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Burke and Hume as Historians: Liberty, Authority, and the Crisis of Civilised Society

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Abstract

Recent scholarship has discovered the complicated intellectual relationship between Edmund Burke and David Hume, but it has not examined their historical thought in sufficient detail. This article focuses on political authority, liberty, and 'the spirit of the age' to clarify their chief differences. Although both Burke and Hume, during the 1750s and the 1760s, sought to refute ancient constitutionalism and construct their narratives of English history from European perspectives, only Hume emphasised the process by which monarchical authority was established in England. For him, the rise of absolute monarchies was a vital step towards 'regular' government and the rule of law, which was gradually consolidated under the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. Burke's evaluation of the Tudors and the early Stuarts differed fundamentally from Hume's. Burke and Hume also diverged in their interpretations of how the spirit of the times shaped the constitutions and politics of modern times. For Hume, England's free constitution was the outcome of an expanding spirit of liberty that had grown substantially since the seventeenth century. Yet, by the late eighteenth century, that same spirit was bringing the constitution into crisis in a manner reminiscent of the tragedy of the Civil Wars of the 1640s. Burke agreed that the spirit of liberty had helped to create England's excellent constitution. Still, he viewed this as the achievement of Englishmen's long, though intermittent, efforts to maintain their liberty. For Burke, it was Humean philosophical enquiries, not the spirit of liberty of his age, that might cause another constitutional crisis.

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Introduction

Although recent scholarship has revealed a complicated picture of the intellectual relationship between Edmund Burke and David Hume,[1] the subtle differences in their historical thought remain understudied.[2] This is partly due to the unsystematic exposition of Burke's historical thinking in his political works. In analysing Burke in comparison with Hume, the absence of his comments on particular periods or monarchs, especially the Tudor dynasty, poses obvious difficulties for interpretation. However, his sporadic comments on past events sometimes convey views that contrast sharply with Hume's, such as those on Henry VIII and Cromwell. For a proper methodology, an examination of Burke's historical ideas must consider both the immediate contexts in which they occurred and the underlying principles relatively independent of them. His views on England's ancient constitution are a most typical example.

As 'philosophical historians' of the eighteenth century, Hume and Burke shared a historical consciousness characteristic of the age and several key principles, including 'the spirit of the age', post-feudalism, post-religious wars, and the significance of impartiality. However, they disagreed on a number of historical questions: on Irish history, notably the Irish Rebellion of 1641; on general theories of history, such as the analogy between history and living beings; and on particular historical figures, such as Charles II, Mary, Queen of Scots, and Henri IV. Burke's Irishness also led him to take the role of conquest in historical nation-building more seriously than Hume did.[3] Among these major differences, this article focuses on the roles

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1 In particular, see Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, 2015), 249 (prescription), 427, 731 ('civilised monarchy'), 479 (political economy), 686 (Hugh Peter); Max Skjönsberg, 'The Hume-Burke Connection Examined', *History of European Ideas*, 49 (2023), 243–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2021.1881581; idem, 'Political Transformations During the Seven Years' War: Hume and Burke', *The Persistence of Party: Ideas of Harmonious Discord in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2021), 201–13; idem, 'Burke and the Scottish Enlightenment', in idem, *The Persistence of Party*, 309-325.

2 For Burke's historical thought, see: John C. Weston, Jr., 'Edmund Burke's View of History', *Review of Politics*, 23 (1961), 203–29, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500008433; Sora Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian: War, Order and Civilisation* (Cham, 2018). For the recent scholarship on Hume's *History of England*, see: Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975); Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (Macmillan, 1996); John G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (6 vols, Cambridge, 1999–2015), II, 199–257; Nicholas Phillipson, *David Hume: The Philosopher as Historian* (Penguin, 2011), 50–136; Andrew Sabl, *Hume's Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the 'History of England'* (Princeton, 2012); Mark G. Spencer, ed. *David Hume: Historical Thinker, Historical Writer* (Penn State, 2013); Jia Wei, *Commerce and Politics in Hume's 'History of England'* (Woodbridge, 2017), although there are several others. Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton, 2000) is also useful for an analysis of their historical thought.

3 Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 58, 99–100, 161, 234, 238. For their views of Henri IV, see Burke to Pierre-Gaeton Dupont (28 October 1790), in *The Correspondence of Edmund*

and processes involved in establishing sovereignty as well as the effects of the spirit of the times upon it—such as the spirit of liberty, religious enthusiasm, and philosophical enquiry—in their views of English and, occasionally, European history. This shows that they sometimes shared conclusions, but their views on the processes through which civilisations were formed or disintegrated vastly differed.

Modern commentators have noted that there is a clear similarity between Burke's *Abridgment of English History* and the medieval volumes of Hume's *History of England*, particularly in their views on Saxons, feudalism, and Magna Charta.[4] More recently, Richard Bourke points out that Burke shared with Hume 'the idea of the modernity of English liberty'[5] and also 'accepted Hume's judgment that France was a civilised monarchy'.[6] As this article demonstrates, nevertheless, their historical views of the process of modernisation were incompatible, which suggests that Burke would have disagreed with the main narrative of English and European history presented by Hume. This divergence shows their different perspectives on the role of political authority and liberty throughout history, and resulted in their divergence of opinion regarding recent history and contemporary events.

The Arrival of Feudalism and its Modification

Burke's most substantial, though still neglected, historical writing, the *Abridgment of English History*, provides an appropriate starting point for comparison with Hume's *History of*

Burke, ed. Thomas W. Copeland et al. (10 vols, Cambridge, 1958–1978), VI, 147–8; Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. C. D. Clark (Stanford, 2001), 306; David Hume, *The History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, Foreword by William B. Todd (6 vols, Indianapolis, 1983), IV, 305. See also: idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), 15, 113, 548–9. For Burke's views on Irish history, see Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 151–89; Séan Patrick Donlan, 'The 'Genuine Voice of its Records and Monuments'?: Edmund Burke's 'Interior History of Ireland', Donlan ed., *Edmund Burke's Irish Identities* (Dublin, 2007), 69–101.

4 Edmund Burke, 'Abridgment of English History', *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, hereafter WS, ed. Paul Langford et al. (9 vols, Oxford, 1981–2015), I, 335 (editor's preface); Roger J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688–1863* (Cambridge, 1987), 87–8, 91; Frederick P. Lock, *Edmund Burke* (2 vols, Oxford, 1998–2006), I, 149.

5 Richard Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 619-652 (at 638).

6 Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 731. Hume distinguished between 'civilised' and 'barbarous' governments by their relationship to law. In his perspective, a 'civilised monarchy' is 'a government of laws, not of men', whereas a 'barbarous monarchy' is the opposite. Hume, 'Of Civil Liberty', in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 87–96; idem, 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', idem, 111–137; Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 152–61. For further discussion, see: Neil McArthur, *David Hume's Political Theory: Law, Commerce, and the Constitution of Government* (Toronto, 2007), 37–81, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442684263; Wei, *Commerce and Politics*, 77–170.

England—especially regarding the latter's treatment of the ancient and medieval periods up to approximately 1215. A close reading of these works reveals two major differences in their narratives: their differing attention to the effects of conquest on a subdued nation, and the processes through which English liberties were established in ancient and medieval eras. Both texts aimed to be impartial historiographies, refuted the unhistorical claims of ancient constitutionalism, and intentionally adopted European perspectives.[7] Yet while Burke's history of England focuses on the process through which the free political system was forged, Hume's places greater emphasis on the significance of monarchical authority.

Burke's idea of conquest was especially conspicuous in his depiction of the Roman ruler, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, who 'knew that the general must be perfected by the legislator; and that the conquest is neither permanent nor honourable, which is only an introduction to tyranny'.[8] In other words, if conquest is bound to occur, 'the spirit of conquest' must be replaced by 'the spirit of liberty' after the event.[9] Both Burke and Hume acknowledged that, at times, conquest helped civilise subdued nations by introducing novel arts and manners. However, as an Anglo-Irish thinker, Burke was more interested in the process of reconciliation between subjugators and the subjugated, namely, the introduction of 'the spirit of liberty' into the conquered land.[10] After Agricola and Christopher Columbus,[11] William the Conqueror provided a notable example in which Burke's characterisation contrasted sharply with Hume's.[12] For both Burke and Hume, William was a bold, strategic, and authoritarian ruler. Yet Burke described him as a tactful ruler who aimed to reconcile the Normans and the Saxons to bring political harmony to the conquered nation. By contrast, Hume considered William to be the first ruler to successfully establish great monarchical authority in English history. Burke and Hume shared the view that the king introduced feudal law in England, followed by anarchic disorder caused by feudal aristocrats. According to Burke, William helped preserve the spirit of liberty, whereas, for Hume, he was the man who 'broke through those limits, which first the feudal institutions, then the refined policy of princes, have fixed to the

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7 For Hume's European or 'cosmopolitan' viewpoints, for instance, see: Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 140, 297–8, 305; Karen O'Brien, 'European Contexts in Hume's "History of England"', in idem, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997), 56–92. The thesis of 'cosmopolitanism' in Hume's *History of England* was partly contested by Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, II, 259–61.

8 Burke, 'Abridgment', *WS*, I, 367.

9 Bourke regards this as a leitmotif of Burke's politics (see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 15–20).

10 Sora Sato, 'Reconciliation after Conquest: Edmund Burke's "Cosmopolitanism"', *History of European Ideas*, 52 (2026), 1040–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2025.2581484.

11 William Burke and Edmund Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (2 vols, London, 1757), I, 3–65. In this work, Columbus was portrayed as a man with a tolerant and tactful mind who civilised the conquered lands. As William was the chief author of this work, the extent of Edmund's contribution—in this and other respects—remains a matter of conjecture. On the authorship of the *Account*, see: Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 125–8.

12 The contrast was briefly discussed by T. O. McLoughlin, 'Edmund Burke's "Abridgment of English History"', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 5 (1990), 55–6.

several states of Christendom'.[13] Hume believed that William created royal authority stronger than that of other European countries of the period.[14] Hence, the English government began to move towards a 'regular' government before its neighbouring nations, even though society still suffered from feudal disorder. In this peculiar sense, Hume's history of England up to this period was distinctive.[15]

After the Norman invasion, 'the spirit of conquest' continued to influence English and British politics. According to Burke, this was especially true of English attitudes towards Ireland. However, the actual conquest of the English nation had ceased, and his narrative was, accordingly, more focused on how English liberty was institutionally established by the time of the Magna Charta. In this respect, Burke was clearly a Whig, despite his efforts to produce an impartial history. Hume was more subtle in constructing his narrative. He occasionally alluded to the origins of the free constitution of later England, yet the main thread of the narrative was intended to show the process through which an early step was taken towards establishing the regular power of government.

Writing about the charters issued by Henry I, Stephen, and Henry II, Hume remained concerned with the power of Norman monarchs: 'the concessions of all these princes [the charters issued by Henry I, Stephen, and Henry II] had still remained without effect; and the same unlimited, at least irregular authority, continued to be exercised both by them and their successors'.[16] For Burke, who was not interested in emphasising the powers of the Norman kings, Henry I's charter 'laid the foundation of those successive charters, which at last completed the freedom of the subject'.[17] He believed that the Great Charter and the Charter of the Forest made a historic contribution to establishing 'the foundation of English liberty', although they were by no means a renewal of Saxon liberties, but rather modifications of the feudal order. Burke shared Hume's view that the Saxons had not enjoyed genuine liberty, since their manners and governments were barbarous. They nevertheless differed over which aspects of the Charter should be particularly emphasised.

Burke drew attention to the separation of 'one branch of jurisdiction … from the king's court', which meant that it was 'detached from his person' and suggested a step towards the practice of the rule of law. This 'separation of a king's authority from his person was a matter of vast consequence towards introducing ideas of freedom and confirming the sacredness and majesty of laws'. Moreover, the freedom of the lower classes was extended by barons' conferring on 'their tenants the same liberties, which they had stipulated for themselves'. Consequently, Burke sought to explain the peculiar character of England's feudalism. The

13 Burke, 'Abridgment', WS, I, 458–477; Hume, *The History of England*, I, 225.

14 On this, see: Nicholas T. Phillipson, *Hume* (New York, 1989), 129. For Burke and Hume's views on William the Conqueror, see: Sato, 'Reconciliation after Conquest', 1044-1045.

15 This is partly due to Hume's indebtedness to Thomas Carte: James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, 2015), 390–5.

16 Hume, *History of England*, I, 437.

17 Burke, 'Abridgment', WS, I, 486.

Great Charter helped to maintain the balance of power between the barons and the other social classes:[18]

> This [an extension of tenants' liberties] prevented the kingdom from degenerating into the worst imaginable government, a feudal aristocracy. The English barons were not in the condition of those great princes, who had made the French monarchy so low in the preceding century, or like those, who reduced the Imperial power to a name. They had been brought to moderate bounds by the policy of the First and Second Henrys; and were not in a condition to set up for petty sovereigns, by an usurpation equally detrimental to the Crown and the People. They were able to act only in confederacy; and this common cause made it necessary to consult the common good, and to study popularity by the equity of their proceedings. This was a very happy circumstance to the growing liberty.[19]

Like Hume, Burke acknowledged that England's monarchical authority had been stronger than that of France under feudalism. However, there was still a difference between Hume and Burke, and it was not simply a matter of the degree of their emphasis on the subject. Like Burke, Hume emphasised that it was a genuine benefit that the rights of 'inferior ranks of men' were extended by the Charter, which helped 'ensure the free and equitable administration of justice … the benefit of the whole community'. Hume also mentioned the reform of the king's court as an improvement of justice and a step towards 'a legal government', although Burke was more emphatic about its effects. In addition, Hume drew attention to a point absent from Burke's analysis: the Great Charter 'introduced no new distribution of the powers of the commonwealth'. For both Hume and Burke, the Charter was 'a kind of epoch in the constitution'.[20] Nevertheless, Hume was more concerned with the state of monarchical authority that made possible a 'regular' government, which remained the main theme in his narrative of English history up to the Tudor period.

Post-Feudalism: Absolute and 'Civilised' Monarchies

According to Hume, the peak of Europe's barbarism occurred in the eleventh century, after which 'human affairs naturally' moved 'in a contrary direction'.[21] The 'first incident, which broke in upon this violent system of government [feudalism]' was 'the practice of … erecting communities and corporations [in Italy and France], endowed with privileges and a sepa-

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18 Burke, 'Abridgment', WS, I, 546–7; Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 37.

19 Burke, 'Abridgment', WS, I, 546–7. On this, see also Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 190–1.

20 Hume, *History of England*, I, 444–5, 487–8. 'The king's courts of justice shall be stationary, and shall no longer follow his person' (ibid., I, 445).

21 Hume, *History of England*, II, 519–20. Hume used a 'pendulum' principle of the rise and fall of nations, which Burke did not share. See: Ryu Susato, 'Human Society "in Perpetual Flux": Hume's Pendulum Theory of Civilisation', in idem, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 2015), 214–41.

rate municipal government' which 'gave them protection against the tyranny of the barons'.[22] The broader driving force behind this development was the progress of arts and manners, including the revival of learning. Indeed, Hume acknowledged that the 'ecclesiastics' contributed to it most notably through the study of Justinian's Pandects.[23] This trend was further augmented by the 'discovery' of the Americas in the late fifteenth century. Hume thus situated the decline of England's feudalism within a wider European context. Unlike Burke's *Abridgment*, Hume's historiography tended to emphasise the effects of remote causes on political society rather than the roots of modern systems.[24]

Like other Scottish historians of the age, Hume emphasised the effects of luxury on feudal aristocrats, who had dissipated their fortunes by purchasing commercial goods and thereby undermined their own power over the vassals. Their newly acquired 'habits of luxury' came to form the 'manners of the age', which resulted in the decline of disobedient barons and the rise of sovereign states.[25] In his historical writings, as in those of other 'enlightened' Scots, the overcoming of feudalism was directly linked to the rise of absolutism in Europe, including England.

As an eager reader of Hume and other historians of the time, Burke was aware of this argument. He believed that the manners, arts, and spirit of the ages could significantly influence the forms of constitutions—a chief argument against ancient constitutionalism in the *Abridgment* and *Fragment*.[26] Burke clearly accepted that several, though not all, European monarchies had been transformed into absolute regimes after the late fifteenth century, with countries such as Poland standing as an exception. Yet he barely discussed the formation of absolutism from the perspective of luxury.[27]

Although Burke's views on the Tudor dynasty remain relatively unclear because of his limited comments on the subject—and perhaps also because the *Abridgment* was unfinished—it is highly unlikely that he agreed with Hume's interpretation of the period. In Hume's view, the English constitution turned towards absolutism during Henry VII's reign. Like many other eighteenth-century historians, Burke generally believed that the first two Tudor monarchs had ruled arbitrarily, but presumably only Hume saw their despotic governments as the road to a 'regular' government. As Hume claimed, 'While he [Henry VII] depressed the nobility, he

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22 Hume, *History of England*, II, 522.

23 Hume, *History of England*, II, 518–20. Cf. William B. Todd, 'Foreword', in Hume, *History of England*, I, xvi-xviii. See also: Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 90; Hajime Inuzuka, 'Posuto-Konfesshonarisuto to shite no Hyumu: "Ingurando-shi" ni okeru Seiji, Shukyo, Rekishi' ['Hume as a Post-Confessionalist: Politics, Religion, and History in the *History of England*'], *Shiso*, 1052 (2011), 62–83, https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1523388080106038656.

24 Burke, 'Abridgment', WS, I, 333 (editor's preface): 'One of the characteristics of Burke's historiography is his ability to trace present events, institutions, customs back to their origins'.

25 Hume, *History of England*, IV, Appendix III, (386 for quotation).

26 Burke, 'Fragment: An Essay towards a History of the Laws of England', WS, I, 321–31; J.G.A. Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas', in idem, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago, 1971; 1989), 202–232 (at 224–5).

27 Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 53–54, 102–103.

exalted and honoured and caressed the lawyers; and by that means both bestowed authority on the laws, and was enabled, whenever he pleased, to pervert them to his own advantage'.[28] Henry VII's government marked a step towards stability and the rule of law, yet the king's 'oppressive expedients … destroyed all security in private property', meaning that one of the essential conditions of a 'civilised monarchy' remained unfulfilled.[29]

Henry VIII exercised even more absolute power, suppressing monasteries and rebellions in order to strengthen the authority of the Crown.[30] As Hume put it, the king 'proceeded, by making examples [i.e., the executions] of [John] Fisher and [Thomas] More, to consummate his *lawless* tyranny', and yet, the 'abolition of the ancient religion much contributed to the regular execution of justice'.[31] By contrast, Burke singled the king out as a prime example of a 'tyrant', who 'was not better enlightened than' Gaius Marius or Lucius Cornelius Sulla.[32] Like William Robertson, Hume also viewed the suppression of monasteries as contributing to the growth of national industry.[33] Burke could not have shared such an interpretation because he generally attributed a positive social role to religious institutions.[34]

It is unfortunate that Burke's comments on the Tudor reigns were limited, especially given the distinctive nature of Hume's critique of Elizabeth I. In 1757, Burke, writing with William Burke, observed that 'Queen Elizabeth had enough of the blood of Harry the eighth, to make her impatient of an opposition to her will, especially in matters of religion'. This may suggest a tyrannical aspect of her reign.[35] However, his overall evaluation of that reign remained unclear. In Hume's view, Elizabeth's popularity among her people was due to 'her frugality' and her non-interference in the 'established liberties of the people'.[36] Yet he also regarded the

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28 Hume, *History of England*, III, 49.

29 Hume, *History of England*, III, 68; David Hume, 'Of Civil Liberty', in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 94; idem, 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 125.

30 Hume, *History of England*, III, 230, 244–5, 250–6.

31 Ibid., III, 220, 324, emphasis added; 'While the catholic superstition subsisted, there was no possibility of punishing any crime in the clergy' (ibid., III, 324). See also ibid., III, 323: 'the English in that age were so thoroughly subdued, that, like eastern slaves, they were inclined to admire those acts of violence and tyranny'.

32 Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 281–2. See also: Edmund Burke, 'Church Nullum Tempus Bill', *WS*, II, 366.

33 Hume, *History of England*, III, 330: 'if there were really a decay of commerce, and industry, and populousness in England, the statutes of this reign, except by abolishing monasteries, and retrenching holidays, circumstances of considerable moment, were not in other respects well calculated to remedy the evil'; William Robertson, *The History of Scotland*, in idem, *The Works of William Robertson* (8 vols, London, 1840), I, 97; Murray G. Pittock, 'Historiography', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003), 271. Despite his admiration for Robertson's works, Burke would have disagreed with this view of Henry VIII.

34 Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 53–54, 102–103.

35 Burke and Burke, *Account*, II, 139–40.

36 Hume, *History of England*, IV, 355.

queen as so despotic that the government came even closer to 'that of Turkey at present'.[37] One advantage of an absolute monarchy, namely the 'strict execution of the laws', still did not appear during her reign because of the limited financial capacities of the period.[38] In other words, England had not yet properly reached the phase of a civilised monarchy.[39] However, Hume distinguished Elizabeth's rule from Oriental despotism:

> the power of the prince, though really unlimited, was exercised after the European manner ... the instances of a high exerted prerogative were not so frequent as to render property sensibly insecure, or reduce the people to a total servitude.[40]

Despite the very limited evidence that prevents a substantial comment, Burke would likely have shared Hume's perspective that arts and manners had gradually improved during this period, even though political restraints on economic freedom under the Tudor dynasty—including Elizabeth's reign—continued to hinder the nation's further development.[41] However, Burke and Hume differed in their evaluations of the religious policies of the period, and this difference also reflected their views on the spirit of the age.

Eras of Religious Disputes

Political authority was a matter not only between rulers and subjects, but also between civil and religious powers. Hume and Burke agreed that conflict between these two powers had deeply unsettled political societies throughout British and European history. As Hume interpreted it, the churches of Roman Catholicism became so powerful after the collapse of the Roman Empire that they established their own political influence and became 'philosophical', giving rise to a number of 'furious' theological disputes and sectarian conflicts.[42] After

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37 Hume, *History of England*, IV, 360.

38 Ibid., IV, 368.

39 Inuzuka interprets Hume's Tudor dynasty as a type of 'civilised monarchies', whereas Sabl does not. Hajime Inuzuka, *Deividdo Hyumu no Seijigaku [The Politics of David Hume]* (Tokyo, 2004, in Japanese), 149–282; Andrew Sabl, *Hume's Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the 'History of England'* (Princeton, 2012), 153. If the Tudor reigns were not 'civilised monarchies', then neither would the reign of Louis XIII in France be, which 'he [Richelieu] changed into a simple monarchy' (Hume, *History of England*, V, 182). See also Wei, *Commerce and Politics*, 71: 'the Tudor monarchy was an inconsistent combination of both absolutism and the Crown's financial dependency. It followed that the Tudor monarchy was different from other civilised monarchies in Europe'. Cf. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 152–61; Burke and Burke, *Account*, II, 4 (Richelieu).

40 Hume, *History of England*, IV, 370. See also ibid., IV, 371–7.

41 Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 479.

42 David Hume, 'Of Parties in General', in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 61–3.

the Protestant Reformation, the 'bigotry' of Roman Catholics caused disasters such as St. Bartholomew's massacres, the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and the Irish rebellion of 1641.[43] In these accounts, Hume did not intend to reveal the peculiar malignancy of Roman Catholicism in the way Protestant writers often did. 'Superstition and enthusiasm' were, for him, part of the nature of religion in general, even though the former was more easily associated with Catholics and the latter with Protestants.[44] Hume analysed European history from the generalised perspective to an extent that Burke and others scarcely did.

Hume was also distinct in the way he addressed the redress of such religious conflicts: 'Erastian' supervision, sovereigns' indifference, and toleration.[45] Similarly, Burke, in the *Abridgment*, claimed that excessive clerical power, including connections with Rome, had frequently militated against the sovereign, and he endorsed Henry I and Henry II's attempts to suppress ecclesiastical privileges.[46] Burke dismissed Thomas Becket's principles for maintaining these privileges as 'subversive of all good government'.[47] In analysing Henry II's religious policy, Hume similarly asserted that the 'union of the civil and ecclesiastical power serves extremely, in every civilized government, to the maintenance of peace and order'.[48] However, unlike Hume, Burke did not intend to imply the significance of civilian supervision over religious authorities.[49] Later in English history, Henry VIII, as Hume put it, 'appointed a commission' which consisted of archbishops, bishops and 'doctors of divinity', and 'by virtue of his ecclesiastical supremacy he had given them in charge to chuse [sic] a religion for his people'. These 'ecclesiastical commissioners should establish nothing repugnant to the laws and statutes of the realm'. Henry was also 'pleased … to introduce appeals from the spiritual to the civil courts' and 'encouraged the judges on all occasions to interpose in ecclesiastical causes'. 'A happy innovation', Hume summarised, 'though at first invented for arbitrary purposes'.[50] Henry VIII, though autocratic, was

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43 Todd, 'Foreword', in Hume, *History of England*, I, xvi–xvii. On Hume's views on the Protestant Reformation, for instance, see Harris, *Hume*, 381–2.

44 David Hume, 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 73–9.

45 The analytical framework for Hume in this paragraph and the next two paragraphs is heavily indebted to Inuzuka, 'Hume as a Post-Confessionalist', 62–83. On Hume's 'Erastian' supervision, see the literature cited in footnote 47.

46 Burke, 'Abridgment', *WS*, I, 454–5. In their medieval histories of England, both Burke and Hume drew attention to William the Conqueror's attempt to subject ecclesiastical authority, but their depictions of Lanfranc, as invited by William, were almost incompatible. Burke viewed this Italian bishop as assisting the creation of English liberty, whereas the bishop was, for Hume, chiefly interested in increasing the papal interest in England. Burke, 'Abridgment', *WS*, I, 465–7; Hume, *History of England*, I, 207–8; See also: Sato, 'Reconciliation after Conquest', 1044–1045.

47 Burke, 'Abridgment', *WS*, I, 508.

48 Hume, *History of England*, I, 311.

49 On Hume's 'Erastian' policy, see: Susato, 'Taming "the Tyranny of Priests": Hume's Advocacy of Religious Establishments', in idem, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, 131–76; Inuzuka, 'Hume as a Post-Confessionalist', 63, 71.

50 Hume, *History of England*, III, 287–8.

successful in centralising power, thereby laying a foundation for the rule of law and for the subjugation of ecclesiastical power to civil authority.

This monarch also aimed to achieve 'an uniformity in their religious sentiments', and 'encouraged the people, by his example, to apply themselves to the study of theology'. It was, however, impossible that 'they would cordially agree in any set of tenets or opinions prescribed to them'.[51] According to Hume, Henry and other sovereigns were alike in this regard. James I was likewise unaware that 'the speculative refinements in it [theology] are mean, and even dangerous in a monarch'. 'By entering zealously into frivolous disputes', Hume commented, 'James gave them an air of importance and dignity', but 'he [James] could no longer have recourse to contempt and ridicule, the only proper method of appeasing it'.[52] The solution was non-intervention, as exemplified to some extent by Elizabeth I, who 'preserved her people, by her superior prudence, from those confusions, in which theological controversy had involved all the neighbouring nations'. The queen 'established no inquisition into men's bosoms'. Although 'the exercise of every religion but the established was prohibited by statute, the violation of this law … was in many instances, connived at'. However, Elizabeth was still 'unacquainted with the practice of toleration, the true secret for managing religious factions'.[53]

For both Hume and Burke, the policy of religious toleration only emerged substantially in the seventeenth century and beyond.[54] As Hume put it, the significance of toleration was appreciated only 'after spilling an ocean of blood in those theological quarrels'. [55] In his *Natural History of Religion*, Hume pointed to the tolerant character of polytheists in contrast to monotheists' spirit of persecution. Nevertheless, he claimed elsewhere that 'it is a vulgar error to imagine, that the ancients were as great friends to toleration as the ENGLISH or DUTCH are at present'.[56] In this respect, Burke similarly refuted the popular belief that ancient religions were tolerant, observing that they persecuted Druids and Christians, though he once commented that 'who were more religious than the Romans, who were more tolerating?'[57]

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51 Ibid., III, 290. For Hume's views on Henry VIII's religious policies, see: Inuzuka, 'Hume as a Post-Confessionalist', 72–3.

52 Hume, *History of England*, V, 12; Inuzuka, 'Hume as a Post-Confessionalist', 76–7.

53 Hume, *History of England*, IV, 176–7, 352. Cf. Inuzuka, 'Hume as a Post-Confessionalist', 74.

54 For Hume's idea of religious toleration, see Greg Conti, 'Hume's Low Road to Toleration', *History of Political Thought*, 36 (2015), 165–91, https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4939556; Andrew Sabl, 'The Last Artificial Virtue: Hume on Toleration and its Lessons', *Political Theory*, 37 (2009), 511–38, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591709335192; Richard Dees, '"The Paradoxical Principle and Salutary Practice": Hume on Toleration', *Hume Studies*, 31 (2005), 145–64, https://doi.org/10.1353/hms.2011.0252.

55 Hume, *History of England*, V, 130.

56 Hume, 'The Natural History of Religion', *Four Dissertations* (London, 1757), 58–63; idem, 'Of Parties in General', *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 61 (note) for quotation; Inuzuka, 'Hume as a Post-Confessionalist', 69, 83.

57 William Cobbett (ed.), *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1806* (36 vols, London, 1806–20), XVII, 776 (note); Edmund Burke, 'Speech on Toleration Bill (17 March 1773)', WS, II, 385; idem, 'Clerical Subscription (6 February 1772)', WS, II, 362–3 (intending to claim that the doctrinal system of subscription was compatible with toleration).

In Hume's historiography, the English constitution was transformed into a virtually 'simple' monarchy—a modernised form of government—earlier than the French one, as Henry VIII's government predated Louis XIII's. In a sense, the reverse was true of the religious policy of toleration. In France, the Huguenots were granted 'liberty of conscience' chiefly due to the government's financial hardship in 1570, though persecution returned in 1577.[58] Later, the Edict of Nantes was introduced,[59] which Louis XIV was to abolish[60] before religious policies were substantially implemented in England, where the Independents were 'the first [of all Christian factions], which … always adopted the principle of toleration'.[61] In fact, England followed the Dutch Netherlands, which 'set the example' of toleration.[62]

Although Burke did not differ greatly from Hume in his understanding of these historical facts, his idea of toleration was not identical. William Burke and Edmund Burke briefly outlined the persecutions of Puritans carried out by two of the Tudors (Henry VIII and Elizabeth I), the early Stuarts (James I and Charles I), and William Laud, and were broadly dismissive of the religious policies of these figures. According to the Burkes, '[i]n all persuasions the bigots are persecutors; the men of a cool and reasonable piety are favourers of toleration'.[63] Burke fully appreciated the significance of religious toleration for a reason different from that of Hume: his latitudinarian belief that 'toleration [is] a part of Christianity'.[64] As a Protestant, he certainly assumed the evilness of the Catholic Church before the Protestant Reformation. 'By toleration', he spoke in Parliament on 17 March 1773, 'Christianity flourished'. 'When the Romish church cast aside its toleration, and betook itself to threatenings, slaughter, and persecution', then 'commotions ensued; ecclesiastic anarchy prevailed'.[65] As he later maintained, the Protestant Reformation 'was one of the greatest periods of human improvement'. In this revolution of opinions, however, things were not settled 'without a violent concussion'. The 'tolerating spirit' was 'long gaining ground in Europe', but 'a full toleration' was not

58 Hume, *History of England*, IV, 150, 168. See also my review of the Japanese translation of the Stuart volumes of Hume's *History of England* (*Annals of the Society for the History of Social Thought*, 50 (2026), edited by the Society for the History of Social Thought in Japan, 203–206).

59 Huguenots were still tolerated in the age of Richelieu, which was 'the only avowed and open toleration, which, at that time, was granted in any European kingdom'. Hume, *History of England*, V, 206.

60 Hume, *History of England*, VI, 470.

61 Hume, *History of England*, V, 442–3.

62 Hume, 'Of the Liberty of the Press', in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 602, 604–5: 'Before the United Provinces set the example, toleration was deemed incompatible with good government' (a sentence deleted in the 1770 edition); Dees, '"The Paradoxical Principle and Salutary Practice"', 157.

63 Burke and Burke, *Account*, II, 139–42, 148, 153; Elizabeth 'kept them [Puritans] down during the whole course of her reign with an uniform and inflexible severity'. Ibid., II, 140. See also Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 137–8.

64 Burke, 'Speech on Toleration Bill (17 March 1773)', WS, II, 383. For Burke's latitudinarianism, for instance, see Clark, 'Introduction', in Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 23, 30–1, 95–8.

65 *Parliamentary History*, Cobbett ed., XVII, 781–2.

yet realised even in his age.[66] The 1689 Act of Toleration was an important milestone towards genuine religious freedom, but Burke noted that 'my opinion in favour of toleration goes far beyond the limits of that act'.[67]

Religious fanaticism frequently confused political society, with the subversion of the English monarchy in 1649 acting as a prime example. Hume interpreted it as an event brought by more than one cause. Like Burke, he believed that religious enthusiasm played a crucial role, but he added one more remote, yet fundamental, cause: the spirit of liberty, which became vigorous in James I's reign and after. Hume further complicated his argument by suggesting that the limited revenue of Charles I was also a main cause of the political confusion.[68] According to Burke, figures such as Hugh Peter represented the religious fanaticism of the age.[69] Apart from this, he also referred to Charles I's misgovernment in a way reminiscent of Hume's account of the monarchy: 'the unfortunate Charles the First defended himself on the practice of the Stuart who went before him, and of all the Tudors; his partizans might have gone to the Plantagenets'.[70] The context was Burke's proposal for financial reform in opposition to Lord North's administration. He continued:

> late reformations are made under a state of inflammation. In that state of things the people behold in government nothing that is respectable. They see the abuse, and they will see nothing else—They fall into the temper of a furious populace provoked at the disorder of a house of ill fame; they never attempt to correct or regulate; they go to work by the shortest way—They abate the nuisance, they pull down the house.[71]

Though rhetorically expressed, the passage conveyed a familiar image of the Civil Wars of the 1640s.[72] Burke agreed with Hume that the spirit of liberty became more conspicuous as

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66 Edmund Burke, 'Speech at Bristol Previous to Election (6 September 1780)', WS, III, 639, 652; Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 97

67 Burke to William Burgh (9 February 1775), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, III, 111–2; Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 23, 229.

68 Hume, *History of England*, VI, 535; my review of Hume's *History of England* (*Annals of the Society for the History of Social Thought*, 50, 203–206).

69 Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 156, 225; Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock, (Indianapolis, Ind., 1987), xi, 219, 222; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 686.

70 Edmund Burke, 'Speech on Economical Reform (11 February 1780)', WS, III, 491. Cf. Hume, *History of England*, V, 40–1.

71 Burke, 'Speech on Economical Reform', WS, III, 491–2. For the same line of argument see ibid., WS, II, 257. See also Burke, WS, II, 417–8; Burke, WS, VIII, 517; Burke referred to the opposition to Charles I's policies as an example of the 'justest causes of publick dissatisfaction'. Edmund Burke, 'Speech on St. George's Fields Massacre (8 March 1769)', WS, II, 224–5.

72 The contexts of Burke's views on the Civil Wars and the Interregnum have been explored in detail by Philip Connell, 'Edmund Burke and the First Stuart Revolution', *Journal of British Studies*, 59 (2020) 463–94.

a result of improved arts and manners in the seventeenth century. However, unlike Hume, Burke did not claim that the early Stuarts' argument for inherited prerogatives clashed with the extended spirit of liberty embraced by the parliamentarians. In Hume's view, the spirit of liberty helped properly transform England's absolutism into a 'civilised monarchy'—and into a mixed monarchy after 1660—[73]which Burke regarded as an output of the Englishmen's political prudence and their inherited spirit of liberty.

Liberty and Authority after 1649

After the Civil Wars, fanaticism was still prevalent, and major figures such as Oliver Cromwell infused it into politics. For both Hume and Burke, Cromwell's government was clearly despotic, yet they remained divided in their evaluations of it. Hume characterised it as close to oriental despotism, in which people were governed 'not in the legal manner of European nations, but according to the maxims of eastern tyranny'. Cromwell 'delegated to his inferior ministers the same unlimited authority, which he himself had so violently assumed'.[74] In contrast, Burke, in the 1790s, underlined this government's contribution to 'the preservation of our [English] laws' and civil order, intending to contrast it with the barbarous tyranny of revolutionary France. 'Cromwell knew', Burke wrote, 'how to separate the institutions expedient to his usurpation from the administration of the public justice'. [75] In other words, Burke's Cromwell sought to produce a government that might be equivalent to a civilised monarchy.[76]

Hume's England lost such a monarchy, imperfectly established by the Tudors and improved by the early Stuarts, during the Interregnum, but recovered it within about a decade. After the Restoration of 1660, England 'could fully ensure, at once, her tranquillity and her liberty' almost for the first time in history. 'Instead of reviving those claims of prerogative', Hume wrote, 'Charles [II] had strictly confined himself within the limits of law.'[77] The Stuart reigns from James I to James II were, in Hume's view, 'a continual struggle maintained between the Crown and the people: Privilege and prerogative were ever at variance.'[78] Hume explicitly dismissed the Whiggish view of these reigns, that is, 'one continued encroachment on the

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73 Hume, *History of England*, VI, 367, 375, 384, 390, 472; Inuzuka, *The Politics of David Hume*, 209.

74 Hume, *History of England*, VI, 74. For Hume's evaluation of Cromwell's reign, see: Inuzuka, *The Politics of David Hume*, 206–9.

75 Burke, 'A Letter to the National Assembly', WS, VIII, 302–3. See also: Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 56–7.

76 However, both Burke and Hume highly rated George Monck as a rehabilitator of social order. Hume also censured Gilbert Burnet as evaluating unfairly Monck from 'his own factious spirit'. Burke, 'Letter to a Member of the National Assembly', WS, VIII, 320–2; Hume, *History of England*, VI, 247.

77 Ibid., VI, 233–4.

78 Ibid., VI, 530.

incontestible rights of the people.'[79] He avoided attributing the main causes of political confusion to the sovereigns, with the exception of James II. In the late Stuart age, the spirit of liberty still provided a foundation for the controversy between Parliament and the Crown. Religious enthusiasm still existed, but the spirit of party was more visible than before and frequently marked by enthusiastic opposition to the sovereigns. The insufficient budget of the Crown was, in Hume's view, once again a major cause of political turmoil in Charles II's reign.[80] Hume attributed one major cause of the 1688–9 Revolution to James II's 'misconduct', especially his defiance of the Test Acts, which provoked a strong reaction from parliamentarians.[81] The final outcome of the 1688–9 Revolution was 'a new epoch in the constitution', which 'not only put a period to their hereditary succession, but made a new settlement of the whole constitution.'[82]

For Burke, Hume's history of England was 'very superficial', prioritising 'a pleasing narrative' over facts. Although the 'reign of Charles II … was the period on which Hume had bestowed the most labour', according to Burke, Hume showed 'an unaccountable partiality for that monarch.'[83] Hume's 'partiality' towards Charles II, as well as his dismissive characterisation of the leaders of the Rye-House conspiracy as tainted by the fanatic spirit of partisanship, clearly disgusted Burke.[84]

In his interpretation of 1688–9, Burke was a Whig, specifically an 'old' Whig, in his own phrase, or an heir of 'vulgar' Whiggism.[85] As he put it in 1777, the 'People at that time [1688] reenter'd into their original rights'.[86] In the Regency Crisis of 1788, Burke also argued that the principles of 1688–9 were 'not formed upon precedent, but upon general reason, and the inalienable rights of men.' At the same time, he underlined the fact that both the Restoration of 1660 and the 1688–9 Revolution 'were acts of necessity' as he was to do so after the French Revolution.[87] However, in 1784, 1790 and 1791, Burke decided to employ the pre-Enlightenment language of ancient constitutionalism (of which he was critical in the late 1750s) to counter the radi-

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79 Ibid., VI, 531.

80 Ibid., VI, 535; my review of Hume's *History of England* in *Annals of the Society for the History of Social Thought*, 50, 203–206.

81 Hume, *History of England*, VI, 470.

82 Ibid., VI, 530–1.

83 As is recorded by James Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (London, 1839), 58.

84 Hume, *History of England*, VI, 427–438; On this topic, see also: Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 58.

85 Edmund Burke, 'Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs', in WS, IV, 365–477. In the *Reflections*, Burke advanced 'a mainstream Whig reading of 1688': Clark, 'Introduction', in Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 41. Cf. Skjönsberg, 'The Hume-Burke Connection Examined', 255. For the distinction between 'vulgar' and 'scientific (sceptical)' Whiggism, see Duncan Forbes's works such as *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 125–92.

86 Burke, 'Address to the King', WS, III, 273.

87 Burke, 'Regency (22 December 1788)', WS, IV, 253 [including editor's note]; Peter J. Marshall, 'Editor's Introduction', in Burke, WS, IV, 17–8; Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 60–62.

cals' argument inspired by the French Revolution.[88] The political necessities obviously urged him to do so, yet he had still remained consistent since the 1750s in acknowledging that the English constitution had evolved in response to the changing political conditions and modes of life. In the *Reflections*, he famously stressed both institutional continuities and Englishmen's peculiar disposition to reflect on their own past. As a Whig, Burke depicted both 1660 and 1688–9 as the moments when the constitution was 'regenerated',[89] whereas Hume adopted none of these interpretations of the events of the period from 1660 to 1688–9.

An even clearer difference in perspective lies in Burke and Hume's views on post–1688 England. Although both clearly regarded the period as one of liberty and growth, neither was optimistic about Britain's present or future. The most important difference lies in their views of the crises Britain has recently faced. For Hume, the Whig oligarchy after 1688–9, 'which, in some particulars, has been advantageous to the state, has proved destructive to the truth of history'. The Whigs, 'forgetting that a regard to liberty, though a laudable passion, ought commonly to be subordinate to a reverence for established government … celebrated only the partizans of the former'.[90] In eighteenth-century Britain, as Hume wrote, 'the people, though guarded by multiplied laws, are totally naked, defenceless, and disarmed, and besides, are not secured by any middle power, or independent powerful nobility'.[91] As a result, the nation was closer to 'a despotic and eastern monarchy' than it had been in Elizabeth's reign.[92] In contrast, Burke believed that intermediary power was strongest during Queen Anne's reign and continued until 1760, when George III began to conspire with Lord Bute to weaken the Whig aristocrats.[93]

According to Hume, the spirit of liberty was prevalent in England during the preceding decades, whereas Burke believed that this spirit had declined rapidly since 1760. In both cases, the constitution faced a great crisis. For Hume, the expanding power of the Commons, as opposed to the curtailed authority of the Crown, was an indicator of risk to the constitution. He observed that the Wilkes affairs of the 1760s reflected this historical trend—the growth of a powerful spirit of liberty—which might have reminded him of the disastrous civil wars of the 1640s.[94]

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88 Burke, 'Speech on Parliamentary Reform (16 June 1784)', WS, IV, 215–26; the works cited in footnote 87.

89 Edmund Burke, 'Speech on the Army Estimates (9 February 1790)', WS, IV, 281–305; idem, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 170, 182–3; idem, 'Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs', WS, IV, 365–477; Clark, 'Introduction', in Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 34; Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution', 202–232; Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 59–62, 67, 80. Cf. Burke, 'Speech on Parliamentary Reform (16 June 1784)', WS, IV, 215–26.

90 Hume, *History of England*, VI, 533.

91 Hume, *History of England*, IV, 370.

92 Ibid., IV, 370.

93 Burke, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, WS, II, 316.

94 Moritz Baumstark, 'The End of Empire and the Death of Religion: A Reconsideration of Hume's Later Political Thought', in Ruth Savage (ed.), *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain: New Case Studies* (Oxford, 2012), 245; 'Hume to William Strahan (3 March 1772)' in John Y. T. Greig (ed.), *The Letters of David Hume* (2 vols, Oxford, 1932), II, 261;

Hume was also sceptical about aspects of the fiscal-military state of Britain established after 1688–9,[95] especially the government's accumulated debt. He believed that this would soon lead to disaster, including the collapse of intermediary power. The advent of powerful 'stockholders' had been transforming the existing social order, and the influence of landed interests would eventually diminish. Hume further noted that 'the middle power between king and people being totally removed, a grievous despotism must infallibly prevail.'[96] According to Burke, landed and monied interests had been effectively connected in Britain, which helped prevent a political revolution there.[97] Burke agreed with Hume about the significance of intermediary powers and that the union between the landed and commercial interests would cease if 'our public debts encrease to such a degree, as to become altogether oppressive and intolerable.'[98] However, unlike Hume, Burke did not believe that Britain was on the verge of a massive catastrophe.[99]

Burke was more positive than Hume about the situation chiefly because he firmly believed in the strength of the British economy, which had continued to grow, as the statistical figures undoubtedly proved.[100] While Hume believed that the Seven Years' War 'proceeded from the most frivolous Causes' and was 'more pernicious to the Victors than to the Vanquished',[101] Burke singled out the war as an opportunity that demonstrated Britain's international competitiveness, explicitly dismissing John Brown's thesis of 'effeminacy'.[102]

Harris, *Hume*, 318–19, 425–38; David Hume, 'Of the Independency of Parliament', in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 42–46. See Harris, *Hume*, 433 for the link between Wilkes' affairs and the 1640s. Harris compares Hume's views on the early phase of George III's reign with Burke's views in his *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents* (ibid., 429). See also: 'Hume to William Strahan (25 October, 1769)', *The Letters of David Hume*, II, 209–11.

95 John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (New York, 1989).

96 Hume, 'Of Public Credit', *Essays*, 358.

97 Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 274.

98 Hume, 'Of Parties in General', *Essays*, 60. Burke made a similar point in *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 326. For Hume's views on Britain's public debt, see Istvan Hont, 'The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and Voluntary State Bankruptcy', *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2005), 325–53.

99 For the themes of this paragraph, see also: Sora Sato, 'Edmund Burke's Political Economy: A Historiographical Essay', *History of Political Economy*, 54 (2022), 808–9.

100 Burke, *Observations on the Present State of the Nation*, WS, II, 102–219; idem, 'Third Letter on a Regicide Peace', WS, IX, 296–386; On this topic, see Pocock (ed.), 'Introduction', in Burke, *Reflections*, xxii.

101 Hume to [Trudaine de Montigny] (25 May 1767), in ed. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest Campbell Mossner, *New Letters of David Hume* (Oxford, 1954), 234–235; Baumstark, 'The End of Empire and the Death of Religion', 247. See also Henry Mackenzie, *The Works of John Home* (3 vols, Edinburgh, 1822), I, 179–80.

102 Burke, 'First Letter on a Regicide Peace', WS, IX, 192; Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*, 113, 238–9.

Until around 1763, both Burke and Hume presumably believed that a 'mild government and great naval force have preserved, and may still preserve during some time, the dominion of England over her colonies'.[103] However, this became increasingly doubtful. According to Hume, the colonies were 'no longer in their Infancy', but they were 'still in their Nonage'.[104] Even so, Britain's recent conflicts with the colonies were not seriously affecting either side, and even their independence would be desirable to 'establish our Prosperity'.[105] Burke characteristically refused to trace such an analogy between life and the polity, and observed that American affairs were causing great distress to the empire, thereby destroying their long-term harmonious relationship.

Moreover, Hume and Burke shared the view that late eighteenth-century France was an example of civilised monarchy,[106] but their views on the process that realised it must have been very different. As O'Brien points out, Hume seems to have accepted Voltaire's views on Louis XIV's politics, which, accordingly, he believed had already realised a modern government by law.[107] Burke could barely endorse such views, although he acknowledged the flourishing state of France under the despotic ruler.[108] For him, the parlements played a key role in securing 'both certainty and stability of the laws' in France before 1790.[109] Hume viewed the absolute monarchy as a necessary stepping-stone toward the rule of law, whereas Burke searched for the seeds of liberty in the cracks of absolutism. Hume did not survive to witness the 1789 Revolution in France, but his ideas of republicanism,[110] as well as of political authority, suggest that he would not have welcomed it. For both Burke and Hume, the French Revolution would, in a sense, have meant the disintegration of a civilised monarchy, elegantly constructed in modern history. However, the two would have held distinct views on what

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103 Hume, *History of England*, V, 148.

104 Hume to William Strahan (1 March 1774), *The Letters of David Hume*, II, 288.

105 Hume to Baron Mure of Caldwell (27 Oct 1775), *The Letters of David Hume*, II, 303; quoted from 'Hume to Andrew Stuart of Torrance (1 August 1775)', in Baumstark, 'The End of Empire and the Death of Religion', in *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain*, 257. For Hume's views of the American affairs, see Baumstark, 'The End of Empire and the Death of Religion'; Harris, *Hume*, 433–8; Pocock, 'Hume and the American Revolution: The Dying Thoughts of a North Briton', in idem, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), 125–41.

106 Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 731; Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 152–61.

107 O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, 67–8, 100. In *History of England*, Hume barely discussed Louis's enforcement of law, yet drew attention to the king's 'finances [which] were brought into order'. Then, 'so regular was the economy observed, and so willingly did the people, now enriched by arts and commerce, submit to multiplied taxes'. This was the foundation of 'his military force', and it may well be that of the rule of law: Hume, *History of England*, VI, 216–7.

108 Burke, 'Speech on the Army Estimates (9 February 1790)', WS, IV, 285.

109 Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 374–5.

110 Hume to David Hume the Younger (8 Dec 1775), *The Letters of David Hume*, II, 306. For this letter, see Harris, *Hume*, 433, 565. Cf. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 182–3, 191; Burke, 'Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs', WS, IV, 402.

collapsed in 1789–1790, as they developed different opinions on the recent history of the nation and social groups or institutions such as the clergy.

Consequences of Philosophical Enquiry

The divergence between Burke and Hume in their interpretations of recent history and contemporary events also arises from their irreconcilable views on philosophy and religion. This included the possible consequences of philosophical enquiry into Christian traditions such as the authority of the Bible and sacred history; as Hume famously put it in the *Treatise*, 'the errors in religion are dangerous' while 'those in philosophy [are] only ridiculous.'[111] His 'philosophical' essays also revealed his religious scepticism, casting doubtful eyes on biblical narratives of miracles, including the Resurrection. In doing so, he was, of course, aware of the popular anxiety that 'certain Tenets of Philosophy', including Epicureanism, would be 'pernicious to the Peace of civil Society' by rejecting the belief in divine Providence and the life after death. Nevertheless, Hume's narrator claimed that 'the State ought to tolerate every Principle of Philosophy'. According to him, there was no 'Instance of any Government's suffering in its political Interests by such Indulgence.'[112] As Philo said in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 'vulgar superstition' tended to invite 'the dismal consequences'. 'If the religious spirit be ever mentioned in any historical narration, we are sure to meet afterwards with a detail of the miseries which attend it'.[113]

Burke was markedly different, as a staunch advocate of anti-deism commentators—notably Joseph Butler, John Leland, and James Beattie—who claimed that deists' arguments against biblical narratives were defective and that the narratives could convey historical truths.[114] Burke himself maintained that people should not 'forget the use of that guide which God has given us for our direction', although human intelligence is very limited.[115] Scripture provides the 'examples' for human life, which is largely led by habits and customs.[116] A sceptical inquiry into these foundations would not uncover any new morality; rather, it would cause confusion

111 Hume, A *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Sir Lewis A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1896), 272.

112 David Hume, 'Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State', in idem, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1750), 211–2, 232.

113 David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (London, 1779), 243; Inuzuka, 'Hume as a Post-Confessionalist', 69.

114 Burke was reported to have highly evaluated anti-deist writings. Burke, 'Toleration Bill (17 March 1773)', WS, II, 387 (Leland); *James Beattie's London Diary 1773*, ed. Ralph S. Walker (Aberdeen, 1946), 33; 'Extracts from Mr. Burke's Table-Talk', *Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society Vol. VII* (London, 1862–3), 55 (Butler). See also: Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'Burke and the Religious Sources of Skeptical Conservatism', in *The Skeptical Tradition Around 1800: Skepticism in Philosophy, Science, and Society*, ed. Johan van der Zande and Richard Popkin (Dordrecht, 1998), 228 (note); Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 278.

115 Burke, 'Clerical Subscription (6 February 1772)', WS, II, 362.

116 'Extracts from Mr. Burke's Table-Talk', *Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society*, 56.

of minds and society. According to Burke, morality changed little over a long period, despite the improvement of various arts in modern eras, and Hume was not far from Burke in this respect. In 1751, Hume noted that 'such Changes … in Religion, Language, laws and Customs' after the Greco-Roman age have not 'ever produc'd any considerable Innovation in the primary Sentiments of Morals.'[117] However, while Burke regarded the moral essence of Christianity as a major foundation of social development, Hume found it to have more adverse effects.

Burke viewed Hume as one of the contemporaries who attempted to undermine the foundations of morality in a manner similar to that of other 'deist writers'[118] and the French revolutionaries. He was reported to have said that the eighteenth century was 'an ignorant Age' in the sense that 'many useless sciences', rather than 'wisdom', were 'much advanced'. He also maintained that 'our fore-fathers' were 'deeper Thinkers than ourselves.'[119] In his view, Hume's philosophical inquiry into religion may well be categorised as one of those 'useless sciences'. As Burke highlighted, 'it would be impossible that civil society could subsist long if we were all Philosophers'.[120] In saying so, he might have been close to Hume's thesis of superstition as a stabilising force in society.[121] However, Burke obviously differed from Hume in his belief on the extent to which religious tradition forms a genuine foundation for political society.

Conclusion

The detailed analysis presented in this paper suggests that an examination of their entire works is required to properly appreciate both the intellectual tensions and connections

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117 Hume, 'A Dialogue', *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (London, 1751), 242. Furthermore, both Hume and Burke believed that 'chance' or 'accidents' play a major role in shaping historical events. 'Chance has a great Influence on national Manners; and many Events happen in Society, which are not to be accounted for by general Rules' (ibid., 249); Burke to Sir Gilbert Elliot (3 September 1788), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, V, 414–5. Cf. Hume to Henry Home, Lord Kames (4 March 1758), *The Letters of David Hume*, I, 272, quoted in Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 190: 'Great empires, great cities, great commerce, all of them receive a check, not from accidental events, but necessary principles'.

118 This can be inferred in part from the treatment of Hume in anti-deist writings such as John Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers, that have appeared in England in the Last and Present Century* (2 vols, London, 1755); James Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (Edinburgh, 1770).

119 'Extracts from Mr. Burke's Table-Talk', *Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society*, 49.

120 'Extracts from Mr. Burke's Table-Talk', *Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society*, 56; Hampsher-Monk, 'Burke and the Religious Sources of Skeptical Conservatism', 248.

121 Hume, *History of England*, II, 14: 'Though the religion of that age [late medieval times] can merit no better name than that of superstition, it served to unite together a body of men who had great sway over the people, and who kept the community from falling to pieces, by the factions and independent power of the nobles'.

between Burke and Hume. Both were sceptical of ancient constitutionalism in their earlier years, stressing the modern origins of British liberty. For Hume, modern liberty was an outcome of established monarchical authority that had grown since the Tudor period, or even since after the Conquest, and yet it had been threatening the same authority during and after the Stuart age. In theory, Burke, too, regarded authority as a prerequisite for the establishment of liberty, but he did not believe that despotic monarchies such as Henry VIII's had contributed to it. He and Hume also shared the view that an unrestrained desire for freedom could undermine political stability. Burke, however, did not believe that the ascendancy of the House of Commons in the eighteenth century was a cardinal example of this. The two were deeply divided on the question of whether philosophical inquiry into religious tradition could compromise the foundations of political society. In their interpretations of English or British history after 1688–9, they diverged chiefly in their views on the impact of the increasing spirit of liberty on political stability. In their earlier period, they differed instead over the extent to which particular authorities had contributed to the formation of liberty. Recent scholarship has often regarded Burke as 'enlightened', significantly associated with the Scottish intellectuals of the age on a number of specific and broad points such as the idea of chivalry and a critical attitude towards religious fanaticism.[122] However, 'the Burke-Hume connection'[123] is one of several intellectual relationships between Burke and his Scottish contemporaries in which only a rigorous examination of their texts can uncover the full implications.

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[122] For instance, see Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), 331–49 (chivalry at 335–7); idem, 'Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm', *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture: The Transformation of Political Culture 1789–1848*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Oxford, 1989), 19–43; idem, 'Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French Cases in British Perspective', *Government and Opposition*, 24 (1989), 81–105, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.1989.tb00109.x.

[123] Skjönsberg, 'The Hume-Burke Connection Examined'.