays*, 43na, and 608-09. For reasons I have not been able to determine, Hume decided not to include these introductory paragraphs in editions of the *Essays* published after 1760.

[88] As noted above, these three essays are "Of Civil Liberty" (1741), "Of Public Credit" (1752), and "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole" (1742). A fourth essay might be raised as evidence that Hume should have been counted among the Commonwealth, Opposition, or Old Whigs or some branch of the Country party, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," which Hume published in his 1752 volume of essays, *Political Discourses*. In that essay Hume developed a plan for an extensive republic that would purportedly hinder the formation of that great bane of republics, faction, a plan that, as I discussed in Chapter 2, contemporary scholars have identified as a source of inspiration for James Madison and his argument for an extensive republic in *The Federalist*, No. 10. There have been two general views of this essay, neither of which takes this essay to serve as evidence that Hume's active political commitments were radical, Country, or republican. The first is that "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth" was simply a *jeu d'esprit*. For this position, see Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*, 158; Whelan, *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 342; and Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Pursuit of Certainty: David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Beatrice Webb* (Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 1998), 89. A second line of thought sees Hume's statement of an ideal commonwealth as a genuinely aspirational statement about a peaceful, well-organized, and commercially prosperous political order. For this position see John Robertson, "The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, eds. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, 169-177; Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*, 282-84; Livingston, "Hume's Historical Conception of Liberty," in *Liberty in Hume's* History of England, eds. Nicholas Capaldi and Donald W. Livingston (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1990), 105-54, 132-34; Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 199-200; and Ryu Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*.

Robert Walpole" (1742), originally published just one month before Walpole's fall, Hume took

direct aim at *the* Court Whig of Court Whigs, criticizing the minister for a lack of talent and

---

Robertson, mistakenly in my estimation, sees "Idea . . ." as part of a project on Hume's part to marry the benefits of modern commercial society with political forms that would make possible the enjoyment of more conventionally republican notions of liberty. On this reading, then, Robertson regards "Idea . . ." as Hume's model for the reform of British commercial society while, Robertson claims, maintaining much of the historical particularity of British social and political forms. Similarly, Stewart reads "Idea . . ." as Hume's statement of what the best possible political system for a modern commercial society should look like if one were constructing it from scratch. Stewart also, however, notes that Hume observed in the fourth volume of the *History* that the stability provided by an established political system ought not be gainsaid, and so reads "Idea…" as strictly a thought experiment in ideal politics, not as a statement of Hume's active political commitments. Susato reads Hume's "Idea . . ." as a statement of his preference for republicanism, but only to the extent that republicanism could be accompanied by "a well-designed system of representation." Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 184. This would seem to leave as an open question Hume's preferred political form in those instances in which a well-designed system of representation were not available. As for Livingston, he, like Robertson, sees Hume as having been committed to the republican civic tradition and so regards "Idea . . ." as Hume's unqualified statement of "the most perfect form of civilized government." Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 199. As with Susato, however, Livingston specifies that only a special kind of republic would be ideal, most notably one with a federal form. *Ibid.* Indeed, in a 1775 letter to his nephew and namesake, Hume expressed agreement with John Millar that republicanism was the finest form of government and noted that modern republics seem to have corrected the most violent factional excesses of ancient republics. That being said, Hume then went on to observe that established governments should not be rejected in favor of speculative political schemes, that republics were only properly suited for small states, and that efforts at bringing republicanism to Britain would result only in "Anarchy, which is the immediate Forerunner of Despotism." Hume to David Hume, Edinburgh, 8 December 1775, 2:306. Moreover, there is ample evidence that, irrespective of what Hume regarded as the best form of an ideal government, in the messy realities of eighteenth-century Europe Hume's preference among actually realized forms of government could be found either in Great Britain's mixed government or in the civilized absolute monarchies of the continent, in particular Bourbon France. This conclusion can be seen, I will argue, most notably in "Of the Independency of Parliament," "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic," and "Of Civil Liberty"—all published in 1741—1742's "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," and 1748's "Of the Original Contract," as well as Hume's observations about established authority in the fourth volume of the *History*, which Stewart cites. Finally, one additional point bears mentioning: the perfect commonwealth Hume was proposing was *not* one that complied with the Country party's shibboleth of the ancient constitution. Even, then, if "Idea" demonstrated that Hume's ultimate loyalties lied with republicanism—and as the remainder of this chapter will make clear, I do not think they did—the innovative constitutional order that Hume proposed was in no way consistent with the Country's program.

"calmly wish[ing] his fall."[89] The question of the public debt figured in both of the other two essays. In "Of Civil Liberty" (1741), Hume bemoaned the practice of "free governments"—a category in which he naturally included the British government—of assuming substantial debts, which, he worried, could lead to a crushing tax burden or financial constraints that would leave Great Britain incapable of mustering resources sufficient for national defense in the case of some new emergency.[90] The only way out of such a predicament, he noted, was the cancellation of the public debt, but given that in popular governments the people—especially the wealthiest among them—both held the debt and public offices, it was unlikely that the government would take advantage of such a measure.[91]

Similarly, although in "Of Public Credit" (1752) Hume briefly observed that the British public debt brought with it certain economic benefits, he went on to enumerate several problems with the debt, including the concentration of people and capital in London, rising prices for goods and labor, the levying of ever more oppressive taxes, the possibility of a drain of capital or people to those foreign nation's holding a share of Great Britain's sovereign debt, and the development of a class of idle rentiers living off of payments on the debt.[92] Most troubling of all

---

[89] Hume, "A Character of Robert Walpole," in *Essays*, 574-76. As I will discuss below, the version of this essay published in 1742 differed somewhat from its original form, as on publication Hume included an addendum that expressed regret at the tone of the essay.

[90] Recall that just the year before this essay was first published Great Britain had entered the War of the Austrian Succession, the first major international conflict in which it had been involved since the termination of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714.

[91] Hume, "Of Civil Liberty," in *Essays*, 95-96.

[92] Hume, "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 354-55. Describing the benefits of the public debt, Hume observed that the debt provided merchants with excess capital with investment opportunities that were more passive than land, as the latter required investors' greater attention and care. In this way, then, investing in the debt allow those merchants to remain active in commerce. Moreover, by providing merchants with another source of income, Hume reasoned that the public debt might lead investing merchants to require less profit in their primary line of work, this benefitting the public with lower prices. Hume, "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 353-54. Hume

for Hume, and as he had previously observed in "Of Civil Liberty," was the possibility that the growing public debt might leave the British people financially hamstrung in the event of a war or other international crisis. In particular, Hume worried that Great Britain might be left powerless in the face of a continental power—by which of course he meant France—that, because of the limits on British finances, had been permitted to run amok over the remainder of Europe.[93] Starting with the 1764 edition of his essays, Hume also added the concern that the growing public debt might entirely disenfranchise the landed classes in favor of the holders of the public debt, a result that risked corruption and ultimately despotism. As Hume put the point, the hereditary landed class had historically served as "a kind of independent magistracy," which could be called on by the king to resist popular uprising but that could also oppose a tyrannical monarch. The growth of the public debt would, Hume worried, eventually eliminate this intermediate power in the British social order.[94]

The problem with pointing to these essays as evidence of Hume's rejection of or indifference toward Court ideology or his embrace of the Country's program is that when read in context none of them articulate an actual rejection of Court ideology or approval of the Country's agenda. To be sure, despite Hume's appeal to both Court and Country for a moderation of rhetoric in "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," in the original version of "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole," Hume had some uncharacteristically tart remarks for the prime minister, noting that Walpole was "a man of ability, not a genius; good-natured, not virtuous; constant, not magnanimous; moderate, not equitable."[95] Nevertheless, as originally

rehearsed similar arguments in a letter to the Baron de Montesquieu written three years earlier. Hume to Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, London, 10 April 1749, 1:137

[93] Hume, "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 358-65.

[94] Hume, "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 358-59.

[95] Hume, "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole," in *Essays*, 575.

written, the essay was more moderate than most public statements against Walpole, ending as it did with Hume's wish both for Walpole's removal from office and his hope that Walpole would be permitted to retire to his home "to pass the remainder of his days in ease and pleasure." Members of the Country opposition were far from similarly magnanimous; when Walpole did leave office they managed to secure the creation of a secret committee in the Commons charged with investigating the last ten years of Walpole's ministry and introduced a bill of pains and penalties against Walpole, a measure that Hume opposed.[96] The opposition press, as one might expect, screamed for Walpole's head.

In contrast, when the time came for Hume's essay on Walpole to be published, just one month before the great man's fall, Hume had moderated his sentiments even further. Writing in the Advertisement to the January 1742 volume of the *Essays*, Hume noted that the essay had been written "some Months ago," and with Walpole's departure appearing, by the time of publication, to be a foregone conclusion, Hume felt obligated to "confess, that . . . I am inclin'd to think more favourably of him, and to suspect, that the Antipathy, which every true born *Briton* naturally bears to Ministers of State, inspir'd me with some Prejudice against him." Hume went on to express the hope that the "impartial READER, if any there be; or Posterity, if such a Trifle can reach them, will best be able to correct my Mistakes in this Particular."[97] Not content, apparently, to leave such correction to the readers of either his own day or some future time, Hume, starting with the 1748 edition of the *Essays* divested the "Character" of its status as a standalone essay and refashioned it as a mere footnote at the end of "That Politics May Be

---

[96] Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 221; Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*, 189. In the 1742 letter to William Mure I mentioned previously, Hume expressed his opposition to the bill of pains and particulars against Walpole. Hume to William Mure, 14 November 1742 (surmised), 1:43-44.

[97] Hume, "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole," in *Essays*, 574-75 n. 1.

Reduced to a Science," the very same essay in which he had cautioned greater rhetorical restraint in partisans' discussions of and writings on Walpole. In demoting this essay to the status of a footnote, Hume further softened its tone, remarking that, while the former essay had once been his opinion of Walpole, he was pleased to discover that, with the passage of time, his opinions of Walpole had moderated. Hume also made it clear that, from a distance, the only significant flaw he could see in Walpole's administration had been Walpole's failure not to pay down more of the national debt. Starting with the 1770 edition of the *Essays*, Hume excised the substance of "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole" completely.

Given the weight that Hume's concern with the national debt played in his displeasure with Walpole's ministry, it strikes me as misplaced to read the "Character of Sir Robert Walpole" as evidence of Hume's rejection *tout court* of Court Whig ideology or the Court Whig project. Hume's complaint with Walpole seems to have borne no relation to the increasing concentration of political power in the Court or the more specific issue of patronage, that is, the issues of constitutional substance that most basically animated the Country's ire. Moreover, Hume did not seem to have been similarly troubled by the ministries of Walpole's immediate successors, Henry Pelham and Thomas Pelham-Holles, the Duke of Newcastle, who continued the project of Court Whiggery after Walpole's fall. Accordingly, Hume's treatment of Walpole in the "Character" essay does not seem to speak to the issue of Hume's ideological commitments.

The same conclusion follows in response to Hume's concern over the debt, whether he was expressing that concern in his emendations to his remarks on Walpole or in "Of Civil Liberty" and "Of Public Credit." Put simply, that concern, in itself, does not situate Hume in the camp of either the Court or the Country. As a preliminary matter, while the concern over the

238

national debt was a fixture in Country arguments against the ministries of Walpole and the Pelhams and the Court project more generally, the Court Whigs also worried about the growth of the public debt, although they were not especially concerned about the mere existence of the debt but instead with managing the size and terms of its repayment. As Hume himself implicitly conceded in his 1748 additions to the "Character," Walpole did take steps to reduce the debt; Hume simply found Walpole's efforts insufficient.[98] Similarly, Henry Pelham worked out a significant mid-century consolidation and interest-rate reduction on the debt, which would have reduced annual servicing on the debt by twenty-five percent had not the outbreak of the Seven Years' War required the assumption of further debt.[99] Accordingly, the issue of the debt, while handled in different registers by Court and Country, quite simply did not serve as the defining fault line that, for example, matters of royal patronage or even the frequency of parliamentary elections did. To say, then, that Hume's mere worry over the debt put him at ideological odds with Court Whiggery goes too far.

Moreover, when looking at the essays that were specifically addressed to the issue of the debt, most of Hume's worries simply do not sound in the same register as the criticisms lodged by Country politicians and polemicists. That is, Hume's original stated concerns with the debt related not to matters of constitutional structure, the conflicting interests of the financiers and the landed classes, or the financiers' purported lack of civic virtue. Instead, as originally stated, Hume's analysis of the debt related to its effects on Great Britain's economic vitality—an area in which he allowed some salutary consequences—and her war-making capabilities, especially as

---

[98] For a discussion of Walpole's efforts at reducing the national debt, see Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England*, 204-12.

[99] Dickson, *The Financial Revolution*, 236-43; Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 123-124.

they related to eighteenth-century Britain's great rival, Bourbon France.[100] Hume's initial argument, then, was not related to the moral fiber of the British people or a concern over the maintenance of ancient martial rigor. Instead, his early analysis of the debt sounded solely in the ranges of technocratic fiscal policy and *realpolitik* balance of power.

Nevertheless, in 1764 Hume added six paragraphs to "Of Public Credit," and those amendments brought a far more strident, alarmed, and politically charged tone to the essay. In these additions Hume anticipated a day not too far off when the tax on land amounted to eighteen or nineteen shillings to the pound and excises and customs were "screwed up to the utmost which the nation can bear." In that event, Hume warned, "the seeds of ruin are here scattered with such profusion as not to escape the eye of the most careless observer." Specifically, Hume expected that such a state of affairs would provide the financiers of Great Britain inordinate economic and social power, and he went on to describe the financial class as men with no meaningful loyalty to Great Britain who would be inclined to "bury themselves in the capital or in great cities, and who will sink into the lethargy of a stupid and pampered luxury, without spirit, ambition, or enjoyment. *Adieu to all ideas of nobility, gentry, and family*."[101] Hume continued, explaining that its easily transferrable nature meant that the financial class's wealth would "seldom be transmitted during three generations from father to son," and, consequently, would prevent the moneyed class's members from securing the same kind of hereditary social authority and sense of responsibility that marked the landed aristocracy. These deficiencies, Hume reasoned, coupled with the impoverishment of the landed classes, meant that Great Britain would be left without a class willing or able to perform the traditional functions of the aristocracy: a role in the

---

[100] Hume, "Of Civil Liberty," in *Essays*, 96; "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 353-55 and 364-65. On this point, see also Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 174-75.

[101] Hume, "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 357-58 (emphasis added).

prevention and suppression of rebellions and a countervailing force against the Crown's constant thirst for more power.[102] The results, Hume predicted, would be an exclusive reliance on a mercenary army and the emergence of royal despotism.[103]

To be entirely fair, taken in isolation, Hume's alarm in these paragraphs could plausibly be read as sounding in the register of a Country Tory, as it critiques the debt in terms of its weakening of the landed classes and the corruption to private morals, public virtue, and Britain's balanced constitution that, the Tories believed, would accompany such a weakening.[104] Nevertheless, I read Hume's 1764 additions in a way that is consistent with understanding Hume as a Court Whig. First, I find the timing of these additions telling, given that they came in the wake of the Seven Years' War. The national debt over the course of that conflict had grown from £74.6 million to £132.6 million. This massive growth of the debt in a mere seven years had been of less concern to Patriots like William Pitt and of greater concern to Court Whigs like the Duke of Newcastle. Indeed, given that Newcastle had sought to end the war earlier than Pitt, and that Pitt had been at least willing to follow popular calls for the most advantageous terms possible with the French, we should read Hume's less-moderate tone in the 1764 amendments as, in part, his effort at shaming the Patriot Whig impulse for needlessly extending the war with France and similarly needlessly adding to the debt.[105]

Both an earlier essay and later correspondence support this conclusion. In "Of the Balance of Power" (1752), written in large measure in support of Great Britain's role in

---

[102] Hume, "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 358.

[103] Hume, "Of Public Credit," in *Essays*, 358-59.

[104] For the seminal study arguing that Hume can best be understood as a Tory, see Giuseppe Giarizzo, *David Hume Politico e Storico* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore S.p.A., 1962).

[105] For a discussion of the differences between the Duke of Newcastle and William Pitt the Elder over the prosecution of the Seven Years' War and the financial strains it imposed, see Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 115-27.

containing Bourbon France, Hume observed that while Britain's wars with France "have been begun with justice, and even, perhaps, from necessity; [they] have always been too far pushed from obstinacy and passion." Hume, in semi-prophetic fashion, observed that the Nine Years' War could have been ended five years earlier, the War of the Spanish Succession four years earlier, and the War of the Austrian Succession five years earlier. One can almost hear Hume's rueful tone when he concluded this point, writing, "we see, that above half of our wars with France, and all our public debts, are owing more to our own imprudent vehemence, than to the ambition of our neighbors."[106] The same criticism likely played a substantial role in Hume's uncharacteristically immoderate tone in the 1764 amendments to "Of Public Credit."

In that exact vein, Hume, writing to William Strahan in 1771, complained that "in six months of an unnecessary War" Pitt had incurred more debt than Great Britain had been able to pay back in eight years of peace. Driving home the point against Patriot Whigs like Pitt, Hume observed that no matter how productive Great Britain's agriculture and manufacturing might be, "all this is nothing in comparison of the continual Encrease of our Debts, in every idle War, into which, it seems, the Mob of London are to rush every Minister."[107] To be sure, and as I just noted, Hume was not disinclined to support British involvement in continental wars, another way in which he differed from Tories; one of Hume's greatest concerns in writing "Of Public Credit" was a desire to preserve Great Britain's financial maneuverability, were it necessary to engage militarily with a surging continental power. What separated Hume (and Newcastle and other Court Whigs) from Pitt and the Patriot Whigs was the latter's insistence on prosecuting war with France almost as a matter of political faith, irrespective of the economic strains it might inflict

---

[106] Hume, "Of the Balance of Power," in *Essays*, 339.
[107] Hume to William Strahan, Edinburgh, 11 March 1771, 1:237.

upon Great Britain. It was this faith, then, and the financial burdens it was causing Great Britain to incur, that I take Hume to have been addressing, at least in part, in the 1764 additions.

Beyond the immediate issue of the significant growth in the national debt stemming from the Seven Years' War, the substance of Hume's 1764 changes to the essay could as easily have been a statement of Court Whig, rather than Country Tory, concerns about the aristocracy and the gentry. That is, although Court Whigs eschewed the republicanism of Country Tories like Bolingbroke, which sought to emphasize and invigorate the landed class's political authority and independence, they shared the Country Tories' view of the landed classes as partners in the social and political order. As Reed Browning has noted, the Court Whigs, like the Country opposition, did worry about the effect that power might have on liberty.[108] Unlike members of the Country party, however, the Court party held that men of a certain bearing and station could be trusted with power and were the best defenders of British liberty, especially against the common rabble that Patriot Whigs risked inciting.[109] In particular, such men, by dint of their estates were unlikely to be corrupted by a power-hungry monarch.[110] Moreover, Court Whigs held that the nobility in particular operated as a means of balancing the Crown and the Commons, thus maintaining the equilibrium of the British constitution, as recommended by classical political thinkers like Aristotle, Polybius, and Cicero.[111] Hume's concerns that the need to pay the debt would lead to the impoverishment of the landed classes, and thus remove from the constitutional balance a necessary weight, stands in direct continuity with the policies of Court Whigs.

---

[108] Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 183.
[109] Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 203. On this point, see also Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 125-30.
[110] Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*, 185. For the same reason, the Court Whig held that efforts at passing a place bill were pointless.
[111] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 143-46.

In light of the foregoing, it strikes me that none of these three superficially "Country" essays actually support the conclusion that Hume was either opposed to the Court's project or sympathetic to that of the Country. The concerns Hume expressed about the debt and Walpole's ministry do not speak to the most basic divisions between Court and Country, relating to constitutional structure and the growth of Court power. Accordingly, the notion that one might point to any or all three of these essays as evidence of Hume's disagreement with Court Whig ideology or allegiance to that of the Country Tories does not withstand serious scrutiny.[112] The most comprehensive reading of Hume's relevant works, then, leads us to the conclusion that Hume was ideologically committed to the project of Court Whiggery.

COURT WHIGGERY AND THE DEFENSE OF THE POLITE COMMERCIAL ORDER

In the second chapter, I argued that Hume regarded not religious but political factions as the greatest threat to the social order of his day, specifically those factions like the Country party, Commonwealth Whigs, and the Patriot movement, which insisted on adherence to speculative political theories like social contract theory and the ancient constitution and operated as sites of social agitation. In this chapter, I have developed the position that Hume, contrary to those who see him as having been a political neutral, was in fact ideologically committed to the Court party's project of consolidating state power in the Court, most notably through the Crown's patronage power. Both sets of views, I contend, proceeded from Hume's conviction that the polite commercial order of his day depended upon the centralization of power that accompanied the rise of the modern state, a project that Hume regarded as having started with the Tudors and

---

[112] For another reading of the 1764 additions to "Of Public Credit," especially Hume's reference to "the several ranks of men, which form a kind of independent magistracy in a state" as his non-Tory argument for the political and social importance of the aristocracy as a bulwark against royal despotism, see Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 174-80.

that in his own day he associated with the Court party. As a result, Hume was ideologically committed to the Court's political project, as the Court represented the faction of his day most committed to the maintenance of the established order. The Country party, in turn, met with Hume's disapproval because its insistence on adherence to a mythic ancient constitution, if embraced as a serious political project, would have jeopardized the maintenance of the strong state power that Hume saw as necessary for the maintenance and continuation of modern commercial refinement.

Both the *Essays* and the *History* support this reading of Hume's political commitments. They also operated as the vehicle by which Hume sought to bring to his middling readers' attention the association of modern centralized state power and a polite commercial order. At the same time, they operated to point out the great inconveniences and outright barbarism of those eras to which the Country appealed when it sought to rally the middling order to the banner of the ancient constitution. Given, as John Brewer and Nicholas Rogers have noted, that the eighteenth-century middling order shared with the Country a general antipathy for the patronage system that defined the Court's project of political centralization, it would make sense that Hume would devote himself to convincing the middling sort that the very style of life they enjoyed depended upon the Court's project and bore no relation to the kind of "order" to which the Country party appealed.[113] This conclusion would seem to be strengthened given that Hume wrote the essays with which I will be engaging here at the height of the Opposition's campaign against Walpole, and that in the two earliest editions of the *Essays* Hume bemoaned the attraction that the principles of the Tories—by which he almost certainly meant those of the Country Tories or possibly the Opposition *tout court*—held for members of England's middling

---

[113] Brewer, "Commercialization and Politics," in *Birth of a Consumer Society*, 199; Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 50-67, 126-27, and 392-94.

ranks.[114] It also made sense that in the furtherance of this task Hume would employ two genres—the essay and the history—that were commonly associated with the culture of politeness and that would thus have appealed to polite middling readers more than, say, a philosophical treatise. In short, I am saying that in the *Essays* and the *History* we can see Hume not only providing detached philosophical meditations on matters of then-current moment, in particular a sustained critique of the notion of an ancient constitution, but also offering to his middling readers a subtle argument for the Court party's modernizing project of consolidating and rationalizing government power in the ministry.

Hume's effort at leading his bourgeois audience to accept—if not outright embrace—the centralizing project of the Court party can be seen in two of his earliest published essays, 1741's "Of Civil Liberty" and 1742's "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences."[115] In the latter, as the title suggests, Hume sought to account for the modern rise of the arts and sciences, including, of course, the polite arts that had so come to define Britain's commercial middling orders. As Hume explained, the emergence of the arts and sciences required a stable social order, one that secured subjects not merely against the predations of criminals and outsiders, but from the arbitrary will of rulers as well. In short, they required a government of regular laws and administration, because only under such governments are people secure enough in their persons and property to follow their more inquisitive and creative impulses, pursuits that give rise to knowledge and the arts and sciences.[116]

---

[114] M. M. Goldsmith, "Faction Detected: Ideological Consequences of Robert Walpole's Decline and Fall," *History* 64, no. 210 (1979), 14-15; Hume, "of the Parties of Great Britain," in *Essays*, 616 n. k.

[115] Before the 1758 edition of the *Essays* Hume had entitled "Of Civil Liberty" as "Of Liberty and Despotism."

[116] Hume, "of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," in *Essays*, 118.

At the inception of the arts and sciences in both antiquity and early modernity, Hume argued, their dependence on the rule of law meant that the arts and sciences could emerge only in those countries where "the people enjoy the blessing of a free government," by which Hume meant republics and mixed monarchies. As Hume saw it, pure monarchies in antiquity and early modernity were always marked by arbitrary rule and so were incapable of giving rise to or otherwise supporting the arts and sciences. Hume also, however, drew a distinction between free governments that were marked by a rule of law and those that were as arbitrary as ancient monarchies. Although free governments, he observed, tend to develop the rule of law more quickly than do monarchies, he nevertheless specified that there have been barbarous forms of free government—again, those in an earlier stage of development—that have also suffered from arbitrary administration and thus tended to have been exceedingly unstable and incapable of supporting the arts and sciences.[117]

Hume complicated this picture even further by specifying that although the arts and sciences might only *arise* in regular free governments—as opposed to the arbitrary and barbarous kind—in a system of "neighbouring and independent states, connected together by commerce and policy," they could very easily be transplanted to *any* type of government, whether free or fully monarchical, provided that they had embraced a regular system of law.[118] In

---

[117] Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," in *Essays*, 118.

[118] Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," in *Essays*, 119-23. As Hume explained, the presence of a variety of relatively small independent states in close contact with one other placed limits on abuses of government power and the stifling effect of local conventional wisdom. In geographically extensive social and political units like the Roman Empire, pre-Reformation Latin Christendom, and China, only those parts of the realm actually subjected to acts of violent oppression will know of the government's excesses, while in smaller states word of them will eventually spread to the whole. Moreover, in such domains the sovereign is, for most, fairly remote, and is thus able to assume a more mysterious and powerful air, while in smaller states he is likely to be known by a larger share of his subjects. Finally, Hume observed that in a system of smaller states the ideas and fashions of each country would

this way, then, just as Hume had distinguished between barbarous free governments and those governed by laws, he also identified a distinction between barbarous monarchies and what he termed civilized monarchies. These monarchies owed their regular and civilizing system of laws and institutions to those free governments in which they were in close contact, and in so borrowing they developed a more stable and reliable social and legal order, which, in turn, again allowed for the development of the arts and sciences.[119] Accordingly, Hume saw both free governments and monarchies with stable, regular legal systems as capable of participating in the enjoyment and development of the arts and sciences. In particular, he held that civilized monarchies were especially accomplished in the polite arts, most notably the art of conversation. In this case, he was clearly thinking of the absolutist monarchy of Bourbon France.[120]

This point becomes even clearer when we consider "Of Civil Liberty," in which Hume claimed that he had intended to use that essay to show the advantages of free governments over absolute monarchies.[121] Having no sooner said so, however, Hume then proceeded to argue that

---

be subject to the examination and critique of the others, thus leading to the general improvement of the arts and sciences.

[119] Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," in *Essays*, 125-26. For an extensive and exceedingly useful discussion of Hume's typology of regimes, which I have borrowed in my analysis, see Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*, 142-62.

[120] Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," in *Essays*, 127 ("Politeness of manners, therefore, arises most naturally in monarchies and courts; and where that flourishes, none of the liberal arts will be altogether neglected or despised.") See also Hume's already-mentioned letter to Michael Ramsay. Hume to Michael Ramsay, Rheims, 12 September 1734, 1:20. ("the French have more real Politeness & the English the better Method of expressing it. By real Politeness I mean Softness of Temper, & a sincere Inclination to oblige & be serviceable; which is very conspicuous . . . not only among the high but low, insomuch that the Porters and the Coachmen here are civil, & that not only to Gentlemen but likewise among themselves, so that I have not yet seen one Quarrel in France, tho' they are every where to be met in England.")

[121] Hume, "Of Civil Liberty," in *Essays*, 89. In the 1741, 1742, and 1748 versions of the essay Hume instead stated that his intent in writing the essay was "to show the Advantages and Disadvantages of each." Hume switched to the language I have quoted above with the 1753 edition of the *Essays*. Nevertheless, the irony of the above-quoted version is not entirely lost in

absolutist France ultimately did a better job of promoting learning and the polite arts than almost

any other people:

> The ENGLISH are, perhaps, greater philosophers; the ITALIANS better painters and musicians; the ROMANS were greater orators: But the FRENCH are the only people, except the GREEKS, who have been at once philosophers, poets, orators, historians, painters, architects, sculptors, and musicians. With regard to the stage they have excelled even the GREEKS, who far excelled the ENGLISH. And, in common life, they have, in a great measure, perfected that art, the most useful and agreeable of any, *l'Art de Vivre*, the art of society and conversation.[122]

In a similar vein, echoing his analysis in the *Treatise* and reflecting a point he would develop in

"Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," Hume observed that commerce was also

flourishing in Bourbon France and attributed this fact to the security that private property

enjoyed in Europe's civilized monarchies. Amplifying his point, Hume observed that in modern

times "all kinds of governments, free and absolute, seem to have undergone . . . a great change

for the better." Notable, in the case of Europe's civilized monarchies, was that they had

embraced the rule of law, with which Hume associated "order, method, and constancy," albeit

"to a surprising degree." Given this embrace of such a regular form of government, Hume

observed of modern monarchies, "Property is there secure; industry encouraged; the arts flourish;

and the prince lives secure among his subjects, like a father among his children."[123]

Hume expanded on these matters at greater length in the *History*. Coming to the very end

of the work, although in what would formally become the *History*'s second volume, Hume noted

that it was only with the accession of the Tudors that England saw the end of a succession of

---

the earlier versions of the essay. In both versions Hume claims that he will have positive things to say about liberty, but in both versions he then proceeds only to laud "despotism."

[122] Hume, "Of Civil Liberty," in *Essays*, 90-91.

[123] Hume, "Of Civil Liberty," in *Essays*, 94. Perhaps feeling the weight of being a good Briton pressing upon him, Hume insisted that monarchical governments remained inferior to free governments in gentleness and stability.

"barbarous ages" and reached "the dawn of civility and sciences," what he described in a letter to William Strahan as "the Commencement of modern History."[124] The event above all others, according to Hume, that had led to this rebirth of civilization was the accidental discovery in 1130 of Justinian's Digests, a find that revived the civil law on the continent and inspired the English to improve upon their own legal system, elevating it "from its original state of rudeness and imperfection."[125] As Hume told the tale, the study and practice of law came to be regarded as a noble occupation and soon was operating as means for social advancement alternative to the more traditional avenue of martial excellence. Moreover, following from his discussion of the development of the rule of law in "Of Civil Liberty," Hume observed that the emergence of a civilized legal system brought with it greater certainty in the administration of justice, and so greater security and improvement in "all other arts." As a particularly significant example, Hume cited developments in commerce and agriculture that ultimately led feudal lords to free peasants from their villeinage in favor of leasehold tenancies. As a result, Hume emphasized, the very last law to enforce more traditional feudal tenures was enacted during the reign of Henry VII. As Hume saw it, the development of law and regular administration in England was accompanied by both material improvements and, as he put it, "the introduction and progress of freedom," so that by the advent of Tudor reign, England was poised to begin the project of modern state-formation.[126]

In addition to the changes he identified in the practical arts and personal liberty from feudal tenures, Hume observed that the Tudor period was also marked by a growth in learning and the polite arts as well as the growth in royal power. The age of Henry VII saw "beginning

---

[124] Hume, *History of England*, 2:518; Hume to William Strahan (surmised), Edinburgh, 25 May 1757, 1:251.
[125] Hume, *History of England*, 2:520-21.
[126] Hume, *History of England*, 2:521-54.

luxury and refinement," and at the same time the nobles were granted the right to alienate their ancient feudal estates, a liberty that, perversely, had the effect of reducing their power relative to the crown and the rising class of new men. As Hume noted, "It is probable, that Henry foresaw and intended this consequence."[127] Reflecting on the reign of Henry VIII, Hume pointed out that Henry had been a great patron of learning, the first such great monarchical patron England had seen since Alfred the Great.[128] Specifically, Henry founded Cambridge's Trinity College and elevated the status of letters to such a degree that learning itself became fashionable in England. As Hume noted, "Erasmus speaks with great satisfaction of the general regard paid by the nobility and gentry to men of knowledge," although the only author of the period who even approached the status of a classical author in Hume's estimation was Thomas More.[129] At the same time, however, Henry VIII went to well-documented lengths to consolidate royal power, most notably in his break with Rome. Apart from its effects on the governance of the English church, the reformation made the administration of justice more regular by rendering the clergy subject to the secular courts for crimes like murder and treason, and by substantially limiting the privilege of sanctuary, which previously both clergy and laity had enjoyed, even for murder and high treason. Henry was also able to secure an apparent right to receive the proceeds from shipping duties, a right that provided the monarch with significant discretionary revenue that continued up to the ill-fated reign of Charles I.[130]

Similarly, Hume pointed out that the nobility's embrace of luxury in residences and apparel under Elizabeth had two general effects, both of them salutary from an eighteenth-century perspective. First, the related expenditures operated as a spur to industry and the arts.

---

[127] Hume, *History of England*, 3:77.
[128] Hume, *History of England*, 3:331 and 1:75-81.
[129] Hume, *History of England*, 3:331-32.
[130] Hume, *History of England*, 3:324 and 3:326.

Second, the same expenditures left the nobility with less disposable income to spend on retainers, thus rendering them more susceptible to exertions of power by the sovereign and the equal execution of the laws against them.[131] The greater Tudor monarchs, then, were instrumental in bringing into existence both the early flourishing of English arts, letters, and economic development while also introducing a more centralized and regular government administration.

The same trends continued under James I, despite the Country view of him as the villain who first introduced Stuart absolutist pretensions to England. As Hume explained, "during no preceding period in English history, was there a more sensible encrease, than during the reign of this monarch, of all the advantages which distinguish a flourishing people." Industry, commerce, trade, the arts, and learning all grew during his reign, although the last of these to a less successful degree than the others.[132] Nevertheless, in the reigns of absolutists like Elizabeth and James I, Hume made clear, there was a veritable explosion of noteworthy authors including Spencer, Shakespeare, Donne, Bacon, Ben Johnson, Walter Raleigh, and even James I, himself. Although Hume found the ultimate quality of these authors' works in large measure lacking, he also acknowledged that it was with these works and during these reigns that English literature began to find its footing.[133]

The foregoing underlines two points. First, Hume recognized the commercial prosperity and the middling politeness of his day were neither eternal nor natural. Instead, they had come into existence as the product of a long historical process, a process in which the growth of centralized power in the monarch had played a crucial role. Indeed, as Hume saw it, the development of commerce, civil peace, and the polite arts and learning had all depended upon

---

[131] Hume, *History of England*, 3:383-84.
[132] Hume, *History of England*, 4:142-49.
[133] Hume, *History of England*, 4:149-55.

the more regularized administration of law and government that had begun with the early Tudor monarchs and was extended under the Stuarts. Given his recognition of this relationship, Hume also recognized that the polite social order of his day was both contingent and fragile. This order was contingent because, as Hume saw it, the development of the more regularized social order in his day depended upon a variety of historical events and accidents that could have played out differently. Similarly, this order was fragile because it relied upon a kind of sweet spot having been reached, one situated between the relative chaos and barbarism that had usually been features of European and English social life before the high and late middle ages and, alternatively, a despotism that was not uncommon in human history.

Second, Hume was seeking to bring his insights about the nature of social order, legal and political forms, and historical processes to the attention of his polite, middling readers, who might otherwise have been inclined to support the program of the Country party. That program, under the banner of the ancient constitution, ran counter to the continuing project of consolidating government power in the Court, a project that Hume saw as the best hope for the maintenance of social order, commercial flourishing, and the enjoyment of polite refinement, and that Hume sought to defend in his essays and the *History*. In these works, then, we should see Hume as being engaged in a struggle to demonstrate to his reading public that the world as they knew it was not natural, that it proceeded from a variety of forces barely understood, and that the liberty and comfort they enjoyed could not be separated from the power that the Court was drawing to itself. Following the Country party in its efforts at bringing the British state into alignment with an ancient constitution of independent estates and an unleashed House of Commons would, on Hume's account, jeopardize all of the emergent British state's hard-won

victories over barbarism and civil disorder, victories from which Hume's polite readers were benefitting, although in the latter's case all too often unknowingly.

As Hume saw it, the pressing threat to that order was not, as Phillipson has argued, the possibility of religious strife, but instead the prospect of civil disorder brought about by political factions animated by speculative political principles. That faction was the Country party and later the related Patriot movement. Beyond drawing his reading audience's attention to the benefits that centralized Court power brought, Hume also sought to respond to the danger of factions of speculative political principle in at least two fashions in the *History*. First, as I demonstrated in the second chapter, Hume attempted to make clear to his middling readers the ways in which the republican dogmas of the Puritans and Independents had led, albeit perversely, to the instability of the Commonwealth and the subsequent Cromwellian dictatorship. In doing so, he was trying to bring the readers of his *History* to see the dangers of throwing in with ideological projects that placed their own vision of political life over the more fundamental requirements of social stability.

Hume's second approach was simply to point out the grave inconveniences of life under the Country's celebrated ancient Saxon constitution, inconveniences that his comfortable, refined middling readers would have in most instances rejected out of hand as simply unacceptable as a mode of social life. In focusing on the ancient constitution Hume was, to be clear, merely using the stated goals and ideals of the Country partisans against them. In his *Remarks on the History of England*, for example, Bolingbroke had embraced the Machiavellian principle that the best governments are those that regularly return to their first principles, and that every government, if

it hopes to endure, must do so from time to time.[134] Bolingbroke argued that "The reason for such a principle is obvious. There must be some good in the first principles of every government, or it could not subsist at all; much less could it make any progress." Given, however, that all of parts of the natural order tend to deteriorate, the goodness of any government will be lost to the extent change is permitted. Consequently, Great Britain could only maintain its ancient spirit of liberty to the extent that its patriots regularly called its constitutional order back to that of the ancient constitution.[135]

As Bolingbroke saw matters, the Court's use of patronage to effect its influence over Parliament was an example of such decay, as it threatened what the Country saw as the necessary independence of each coordinate branch of the government, and thus the very core of British liberty.[136] Bolingbroke traced the spirit of English back to England's Saxon past, and then followed that spirit forward through the reigns of patrons of liberty like Edward III and Elizabeth and putative tyrants like the first Norman monarchs, as well as Richard II, Henry VII, James I, and Charles I.[137] For Bolingbroke, the crucial condition for the maintenance of English liberty was the maintenance or, after periods of decay the recrudescence, of the ancient Saxon constitution, which balanced the interests and powers of the king, the nobles, and the freemen,

---

[134] Bolingbroke, *Remarks on the History of England*, Letter 2, in *Lord Bolingbroke: Historical Writings*, 165.

[135] *Ibid.*

[136] *Ibid*, 168.

[137] Isaac Kramnick, introduction to *Lord Bolingbroke: Historical Writings*, xli; Bolingbroke, *Remarks on the History of England*, Letter 14, in *Lord Bolingbroke: Historical Writings*, 179; Bolingbroke, *Dissertation upon Parties*, in *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*, 115.

and provided for the election of the latter to the witenagemot, the earliest English parliament, to which the monarch was ultimately responsible.[138]

His admiration for the ancient constitution notwithstanding, Bolingbroke had very little to say specifically on the nature of life under Saxon rule. In this first volume of his *History*, Hume set out to remedy these deficiencies in Bolingbroke's historiography in an effort to show his middling readers that the ancient constitution celebrated by the Country writers was in no way worthy of a polite and sensible reader's loyalty.[139] Where Bolingbroke in his *Remarks* and his *A Dissertation upon Parties*, devoted only a few spare paragraphs to his discussion of the Saxons, Hume devoted over one hundred fifty pages of the *History* to the same period. Aside from calling into question Bolingbroke's claims of a *witenagemot*—that is, a parliamentary-like body—that permitted the representation and election of freemen, Hume described a Saxon England that, given its "military and turbulent people, so averse to commerce and arts, and so little enured to industry, justice was commonly very ill administered, and great oppression and violence seem to have prevailed."[140] The Saxons were, according to Hume, so prone to violence that Britain, which under prior Roman rule had seen the growth of civilization and the arts, was thrown back into a state of near-barbarism following the introduction of Saxon rule.[141] The first four hundred years of Saxon rule saw England divided into seven smaller kingdoms, and during that period there was virtually no improvement in any of the essential and interrelated categories

---

[138] Bolingbroke, *Remarks on the History of England*, Letter 4, in *Lord Bolingbroke: Historical Writings*, 178-79; Bolingbroke, *Dissertation upon Parties*, in *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*, 114-15 and 153-54.

[139] Phillipson identifies a similar project and he even goes so far as to say that "Hume's story of the millennium which [sic] spanned the Roman occupation of Britain and Henry VII's victory at Bosworth in 1485 was the work of a modern Whig," but nevertheless does not stop to consider that Hume's work might well have been that of someone ideologically committed to Court Whiggery. Phillipson, *David Hume*, 119-20.

[140] Hume, *History of England*, 1:162-65 and 1:165-66.

[141] Hume, *History of England*, 1:23-24.

of "arts, civility, knowledge, humanity, justice, or obedience to the laws."[142] Further, under Saxon rule the common people, in light the failure of the regular administration of the laws, were obligated to pledge themselves to virtual slavery to various warlords in the hope of securing any kind of protection from the predations of others.[143] As for what laws there were, their execution would have been at least as likely to terrify Hume's readers as the possibility of their failure; Hume almost seems to have relished his account of the Saxon ordeal.[144] Hume concluded his discussion of the Saxon era by noting, "With regard to the manners of the Anglo-Saxons we can say little, but that they were in general a rude, uncultivated people, ignorant of letters, unskilled in the mechanical arts, untamed to submission under law and government, addicted to intemperance, riot, and disorder."[145]

His readers would have found nothing to attract them in the portrait of Saxon social life that Hume painted, and the implication could not have been plainer: the Saxon constitution to which the Country partisans regularly appealed was antithetical to everything that made social life enjoyable to a polite Briton of the Augustan age. Driving his point home, Hume remarked:

> On the whole, notwithstanding the seeming liberty or rather licentiousness of the Anglo-Saxons, the great body even of the free citizens, in those ages, really enjoyed much less true liberty, than where the execution of the laws is the most severe, and where subjects are reduced to the strictest subordination and dependence on the civil magistrate.[146]

---

[142] Hume, *History of England*, 1:50.

[143] Hume, *History of England*, 1:167.

[144] Under the ordeal an accused person was made either to pick up a stone from a pot of boiling water or carry a red-hot iron some specified distance. The accused was then made to bind the hand in coverings for three days, after which the hand was unwrapped. If it was found unburnt, the accused was judged innocent. Alternatively, an accused might be thrown into water and determined to be guilty or innocent depending on whether he sank or swam. Hume observer, "It is difficult for us to conceive, how any innocent person could ever escape by the one trial, or any criminal be convicted by the other." Hume, *History of England*, 1:181.

[145] Hume, *History of England*, 1:185.

[146] Hume, *History of England*, 1:168-69.

There was, of course, a third, more preferable alternative to Saxon license and abject subordination. On Hume's account, that alternative was the steady and regular administration and ordered social life that the Court was able to supply. That administration and order, contrary to the paeans of Bolingbroke and his Country confreres, provided a liberty far finer than that found in the ancient Saxon past because it made the commercial politeness and a refined means of escaping the terrors of the Nietzschean sickness possible.[147]

In the *Essays* and the *History*, then, Hume should not be seen as seeking to dispassionately adjudicate between the claims of Court and Country as he might have between those of Whig and Tory. Instead, we should see him as working to discredit the claims of the Country party, the only party that presented the British middling orders with an alternative to the social and political vision of the Court. Hume attempted to lead his readers to reject the project of the Country by demonstrating to them just how unappealing Saxon liberty really was, just as he had also pointed out the profound social unrest that the liberty-loving Puritan and Independent enthusiasts of the seventeenth-century had ushered in a period of military despotism. At the same time, Hume called on his readers to see the Court not as a site of corruption and nascent tyranny, but instead as the source of both the reliable civil liberty that eighteenth-century Britons enjoyed, and, concomitantly, the refined and polite commercial pleasures that had flourished in Britain since, at least, the Glorious Revolution. Like Addison before him, Hume was seeking to call his readers to see that those who valued the particular social order of eighteenth-century Britain, an order of commerce, politeness, and a bourgeois ethos, should oppose the speculative flights of

---

[147] On the question of the divergence between Court and Country—and, by extension, Hume and Country—see Goldie, "The English System of Liberty," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, 75; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 140-42.

fancy of the Country party and Patriots and embrace the established order and the Court project that had, in Hume's estimation, made the possibility of that order a reality.

In presenting his account of pre-Roman and Roman Britain, Hume allowed himself, not uncharacteristically, a slight irony. As I noted in the introduction, Hume made clear that while Agricola was engaged in bringing the Britons under Roman rule, "he neglected not the arts of peace. He introduced laws and civility among the Britons, taught them to desire and raise all the conveniences of life, reconciled them to the Roman language and manners, instructed them in letters and science, and employed every expedient to render those chains, which he had forged, both easy and agreeable to them."[1] In relating the nature of the Britons' subjugation, Hume expressed no disapproval of the way in which the introduction of Roman manners and learning into Britain was "easy and agreeable." Indeed, Hume described Rome's exercise of "dominion" over Britain as both a welcome cessation of the barbarism and factious in-fighting that had marked the Britons' lives and as the source of civilized life.

In crafting his description of both the ancient Britons and Rome's conquest of Britannia, however, Hume relied on Tacitus more than any other ancient historian, and, in particular, cited Tacitus as his authority for his portrayal of the effects of Agricola's campaigns.[2] Therein lies the irony. Tacitus, unlike Hume, regarded the Roman capture of Britain with ambivalence and trepidation. To be sure, Tacitus held that Romans needed to renew their sense of martial rigor and their dedication to military expansion, for only then could they regain the republican virtue they had lost under the principate of Domitian and overcome the tendency toward corruption and decadence that, in his estimation, had plagued Rome since the inception of the Augustan peace. Indeed, for exactly those reasons Tacitus applauded both his father-in-law's victories in Britain

---

[1] Hume, *History of England*, 1:10.
[2] Hume cited Tacitus a total of six times, with four references to the *Agricola* and two references to the *Annals*. The closest competitor by far was, not surprisingly, Julius Caesar, himself, whose *Gallic War* Hume cited three times.

and, in the form of a pseudo-ethnographic study of Germanic tribes, sought to focus his Roman readers' attention on a new target for expansion.

Nevertheless, in an effort at underscoring the dangerous effects that he saw luxury having on the Roman spirit, Tacitus cast the Romans' gift of refinement to the ancient Britons in decidedly sinister terms, going so far as to identify the Britons' eventual embrace of Roman learning and manners as the true cause of their servitude. In contrast to Hume's laudatory description of the coming of the "arts of peace" to Britain, Tacitus presented Agricola's efforts almost as though they had introduced a narcotic into the Britons' spirit. Having first been injected with a love of "temples, public squares, and proper houses"; with training in the liberal arts; and, eventually, with a love of all things Roman; the Britons, Tacitus reported, eventually "strayed into the enticement of vice—porticoes, baths and sumptuous banquets. In their innocence they called this 'civilization,' when in fact it was part of their enslavement."[3] The same could have been said, in Tacitus' view, for his fellow Romans, whom he regarded as having traded their traditional liberty for an enervating luxury. Despite Hume's reliance on Tacitus, then, the two came to markedly different conclusions about both the nature of the Roman conquest on Britain and the advisability of political projects that proceed from a devotion to a mythic, ancient constitutional order.[4]

---

[3] Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Agricola*, in <u>Agricola and Germania</u>, trans. Harold Mattingly, rev'd trans. J.B. Rives (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 15.

[4] In "Of Refinement in the Arts," Hume responded directly to the argument that refinement had caused Rome's corruption and loss of liberty. Contrary to the position of Roman writers like Tacitus and Sallust, Hume took the view that it was not luxury that caused Roman decadence and despotism, but deficiencies in the Roman constitution and Rome's expansion beyond sustainable limits. In this way Hume saw the cause of Rome's problems in what someone like Tacitus or Sallust saw as Rome's salvation, namely, further military expansion and a return to Rome's traditional constitution. Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," in *Essays*, 276-77.

Given the argument of this study these differences should come as no surprise, as Hume saw in polite refinement and the pursuit of at least a measure of luxury not a corrupted social order unworthy of the sacrifices of past statesmen and soldiers, but the hard-won victory of civilization over barbarism and instability. That conclusion, in turn, led him to support the Court party's centralizing project, for it was in that project that Hume saw the best chances for the maintenance and reproduction of the polite, bourgeois social order that had emerged in Great Britain in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Moreover, his commitment to the polite, commercial order of his day led Hume to oppose ideological programs that would have sought to replace the stable, established political order of his day with one informed by a speculative or idealized form of political life. This reading runs contrary to the prevailing view of Hume in the current scholarship, which sees Hume as having rejected the political factions of his day in favor of a scrupulously maintained philosophical neutrality.

Chapter 1 laid the groundwork for my argument by examining both the professional difficulties Hume encountered in the 1740s when he sought academic appointments at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow and the efforts by the evangelical wing of the Church of Scotland in the 1750s to excommunicate him. I argued that, contrary to the usual interpretations of these episodes, Hume was not targeted so much for his heterodox philosophical or religious views, but because he was seen both as a creature of Court party patronage networks and as ideologically sympathetic to the Court party's project. Those perceptions thus led those within the Scottish political class and ecclesial hierarchy committed to Country Whiggery to treat Hume as an enemy.

Just as Hume's difficulties in Scotland likely proceeded at least as much from his association with Court party patronage networks as from his apostasy—and, in the case of the

chairs at Edinburgh and Glasgow, this is almost certainly the case—in Chapter 2, I demonstrated that, from his side, Hume did not regard religious factions as the greatest threat to the social order of his day. Although prior readings of Hume's political thought have wisely focused on the acute concern he had with the problem of faction, those readings have usually also identified religious factions as Hume's great worry. This view is mistaken. Instead, I argued that given the urban unrest that the Country party had been able to effect in the 1730s in response to the Court party's Excise Bill, it was the Country party, and not any religious faction, with which Hume was acutely concerned. Hume's anxiety concerning the Country party was especially salient given the significant support that the Country party enjoyed among the urban middling orders of his day; that is, the class of people who had especially benefitted from the polite bourgeois social life of eighteenth-century Great Britain.

As a result of the attraction members of the British middle class exhibited toward Country party polemics, Hume employed the genres of the essay and history—forms especially favored as polite literature by the middling ranks—to argue against the Country party's program and in favor of the centralizing efforts of the Court party. In particular, in his essays Hume defended the Court's use of Crown patronage to secure parliamentary compliance in the Court's efforts at centralizing political control. Similarly, he warned of the danger of tipping the British constitution too far toward republicanism, which he would have understood to have included absolute parliamentary rule. Further, in the first-published volume of the *History* he underscored the excesses that the Puritans and the Independents undertook in the name of liberty and implicitly raised the prospect that the speculative, idealized program of the Country party, while seeming to serve the cause of liberty, would most likely lead only to anarchy and despotism.

In Chapter 3, I took a step back to begin to explain Hume's commitment to the project of the Court party, which I situated in Hume's experience of what Nietzsche, in the Third Treatise of the *Genealogy of Morality*, termed "the sickness." Reading the conclusion of the first book of the *Treatise* in tandem with his 1734 letter to an unnamed physician, I concluded that the philosophical investigations into which Hume's "new Scene of Thought" had launched him had also led him to a radical skepticism that left him with no firm epistemological or metaphysical ground on which to stand. That lack of foundations triggered a deep existential despair that Hume described in both the conclusion to the *Treatise*'s first book and in the 1734 letter as robbing him of all ardor for his work. Taking Hume at his word in the *Treatise*, I noted that Hume, continuing his discussion of his *ennui*, found in the polite and refined pleasures of bourgeois conviviality a treatment to his experience of the Nietzschean sickness; that is, a loss of will proceeding from the apparent meaninglessness of both life and the suffering that haunts all life. Polite, bourgeois conviviality thus provided Hume with a way out of the despair in which he found himself. The salvation those pleasures offered him led him not only to redouble his devotion to the conventions of the polite social order of his day, but to become particularly attentive to and protective of what he had identified as the structural political predicates of that order, specifically, a strong, centralized state authority freed from the instability and uncertainty of traditional aristocratic prerogatives and insulated from mass-based politics. That conclusion thus explains Hume's general comfort with the royal absolutism of his day, given that he saw the rule of law as operative in absolutist states. It also, in his own political context, led him to support the project of the Court party.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the crucial role that politeness played in Hume's day, distinguishing what I termed commercial politeness from the politeness of royal courts. Among

264

the distinctive features of commercial politeness were its sites of display in coffeehouses, clubs, and commerce; its activities, in particular conversation and tasteful forms of consumption and entertainment; its membership, composed of the rising middle class of professionals, financiers, merchants, and bureaucrats; its norms of moderation, urbanity, and toleration; and its function, namely, the crafting of a common ethos for this emergent urban middle class. This growing middling order, and the new form of politeness that operated as its common idiom and disciplining practice, arose from the economic and demographic changes that Great Britain had experienced starting in the middle of the seventeenth century, as it became a full-blown commercial and consumer society.

Politeness, I also demonstrated, came to operate as a means of shoring up the middling order's attachment to the established order, in particular the establishment and Court Whiggery of the early eighteenth century. As I explained, the periodical essays in Steele's and Addison's *Spectator* served as an instruction manual if not the Bible of politeness. In addition to essays on theater, literature, and conversational norms, Addison's *Spectator* essays stressed the support of the political order, associating the Whig oligarchy with commercial prosperity and social peace, while at the same time distinguishing that oligarchy from Whiggery itself. That is, Addison's essays presented the Whig establishment as alien to any particular party, while painting more extreme Whigs as the entirety of partisan Whiggery. Moreover, Addison made clear that polite British subjects would reject partisan commitments in favor of the seemingly non-partisan established order of the Whig oligarchy. Addisonian politeness, which in the eighteenth century was largely coterminous with bourgeois politeness, thus operated to protect the Court Whig order both by delegitimizing that order's critics and by associating it with the existence and

continuation of the commercial society in which the *Spectator*'s middling readers were so invested.

Having laid out in Chapter 4 the relationship between the emergent middle class and bourgeois politeness and the ideological association between bourgeois politeness and the establishment Whig order, in Chapter 5, I returned to Hume. After demonstrating Hume's own commitment to the practices and conventions of commercial politeness—from polite conversation and clubs to his use of the polite literary forms of history and the essay—and his association of eighteenth-century politeness with the rise of commerce, I turned to an examination of Hume as a philosophically nuanced but nevertheless ideologically committed Court Whig. In addition to pointing out the Court Whig patronage networks from which Hume benefitted, I showed that both the Court Whigs and Hume rejected systems of speculative politics and argued for the legitimacy of established authority simply on the basis of the order that such authority provided. I also highlighted the fact that Hume's argument in support for Court patronage—the defining feature of mid-century Court Whiggery—sounded remarkably like Court Whig justifications for their use of the Crown's patronage power, as a means of maintaining the balance of the British constitution against an otherwise too-powerful House of Commons.

In light of these facts I concluded that Hume should be understood as a principled supporter of the Court Whig project of greater administrative and political centralization, which he saw as the best means of maintaining the British social and constitutional order. Relatedly, arguments that Hume was either a partisan neutral or in some way sympathetic to the Country party, in the face of this evidence, simply fall flat. As I showed, such arguments proceeded in the first case from failures to see that Hume's assurances of his neutrality were, when not merely a

266

common rhetorical ploy, directed at the divide between the Whigs and the Tories, not the Court and the Country, while in the second case they were the product of misunderstandings of a few key essays.

Having established Hume's philosophical devotion to the Court party, I then returned to the issues of eighteenth-century bourgeois politeness and his concern with the threat to the bourgeois social order posed by the Country party. Based on the essays "Of Civil Liberty" and "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences" as well as the *History*, I showed that Hume regarded a polite commercial social order as the product of a strong, centralized state. I further argued that Hume used those works to present the same relationship to his middle-class readers in an effort to shore up support for the Court party. This effort held particular significance for Hume because the middling orders were especially inclined to support the Country party's polemics and protests against the Court party. That support had at times translated to significant social unrest, most notably the already-mentioned case of the Excise Bill. Accordingly, in addition to having used his discussion of the Puritans and the Independents in the first Stuart volume of the *History* to underscore the social disruption that appeals to idealized notions of liberty can have, and having also advised his middling readers of the relationship between the centralizing efforts of the Court and the polite social order they enjoyed, Hume turned to an examination of the so-called ancient constitution the Country celebrated. In contrast to Country accounts of ancient liberty, Hume made clear that, in the absence of a strong, centralized state, life in pre-Tudor England was nothing a polite eighteenth-century should admire or long for.

This dissertation has made three immediate contributions. First, contrary to a majority view in Hume scholarship—one represented most significantly by Nicholas Phillipson—Hume did not regard religious factions as the great threat to the social order of his day. Instead, he was

concerned that the Country party, in its appeals to imagined ancient liberties and calls for a greater and sometimes violent political role for the public, would undermine the predicates of the polite bourgeois social order of his day. Mass politics, particularly mass politics informed by speculative philosophical commitments and manipulated by an interest-seeking elite, was for Hume the great threat to the social order of his day.

The second contribution this dissertation provides is its demonstration of Hume's own partisan commitments. The common view in contemporary Hume scholarship sees him as having been neutral as between the political factions of his day, whether Whig, Tory, Jacobite, Country, or Court. I have shown that view to be deeply mistaken. Instead of being a neutral, disinterested observer, Hume was philosophically committed both to the views of Court Whiggery and to the Court Whigs' project of bringing the more "republican" element—in Hume's terms—under greater control of the Court, in particular through the use of Crown patronage. Hume was committed to the Court party in particular because he quite understandably associated a flourishing bourgeois order with greater political centralization. Accordingly, Hume rejected Country, radical Whiggish, and Patriot notions of political organization for the Court's efforts at centralized political management.

The third significant contribution of this dissertation, and the one with possible implications beyond Hume scholarship, is suggested in my explanation of Hume's commitment to the Court party's project and his rejection of political movements that posed a threat to that project. As I have argued, these features of Hume's political thought proceeded from Hume's embrace of the norms of bourgeois politeness, an embrace that developed out of Hume's encounter with an uncompromising skepticism and a resulting depression that I associated with the "sickness" Nietzsche discussed in the Third Treatise of the *Genealogy*. It was in the

enjoyment of bourgeois politeness that Hume apparently found a way out of the Nietzschean sickness, and as a result, Hume developed a philosophical defense of what we have today come to see as the hallmarks of liberal bourgeois society: urbanity, cosmopolitanism, toleration, material prosperity and consumption, and, superintending over all, a state concerned primarily, it is said, with its subjects' liberty to enjoy their lives and property in a peaceable and self-regarding fashion. It is with these aspects of modern life that another Nietzschean concept surfaces.

Although Nietzsche did not discuss the features of bourgeois social life as treatments for the sickness, he did see the organization of social life directed toward such ends as a possible consequence of the death of God. That is, in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche argued that the ascetic ideals of Christianity had provided humanity with a response to the will-destroying and potentially species-threatening *ennui* that confronted mankind when it considered the possibility that there is no meaning to our suffering. Although in Nietzsche's estimation Christian ascetic ideals had more often than not served to deform the wills and creativity of generations of Europeans, it nevertheless gave them *something* to will: their own self-denial. In doing so, Christianity thus had given Europeans a project with which to occupy themselves, and so both the will and European civilization itself were saved. Nietzsche observed, however, that with the death of God Christianity had lost the hold it once had possessed on the European spirit. Although Nietzsche hoped that at least some "healthy" Europeans might take the demise of Christianity as an opportunity to devise genuinely new modes of life, thought, and art, he also worried that the death of God and the accompanying loss of the Christian account of suffering could allow for the recrudescence of the sickness, as it might rob modern Europeans of the will that Christianity had provided.

Another possible consequence of the death of God, and one that particularly worried Nietzsche, was a future dominated by what he called the last man. As Nietzsche described him in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the last man was a human type that would lack all passion, all appetite for struggle, all ability to bear suffering, and all prospects for true originality. Instead, the last man would simply seek to live a pain- and conflict-free life, his time occupied with entertainment, "little" pleasures, and the occasional quarrel that always ended in reconciliation, "else it might spoil the digestion." For the last man nothing of any real import could ever be at stake, and the promise of human greatness would be sacrificed on the altar of comfort, moderation, and safety. Accordingly, what I am proposing is that the rise of modern liberty that Hume identifies with polite bourgeois society and associates with the modern state, the liberty that Hume defends against the political enthusiasts of his day and celebrates before his middling readers, is, in the end, nothing more than the liberty to be the last man.[5]

Moreover, if I am correct and Hume's project of theorizing about and defending the preconditions for polite bourgeois social life is also the best way of reading the Enlightenment *tout court*, then contrary to historians and theorists of the Enlightenment like Gay, Israel, Rorty, and Robertson, the Enlightenment should not be seen as a project for the emancipation or this-worldly betterment of humanity. It was, instead, a project in convincing the world that the life of the last man was nothing to be feared, but, instead, something to be embraced. In this way, the leading figures of the Enlightenment should be seen as the vanguard of the last man and Hume as one of its chief ideologists.

---

[5] For a brief discussion that also sees Nietzsche associating bourgeois values and social life with the last man, see Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, 1999), 86-88. My thanks to Joe Haydt for bringing this discussion to my attention.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts

Anonymous. *An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments Contained in the Writings of Sopho* [Kames]*, and David Hume, Esq.; Addressed to the consideration of Reverend and Honourable Members of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*. Edinburgh, 1755.

Answers to the Reasons of Dissent from the Sentence of the Reverend Commission of the General on March 11 1752. Edinburgh, 1752.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John, Viscount. *Remarks on the History of England*. In *Lord Bolingbroke: Historical Writings*. Edited by Isaac Kramnick. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

_____. *A Dissertation upon Parties*. In *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*. Edited by David Armitage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Caius Julius Caesar. *The Gallic War*. Translated by H. J. Edwards. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Defoe, Daniel. *A Plan of the English Commerce*. London, 1728.

General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. *Annals of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1739-1766*. 2 vols. Edited by Nathaniel Morren. Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1838-1840.

Hume, David. *The Philosophical Works*. Edited by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882.

_____. *The Letters of David Hume*. 2 vols. Edited by J. Y. T. Greig. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932.

_____. *New Letters of David Hume*. Edited by Raymond Kiblansky and Ernest C. Mossner. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954.

_____. *The Natural History of Religion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956.

_____. *Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*. Edited by Ernest C. Mossner and John V. Price. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967.

_____. *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

_____. *The History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983.

_____. *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Edited by Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987.

Hume, Hugh. *A Serious Exhortation to the Electors of Great Britain*. London, 1740.

MacQueen, Daniel. *Letters on Mr. Hume's History of Great Britain* (1756). In *Early Responses to Hume's* History of England, vol. 1. 2nd ed. revised. Edited by James Fieser. Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Maudemaire Clark and Alan Swensen. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.

_____. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1966.

Oldmixon, John. *The Critical History of England*. 2 vols. London: J. Pemberton, 1724-26.

_____. *The History of England During the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart*. London: J. Pemberton, 1730.

_____. *The History of England During the Reigns of King William and Queen Mary, Queen Anne, King George I*. London: Thomas Cox, 1735.

Rapin-Thoyras, Paul de. *The History of England*. 15 vols. Translated by Nicholas Tindal. London, 1724-1731.

The Scots Magazine. Edinburgh: Sands, Murray, and Cochran.

Publius Cornelius Tacitus. *Agricola and Germania*. Trans. by Harold Mattingly. Revised trans. by J.B. Rives. London: Penguin Classics, 2009.

Secondary Texts

Adair, Douglass. "The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy: Republicanism, the Class Struggle, and the Virtuous Farmer." PhD diss., Yale University, 1943.

_____. "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science: David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1957): 343-60.

_____. *The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy: Republicanism, the Class Struggle, and the Virtuous Farmer*. Edited by Mark E. Yellin. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000.

Arkin, Marc. "'The Intractable Principle:' David Hume, James Madison, Religion, and the Tenth Federalist." *American Journal of Legal History* 39, no. 2 (1995): 148-76.

Beck, Lewis White. "A Prussian Hume and a Scottish Kant." In *Essays on Kant and Hume*, 111-29. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.

Bejan, Teresa M. *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Bloom, Edward A., and Lillian D. Bloom. *Joseph Addison's Sociable Animal: In the Marketplace, on the Hustings, in the Pulpit*. Providence: Brown University Press, 1971.

Bond, Donald, ed. *The Spectator*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965.

Borsay, Robert. *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Brewer, John. "Commercialization and Politics." In *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, edited by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, 197-262. London: Europa, 1982.

_____. *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

_____. *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

British Broadcasting Corporation. "Doubt over Date of Brit Invasion." July 1, 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7483566.stm.

Browning, Reed. *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

Buchan, James. *Capital of the Mind: How Edinburgh Changed the World*. London: John Murray, 2003.

Carte, Thomas. *General History of England*. 4 vols. London: W. Russel, 1747-1755.

Cheyne, George. *The English Malady: or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds, as Spleens, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysteric Distempers, etc*. London: G. Strahan, 1733.

Collins, Jeffrey R. "Redeeming the Enlightenment: New Histories of Religious Toleration." *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 3 (2009): 607-636.

Crafts, N. F. R. *British Economic Growth during the Industrial Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Davis, Ralph. "English Foreign Trade, 1770-1774." In *The Growth of English Overseas Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, edited by W. E. Minchinton, 99-118. London: Meuthen & Co., 1969.

Dickinson, H. T. *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy*. London: English Universities Press, 1973.

_____. *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977.

Dickson, P. G. M. *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit*. New York: MacMillan, 1967.

Drummond, Andrew L., and James Bulloch. *The Scottish Church 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates*. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1973.

Duffy, Michael. "The Foundations of British Naval Power." In *The Military Revolution and the State, 1500-1800*, edited by Duffy, 49-85. Exeter: University of Exeter, 1980.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Function of Criticism: From the* Spectator *to Post-Structuralism*. London: Verso, 1984.

Earle, Peter. *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Elliot, George F. S. *The Border Elliots and the Family of Minto*. Edinburgh, David Douglas, 1897.

Emerson, Roger L. "The Social Composition of Enlightened Society: The Select Society of Edinburgh, 1754-1764." *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 114 (1973): 291-329.

_____. "The 'Affair' at Edinburgh and the 'Project' at Glasgow: The Politics of Hume's Attempts to Become a Professor." In *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, edited by M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright, 1-22. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

Forbes, Duncan. "Sceptical Whiggism, Commerce, and Liberty." In *Essays on Adam Smith*, edited by Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson, 179-201. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975.

_____. *Hume's Philosophical Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Gaskin, J. C. A. *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1978.

Gay, Peter. *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism*. New York: Knopf, 1966.

Giarizzo, Giuseppe. *David Hume Politico e Storico*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore S.p.A., 1962.

Goldgar, Bertand A. *The Curse of Party: Swift's Relations with Addison and Steele*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961.

Goldie, Mark. "The English System of Liberty." In *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, edited by Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, 40-78. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Goldsmith, M. M. "Faction Detected: Ideological Consequences of Robert Walpole's Decline and Fall." *History* 64, no. 210 (1979): 1-19.

Gordon, Thomas. *A Discourse of Standing Armies; Shewing the Folly, Uselessness, and Danger of Standing Armies*. 3rd ed. London: T. Warner, 1722.

Greig, J. Y. T. *David Hume*. New York: Garland, 1983.

Hardin, Russell. *David Hume: Moral and Political Theorist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Harris, Bob. *Politics and the Nation: Britain in the Mid-Eighteenth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Harris, James A. *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Herdt, Jennifer. "Opposite Sentiments: Hume's Fear of Faction and the Philosophy of Religion." *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (1995): 245-59.

_____. *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Hicks, Philip. *Neoclassical History and English Culture from Clarendon to Hume*. New York: St. Martin's, 1996.

Hobsbawm, Eric. "Class Consciousness in History." In *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, edited by István Mészáros, 5-21. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.

Holmes, Geoffrey. *British Politics in the Age of Anne*. London: Hambledon, 1987.

Hont, Istvan. "The 'Rich Country-Poor Country' Debate in Scottish Classical Political Economy." In *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, edited by Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, 271-81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

_____. "The Early Enlightenment Debate on Commerce and Luxury." In *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, edited by Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, 377-418. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Hunt, Margaret. *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Israel, Jonathan. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

_____. *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

_____. *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Jordan, Will R. "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration of David Hume and Religious Establishment." *Review of Politics* 64, no. 4 (2002): 687-713.
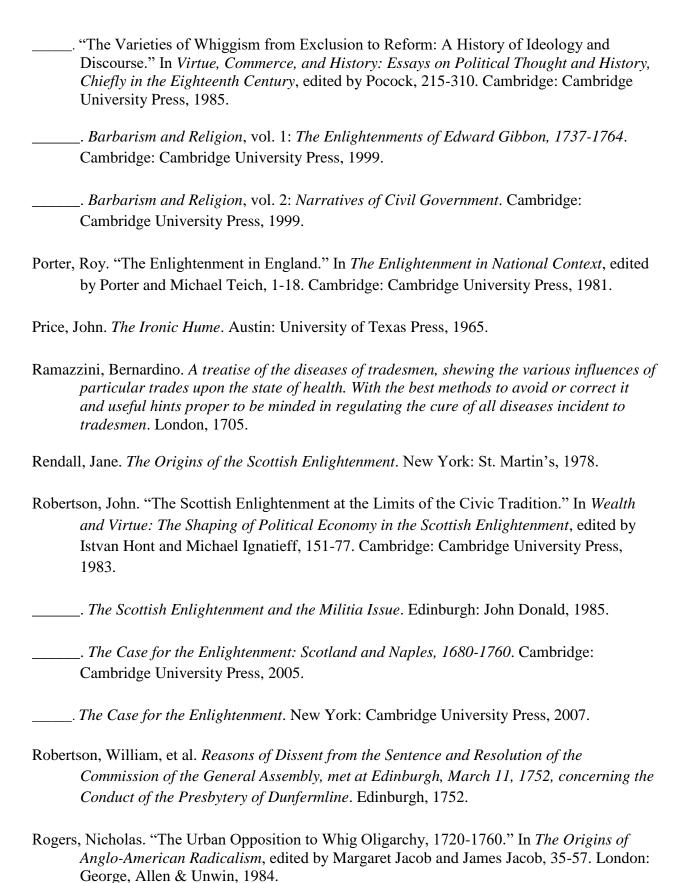
Kaplan, Benjamin J. *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007.

Kidd, Colin. *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-c. 1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Klein, Lawrence. "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness." *Eighteenth Century Studies* 18, no. 2 (1984-85): 187-214.

_____. "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England." *The Historical Journal* 32, no. 3 (1989): 583-605.

_____. "The Political Significance of 'Politeness' in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain." In *Politics, Politeness, and Patriotism*, edited by Gordon J. Schochet, 73-108. Washington DC: The Folger Institute, 1993.

_____. *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

_____. "Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England." In *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, edited by Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, 362-82. New York: Routledge, 1995.

_____. "Property and Politeness in the Early Eighteenth-Century Whig Moralists: The Case of the *Spectator*." In *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, edited by John Brewer and Susan Staves, 221-33. New York: Routledge, 1995.

_____. "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century." *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002): 869-98.

_____. "Sociability, Solitude, and Enthusiasm." In *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850*, edited by Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa, 153-77. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2002.

Kramnick, Isaac. *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968.

Kulisheck, P. J. "Pension and Place Bills." In *Britain in the Hanoverian Age: 1714-1837*, edited by Gerald Newman, 540-41. New York: Garland, 1997.

Langford, Paul. *The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

_____. *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.

_____. *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from* The Tatler *and* The Spectator. Edited by Erin Mackie. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1998.

Letwin, Shirley Robin. *The Pursuit of Certainty: David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Beatrice Webb*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998.

Lewis, C. S. "Addison." In *Essays on the Eighteenth Century Presented to David Nichol Smith*, 1-14. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945.

Lieburg, M. J. van. *The Disease of the Learned: A Chapter from the History of Melancholy and Hypochondria*. Oss, the Netherlands: Organon International, 1990.

Livingston, Donald W. *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

_____. "Hume's Historical Conception of Liberty." In *Liberty in Hume's* History of England, edited by Nicholas Capaldi and Livingston, 105-53. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1990.

_____. *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

McArthur, Neil. *David Hume's Political Theory: Law, Commerce, and the Constitution of Government*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

Merrill, Kenneth R., and Donald G. Wester. "Hume on the Relation of Religion to Morality." *Journal of Religion* 60 (1980): 272-84.

Miller, David. *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1981.

Mokyr, Joel. *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700–1850*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Monod, Paul Kléber. *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Morgan, Edmund S. "Safety in Numbers: Madison, Hume, and the Tenth *Federalist*." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (1986): 95-112.

Mossner, Ernest Campbell. "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, 1734: The Biographical Significance." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1944): 135-52.

_____. *Life of David Hume*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954.

Mossner, Ernest Campbell, and Harry Ransom. "Hume and the 'Conspiracy of the Booksellers': The Publication and Early Fortunes of the *History of England.*" *The University of Texas Studies in English* 29 (1950): 162-82.

Murphy, Andrew. *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001.

Norton, David Fate, and Richard Popkin. *David Hume: Philosophical Historian*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965.

O'Gorman, Frank. *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832*. New York: Arnold, 1997.

Phillips, Mark Saber. *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

_____. "'The Most Illustrious Philosopher and Historian of the Age': Hume's *History of England.*" In *A Companion to Hume*, edited by Elizabeth S. Radcliffe, 61-78. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.

Phillipson, Nicholas. "The Scottish Enlightenment." In *The Enlightenment in National Context*, edited by Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, 19-40. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

_____. *David Hume*: *The Philosopher as Historian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

Pippin, Robert B. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*. 2nd ed. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999.

Pincus, Steve. *1688: The First Modern Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Plumb, J. H. *The Origins of Political Stability: England, 1675-1725*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967.

Pocock, J. G. A. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

_____. "Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England." In *L'età dei lumi. Studi storici sul Settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, vol. 1, edited by Rafelle Ajello et al., 524-62. Naples: Casa Editrice Jovene, 1985.

_____. "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology." In *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Pocock, 103-123. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

_____. "The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse." In *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Pocock, 215-310. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

_____. *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 1: *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

_____. *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 2: *Narratives of Civil Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Porter, Roy. "The Enlightenment in England." In *The Enlightenment in National Context*, edited by Porter and Michael Teich, 1-18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Price, John. *The Ironic Hume*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965.

Ramazzini, Bernardino. *A treatise of the diseases of tradesmen, shewing the various influences of particular trades upon the state of health. With the best methods to avoid or correct it and useful hints proper to be minded in regulating the cure of all diseases incident to tradesmen*. London, 1705.

Rendall, Jane. *The Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment*. New York: St. Martin's, 1978.

Robertson, John. "The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition." In *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, edited by Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, 151-77. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

_____. *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1985.

_____. *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

_____. *The Case for the Enlightenment*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Robertson, William, et al. *Reasons of Dissent from the Sentence and Resolution of the Commission of the General Assembly, met at Edinburgh, March 11, 1752, concerning the Conduct of the Presbytery of Dunfermline*. Edinburgh, 1752.

Rogers, Nicholas. "The Urban Opposition to Whig Oligarchy, 1720-1760." In *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, edited by Margaret Jacob and James Jacob, 35-57. London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1984.

_____. *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.

_____. "The Middling Orders." In *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by H. T. Dickinson, 172-82. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

Rogers, Samuel. *Recollections of the Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1856.

Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. London: Penguin, 1999.

_____. "The Continuity between the Enlightenment and 'Postmodernism.'" In *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, edited by Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hans Reill, 19-38. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Rudé, George. *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964.

Rule, John. *The Vital Century: England's Developing Economy, 1714-1815*. New York: Longman, 1992.

_____. "Manufacturing and Commerce." In *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by H. T. Dickinson, 125-40. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.

Sabl, Andrew. *Hume's Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the* History of England. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Schmidt, Claudia. *David Hume: Reason in History*. University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Sher, Richard. *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

_____. "Professors of Virtue: The Edinburgh Chair." In *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, edited by M. A. Stewart, 87-126. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Shevelow, Kathryn. *Women and Print Culture: The Constitution of Femininity in the Early Periodical*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Siebert, Donald T. *The Moral Animus of David Hume*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990.

Sorkin, David Jan. *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Spencer, Mark G. "Hume and Madison on Faction." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 59, no. 4 (2002): 869-96.

Stewart, John. *The Moral and Political Philosophy of David Hume*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.

_____. *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Suderman, Jeffrey M. "Medieval Kingship and the Making of Modern Civility: Hume's Assessment of Governance in *The History of England.*" In *David Hume: Historical Thinker, Historical Writer*, edited by Mark G. Spencer, 121-42. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013.

Susato, Ryu. "Taming 'The Tyranny of Priests': Hume's Advocacy of Religious Establishments." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, no. 2 (2012): 273-93.

Susato, Ryu. *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

Thompson, E. P. *The Making of the English Working Class.* London: Victor Gollancz, 1963.

_____. "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History* 3, no. 2 (May, 1978): 133-65.

Tilly, Charles. "Reflections on the History of European State-Making." In *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, edited by Charles Tilly, 3-83. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Tissot, Samuel A. *An essay on diseases incidental to literary and sedentary persons With proper rules for preventing their fatal consequences. And instructions for their cure.* Dublin, 1772.

Wennerlind, Carl. "David Hume's Political Philosophy: A Theory of Commercial Modernization." *Hume Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 247-70.

Wexler, Victor G. *David Hume and the* History of England. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1979.

Whelan, Frederick G. *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Wills, Garry. *Explaining America: The Federalist*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980.

Wollheim, Richard. *Hume on Religion*. Cleveland: Meridian, 1963.

Wood, Ellen Meiksins. *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment*. London: Verso, 2012.

Wooton, David. "David Hume: 'The Historian.'" In *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, edited by David Fate Norton and Jacqueline Taylor, 447-79. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Wright, John. "Dr. George Cheyne, Chevalier Ramsay, and Hume's Letter to a Physician." *Hume Studies* 29 (2003): 125-41.

Wrigley, E. Anthony. "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period." In *The Eighteenth-Century Town, 1688-1820*, edited by Peter Borsay, 39-82. New York: Longman, 1990.

Yandell, Keith. *Hume's Inexplicable Mystery: His Views on Religion*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

Zahedieh, Nuala. "Overseas Expansion and Trade in the Seventeenth Century." In *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 1: *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Empire*. Edited by Nicholas Canny. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.