**The Hume-Burke Connection Examined**

**Abstract:**

This article examines the connection, personal and intellectual, between David Hume and Edmund Burke. Scholars have often compared the two thinkers, mainly in an unsystematic and selective way. Burke’s early biographers regarded them as opposite figures on account of Hume’s religious and philosophical scepticism and Burke’s devout Christian faith. By contrast, modern scholars often stress their intellectual kinship. More specifically, they have repeatedly attempted to place Hume and Burke either close together or far apart on a liberal-conservative spectrum. This article shows that an historical investigation into their personal and intellectual relationship is bound to challenge and complicate such endeavours. Besides an account of Hume’s and Burke’s acquaintance, the article discusses Burke’s engagement with Hume, and provides a comparison of key areas of their thought. It demonstrates that while Hume had something to offer Burke as a man of letters, in the 1750s and after 1790-1, Hume was less useful for Burke in the intermediate period when Burke was an active parliamentarian and Whig party member, especially since the mature Hume was so hostile to Burke’s brand of Whiggism.

**Key words:** David Hume, Edmund Burke, Whig party, natural law, utility, political economy, public debt, ancient constitutionalism, contract theory, Adam Smith.

This essay examines the connection, personal and intellectual, between David Hume and Edmund Burke. Hume and Burke have sometimes been regarded as diametrically opposite figures on account of Hume’s religious scepticism and Burke’s devout Christian faith.[[1]](#footnote-1) Notoriously, Burke is alleged to have told James Boswell that keeping company with Hume was ‘hardly defensible’, and that he only spoke to him since ‘the present state of society’ required it.[[2]](#footnote-2) This jibe is, however, likely to have been related to banter between an Irishman and a Scot rather than religion.[[3]](#footnote-3) While not bereft of criticism and controversy, the relationship between the two and Burke’s engagement with Hume’s writings were usually more cordial and respectful, despite important differences. The debate about their connection goes back to the eighteenth century. Notably, Burke’s first biographer Robert Bisset was convinced that Burke had planned to refute Hume’s sceptical philosophy early on.[[4]](#footnote-4) James Mackintosh speculated that Hume, like Burke, would have opposed the French Revolution had he been alive, but nevertheless stressed that

it would not be difficult to distinguish between the undisguised fury of an eloquent *advocate* [Burke] and the well dissembled partiality of a philosophical JUDGE [Hume] … The passions of the former would only *feel* the excesses which had dishonoured it; but the philosophy of the latter would instruct him, that the human feelings, raised by such events above the level of ordinary situations, become the source of a guilt and a heroism unknown to the ordinary affairs of nations; that such periods are only fertile in those sublime virtues and splendid crimes, which so powerfully agitate and interest the heart of man.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Modern scholarship has continued to compare and contrast the two thinkers, mainly in an unsystematic and selective way. In contrast with some earlier accounts, modern scholars often stress their intellectual kinship.[[6]](#footnote-6) Knud Haakonssen, for instance, refers to Burke as ‘Hume’s only peer in the metaphysics of politics’.[[7]](#footnote-7) This resembles Harold Laski’s earlier contention that ‘[t]he metaphysics of Burke, so far as one may use a term he would himself have repudiated, are largely those of Hume.’[[8]](#footnote-8) Andrew Sabl argues that Hume ‘may in fact have much in common with the Burke who prized liberty and restraints on arbitrary power (whether traditional or revolutionary),’ but ‘has fewer affinities with the cartoon Burke (drawn from a few unfortunate passages of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*), the peddler of an aristocratic constitutionalism founded on chivalry and reverence for political myths’.[[9]](#footnote-9) Similarly to Sabl’s second statement, John B. Stewart maintains that Hume’s more positive attitude towards political and social reform can helpfully be contrasted with ‘Burkean conservatism’.[[10]](#footnote-10) For Donald Livingston, by stark contrast, it was Hume and not Burke who was ‘the first to have worked out a conservative theory of politics.’[[11]](#footnote-11)

This essay does not intend to contribute to the debate about who was the most ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’ – terms with no party-political meaning and little political significance in both of their lifetimes.[[12]](#footnote-12) Instead, it offers an historical account of the actual connections between Hume and Burke, starting with their acquaintance and interactions, before moving on to Burke’s engagement with Hume, and, thereafter, a comparison of key areas of their thought. This comparison will touch on human nature, natural law, utility, religion, Whiggism, ancient constitutionalism, virtue, corruption, empire, political economy, and party. This wide-ranging survey cannot deal with any of these topics exhaustively, but it is the surest way of improving on the current scholarship, which has often been too sweeping when comparing Hume and Burke or placing them in dialogue, by concentrating on selective areas. Reading Hume is likely to have improved Burke’s political acumen and benefited him throughout his life, even as he disagreed with core elements of Hume’s scepticism and held many contrasting political opinions. More specifically, I demonstrate that while Hume had something to offer Burke as a man of letters, in the 1750s and after 1790-1, in certain ways Hume was less useful for Burke in the intermediate period when Burke was an active parliamentarian and Whig party member, since the mature Hume was so hostile to Burke’s brand of Whiggism.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**I: Hume and Burke as acquaintances**

Any historical discussion of Hume and Burke should begin by acknowledging that they were acquainted and, at least initially and at times, mutually respected each other. In 1759, Hume wrote from London to Adam Smith that he was ‘very well-acquainted’ with Burke.[[14]](#footnote-14) He later described Burke to Hugh Blair as ‘a very ingenious Irish gentleman’.[[15]](#footnote-15) This was before Burke had entered politics, and his fame rested on *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; expanded second edition, 1759), and to a lesser extent *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756). The latter was a parody of the posthumously published writings of Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke. Hume shared Burke’s low opinion of Bolingbroke’s philosophical writings, but he appears to have been more impressed by Burke’s *Sublime and Beautiful,* which he referred to as ‘a very pretty Treatise’ in a letter to Smith, although opinions are divided as to whether or not this was actually meant as a compliment.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In the *Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke, like Hume and later Smith, gave sympathy a major role in his philosophy, calling it one of the three main links in ‘the great chain of society’.[[17]](#footnote-17) Hume sent Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)to Burke, who was ‘much taken’ with the book.[[18]](#footnote-18) After Hume’s introduction, Burke waxed lyrical about the book in a letter to Smith. ‘I am not only pleased with the ingenuity of your Theory’, he wrote, ‘I am convinced of its solidity and Truth’.[[19]](#footnote-19) In the same letter, Burke referred to Hume as ‘our friend’.[[20]](#footnote-20) Smith and Burke became close, even if they do not appear to have met in person until 1775. Smith is believed to have said that Burke ‘was the only man, who, without communication, thought on these topics [political economy] exactly as he did.’[[21]](#footnote-21)

Since there are no surviving letters between Burke and Hume, we do not know how close their acquaintance was, even if it was certainly not as close as that between Burke and Smith, or indeed that between Smith and Hume. Apart from Hume’s correspondence cited above, Burke’s writings along with his early biographers give us some clues to his relationship with Hume. *Clue* is the keyword, since the stories told in Burke’s early biographers should not be accepted uncritically, but they are cautiously used here to sketch out a picture of what Burke’s attitude towards Hume may have been at different times.

The *Annual Register,* which Burke edited until 1765 and kept contributing to subsequently, reviewed Hume’s *History of England* approvingly in 1761. This review was most likely written by Burke, since he was the principal writer at that time, and his library contained the same edition as the one reviewed.[[22]](#footnote-22) Moreover, the journal wrote highly of Hume after his death, calling his *History* ‘one of the most excellent productions of human genius, and…certainly the greatest historical work of modern times.’[[23]](#footnote-23) This entry made no references to Hume’s irreligion, and sided with the Scotsman over Jean-Jacques Rousseau in their infamous quarrel. In the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)*,* Burke reported a conversation he had had with Hume about Rousseau, which had revealed Rousseau’s alleged vanity.[[24]](#footnote-24) In a later publication, Burke said that he ‘had good opportunities of knowing [Rousseau’s] proceedings almost from day to day’ when he was in England in 1766, presumably from Hume, who had taken Rousseau under his wing before they dramatically fell out.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The relationship between Hume and Burke was not exclusively convivial. Later in life, Burke suggested that he was the person Hume had in mind when he wrote of an ‘Irish Catholic, who denies the massacre in 1641’.[[26]](#footnote-26) According to Hume, this denial, along with the assertion by an English Whig of the reality of the Popish Plot and a Scottish Jacobite’s belief in the innocence of Mary Queen of Scots, showed that ‘party men’ were ‘beyond the reach of argument, and must be left to their own prejudices’.[[27]](#footnote-27) Burke was not Catholic, but his mother and wife were, and he was often called one as he was known as one of the foremost champions of Irish Catholics of the age.[[28]](#footnote-28) The event in question had occurred in October 1641, and was later used by Protestants to justify the penal laws against Catholics. For Hume, it represented the worst kind of religious violence and sectarianism. As a result of the episode, Bisset reported that Burke ‘did not regard Hume’s memory with great affection, however highly he must have admired his talents.’[[29]](#footnote-29)

Burke’s disappointment is likely to have been amplified by the fact that he was involved in a larger project of seeking to convince Hume to change his mind about the event. Two Irish historians, Charles O’Conor of Balanagare and John Curry, immediately criticised Hume. His representation was ‘not true history, but fine and pathetic writing ... and the Irish certainly have not sat for the picture’, they argued in a joint publication.[[30]](#footnote-30) In 1760, they sent O’Conor’s *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion in the Year 1641* (London, 1748) to Hume, Burke and Tobias Smollett, Hume’s historiographical rival, in order to set the record straight. Burke assisted by putting the work directly in Smollett’s hands. Smollett wrote of the *Memoirs* in his *Critical Review* in 1761, and accepted O’Conor’s argument that the massacre was ‘neither unprovoked nor general’. Hume softened his own account in the 1770 edition of the *History,* in which he among other things changed the description of the Irish from ‘barbarous savages’ to ‘enraged rebels’. More substantially, he implied that the estimated death toll of forty thousand may have been ‘very much exaggerated’, which he changed for the final posthumous edition of 1778 to ‘somewhat exaggerated’.[[31]](#footnote-31) This is unlikely to have placated Burke.[[32]](#footnote-32)

For a few years in the second half of the 1760s, Hume and Burke both inhabited the political world of London. Burke was elected to parliament at the end of 1765 and served as the Marquess of Rockingham’s private secretary in the first Rockingham administration in 1765-6, while Hume served as Under Secretary in the Northern Department to Henry Seymour Conway between 1766 and 1768. Although ‘in frequent communication’,[[33]](#footnote-33) they do not appear to have become close friends. In the only reference to Burke in Hume’s surviving correspondence at this time, Hume showed sympathy for Burke after he had reportedly performed poorly in the House of Commons in March 1767. He wrote to Adam Ferguson: ‘Burke did very ill, which I am sorry for. It is pretended, that he rather sinks in Reputation.’[[34]](#footnote-34)

Besides the Irish episode, the fact that Hume served the administration which had succeeded the Rockingham ministry may also have been a reason that impeded further bonding. Conway had also served in Rockingham’s administration and held talks with Burke about a potential job opportunity after the fall of the first Rockingham ministry. Burke responded, however, that if Rockingham and his followers went into formal opposition, he would have to resign and join them.[[35]](#footnote-35) Unsurprisingly, no formal job offer materialised. After Burke’s split with the Foxite Whigs in 1791, he would look back and stress that at this time he had been ‘free to choose another connexion’ but that ‘he cheerfully took his fate with the party’.[[36]](#footnote-36) He was dismissive of those who stayed on to serve the Chatham administration, which he described as

[S]o checkered and so speckled; he [Chatham] put together a piece of joinery, so crossly indented and whimsically dovetailed; a cabinet so variously inlaid; such a piece of diversified Mosaic; such a tesselated pavement without cement; here a bit of black stone, and there a bit of white; patriots and courtiers, kings friends and republicans; whigs and tories; treacherous friends and open enemies…indeed a very curious show; but utterly unsafe to touch, and unsure to stand on.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Even though Hume is unlikely to have been a key target of Burke’s criticism here, this was evidently not a strong foundation for the cultivation of friendship. It is clear that Hume’s politics was different and that he was more supportive of George III and Lord Bute, the antagonists of the Rockingham Whigs. The king had pensioned Hume and held a high opinion of him.[[38]](#footnote-38) Moreover, his closer acquaintances, such as Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto, were among the ‘king’s friends’.[[39]](#footnote-39) During the Rockingham ministry, Hume wrote to his patron Francis Seymour Conway, 1st Earl of Hertford, that Rockingham’s only reason for excluding Bute from the government was his Scottish nationality.[[40]](#footnote-40) Moreover, it was during the first Rockingham ministry that Hume wrote: ‘I have Reluctance to think of living among the factious Barbarians of London, who will hate me because I am a Scotsman & am not a Whig’.[[41]](#footnote-41)

James Prior, Burke’s early biographer, also presented another potential reason why their friendship did not seem to have been close and cordial after Hume returned to Britain from Paris in 1766. According to Prior’s account, Burke told Charles James Fox and others that Hume was ‘an easy and unaffected man’ before going to Paris to serve as Secretary to Lord Hertford, the British ambassador, in 1763. In Paris, however, the adulation and attention he received from the ‘female wits’ and *salonnières* proved ‘too powerful even for a *philosopher;* and the result was, he returned [to Britain] a literary coxcomb.’[[42]](#footnote-42) In any case, in the next section we see that Burke continued to read and cite Hume in his writings, even though he did not always agree with him.

**II: Philosophical Foundations and Agendas**

When Burke wrote that ‘reason is but a part and by no means the greatest part’ of human nature, he came close to Hume’s infamous statement that ‘[r]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions’.[[43]](#footnote-43) On this basis, it has often been stressed that Burke accepted Hume’s criticism of rationalism, but this can easily be exaggerated.[[44]](#footnote-44) The limitations of reason played a key role in Burke’s *Sublime and Beautiful,* in which he argued thatsublime and beautiful objects have an effect on us before we have time to reason about them. But in contrast with Hume, Burke’s critique of rationalism had a religious component:

Whenever the wisdom of our Creator intended that we should be affected with anything, he did not confide the execution of his design to the languid and precarious operation of our reason; but he endured it with power and properties that prevent the understanding, and even the will, which seizing upon the senses and imagination, captivate the soul before the understanding is ready either to join with them or to oppose them.[[45]](#footnote-45)

It is evident that Burke’s critique of rationalism did not mean that he subscribed to the full programme of Hume’s academic scepticism. Notably, Burke admired James Beattie’s attack on Hume in *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (1770). In his review of the book, Burke described Beattie’s intention as ‘expos[ing] the sceptical systems of Bishop Berkley and Mr. Hume; the one made with good intentions but with a bad effect; the other with the intentions to produce that infidelity to which it leads so evidently.’[[46]](#footnote-46) In the review, Burke launched his own attack on philosophical scepticism:

It is evident that, if such an opinion should prevail [i.e. scepticism], the pursuit of knowledge, both in the design and the end, must be the greatest folly, instead of being an indication of some wisdom in the attempt, and in the progress a means of acquiring the highest. It is evident too, that morality must share the fate of knowledge, and every duty of life becomes precarious, if it be impossible for us to know that we are bound to any duties, or that the relations which gave rise to them have any real existence.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Interestingly, however, when Burke sought to outline the proper role of the understanding in his aesthetic theory, his views approximated Hume’s. The *Sublime and Beautiful* was published two months after Hume’s ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ (1757), but it had been completed by 1753.[[48]](#footnote-48) However, a new introduction on taste in the second edition of thebook*,* published in 1759, has often been regarded as a response to Hume’s essay. As Dario Perinetti has argued, the work defends a similar thesis as Hume’s: that aesthetic judgements could be settled by appealing to matters of fact.[[49]](#footnote-49) With Hume, Burke also defended the notion of a common, objective standard of taste, and held that some people were better at aesthetic judgement than others. For both, the quality of art and literary productions was not relative and arbitrary. Yet they disagreed about the nature of facts which determine the aesthetic quality of an object; for Burke, it was facts about the external object itself, and for Hume, facts about the intentional attitude of the observer.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The difference between Hume and Burke is likely to have gone deeper. Paddy Pullard has shown that one of Burke’s university friends speculated that the *Sublime and Beautiful* was a response to Francis Hutcheson’s moral sense theory, whereby human beings were naturally inclined towards morality, beauty, and order. On this contemporary account, Burke feared that Hutcheson’s moral sense theory risked making virtue independent of revealed religion, and this is exactly what Burke sought to rectify in his philosophical enquiry.[[51]](#footnote-51) The full title of Burke’s book clearly echoes Hutcheson’s *Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725)*.* Hume also sought to transcend Hutcheson’s moral sense philosophy, but hardly in order to prop up revealed religion. It is highly plausible that Burke’s agenda was ultimately religious since he also wrote and published his *Vindication* against Bolingbroke’s deism and anti-clericalism at this time. Hume also disliked Bolingbroke’s posthumous *Works,* but for their mediocrity rather than their subversive qualities. As Hume wrote on their publication in 1754: ‘The Clergy are all enrag’d against him [Bolingbroke]; but they have no Reason. Were they never attack’d by more forcible Weapons than his, they might for ever keep Possession of their Authority.’[[52]](#footnote-52)

**III: Echoes and Citations of Hume in Burke**

Despite their different perspectives, there are many blatant echoes and references to Hume in Burke’s political writings that we can safely concur with Richard Bourke’s statement that Burke was ‘captivated by Hume’s ideas’.[[53]](#footnote-53) With Hume, Burke stressed that government was not possible without reference to the *opinion* of the governed.[[54]](#footnote-54) There are several allusions to Hume in Burke’s *Reflections,* in which he repeated many familiar Humean arguments, including the critique of enthusiasm and the relationship between democracy and ‘Caesarism’.[[55]](#footnote-55) Perhaps most importantly, the *Reflections* puts a premium on the principle of habit or prejudice.[[56]](#footnote-56) Jeffrey Hart once wrote that ‘[i]t was one of Burke’s great accomplishments as a political philosopher to show that Hobbes and Locke erred in assigning to reason rather than to habit the function of maintaining the stability of a society.’[[57]](#footnote-57) This achievement was, however, prefigured by Hume, who repeatedly stressed the seminal role of habit in consolidating systems of rule.[[58]](#footnote-58) Notably, when Burke wrote that too frequent changes would mean that ‘No one generation could link with the other. Men would become little better than the flies of a summer’, both the metaphor and the argument were close to what Hume had previously written in ‘Of the Original Contract’ (1748):

Did one generation of men go off the stage at once, and another succeed, as is the case with silk-worms and butterflies, the new race, if they had sense enough to choose their government, which surely is never the case with men, might voluntarily, and by general consent, establish their own form of civil polity, without any regard to the laws or precedents, which prevailed among their ancestors. But as human society is in perpetual flux, one man every hour going out of the world, another coming into it, it is necessary, in order to preserve stability in government, that the new brood should conform themselves to the established constitution, and nearly follow the path which their fathers, treading in the footsteps of theirs, had marked out to them.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Like Hume, Burke was especially emphatic about the importance of balancing liberty and authority. Hume’s most explicit statement on the interrelationship of liberty and authority was his posthumous ‘Of the Origin of Government’ (1777), published after Burke had linked the two principles in his *Speech at his Arrival at Bristol* (1774), which he later self-cited in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791)*.*[[60]](#footnote-60)As Burke put it in the *Appeal:* ‘none, except those who are profoundly studied, can comprehend the elaborate contrivance of a fabric fitted to unite private and public liberty with public force, with order, with peace, with justice, and, above all, with the institutions formed for bestowing permanence and stability through ages’.[[61]](#footnote-61) In a letter, he explained his intention behind the *Reflections* as ‘to distinguish the Ideas of a sober and virtuous Liberty…from that profligate, immoral, impious, and rebellious Licence, which, through the medium of every sort of disorder and calamity, conducts to some kind or other of Tyrrannick domination.’[[62]](#footnote-62)

The reciprocal relationship between authority and liberty was a fairly standard establishment Whig doctrine, and had been anticipated by Court Whig writers before Hume, who may indeed have influenced him.[[63]](#footnote-63) However, there are not only echoes of Hume in Burke’s writings but also citations. In the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777), for instance, he cited Hume’s essay ‘Of Civil Liberty’.[[64]](#footnote-64)Burke wrote the pamphlet to justify the Rockingham party’s decision to secede from parliament rather than lending credibility to the government’s policy on America. With reference to the absolute monarchy of France, Hume had argued that private property was as secure in civilised monarchies as in republics, and that people did not fear ‘the violence of the sovereign’ in such governments ‘more than we commonly dread from thunder, or earthquakes, or any accident the most unusual and extraordinary.’[[65]](#footnote-65) This was true, according to Burke, and a greater reason why arbitrary power could not be tolerated: it was ‘by lying dormant a long time, or being at first very rarely exercised, that arbitrary power steals upon a people,’ he argued.[[66]](#footnote-66) The apparent security of absolute monarchies, accurately portrayed by Hume, made them more odious rather than attractive, Burke implied.

In *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), Burke cited from the second volume of Hume’s *History,* and also took swipe at Hume’s lack of religion:

In the mean time a system of French conspiracy is gaining ground in every country. This system happening to be founded on principles the most delusive indeed, but the most flattering to the natural propensities of the unthinking multitude, and to the speculations of all those who think, without thinking very profoundly, must daily extend it’s influence. A predominant inclination towards it appears in all those who have no religion, when otherwise their disposition leads them to be advocates even for despotism. Hence Hume, though I cannot say that he does not throw out some expressions of disapprobation on the proceedings of the levellers in the reign of Richard the Second, yet affirms that the doctrines of *John Ball* were ‘conformable to the ideas of primitive equality, *which are engraven in the hearts of all men.*’[[67]](#footnote-67)

Finally, in the conclusion of the *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace,* written in 1795 and published posthumously in 1812, Burke argued that there was no prospect for ‘Mr. Hume’s Euthanasia of the British Constitution’.[[68]](#footnote-68) This referred to Hume’s contention that absolute monarchy was the ‘easiest death’ of the British constitution, since it would avoid a cycle of civil wars and revolutions which would eventually terminate in an absolute monarchy in any case.[[69]](#footnote-69) With monarchy and religion under attack at home and abroad from Jacobinism, Burke concluded that ‘There is no such Euthanasia for the British Constitution’.[[70]](#footnote-70)

These scattered references and allusions in different works over a long period of time indicate that Burke had read and continued to read widely and carefully across Hume’s *oeuvre*.[[71]](#footnote-71) In the next sections, we compare their outlooks and commitments in greater detail.

**IV: Natural law, utility, and religion**

The writings and speeches of Burke, who for most of his life was a practical politician and pamphleteer rather than an armchair philosopher, escape synthesis. As a politician, he was, in his own words, a ‘philosopher in action’.[[72]](#footnote-72) Yet, as has already been hinted at, a moral and religious basis to his thought can be identified, the equivalent of which is absent in the sceptic Hume.[[73]](#footnote-73) Whether, and to what degree, Burke was a natural law or alternatively a utilitarian thinker has been a subject of debate. For instance, it has been suggested that ‘in rejecting natural law [Burke] shared the conservatism of Hume.’[[74]](#footnote-74) Such statements, however, sit uneasily with Burke’s contention at the trial of Warren Hastings that ‘[t]here is but one Law in the world, namely, that Law which governs all Law, the Law of our Creator, the law of humanity, Justice, Equity, the Law of Nature and of Nations’.[[75]](#footnote-75) In his correspondence, he wrote that ‘[t]he principles of true politicks are those of morality enlarged’.[[76]](#footnote-76) Moreover, he stressed at the Hastings trial that ‘[t]he laws of morality are the same everywhere’, when arguing against ‘geographical morality’ and ‘oriental despotism’.[[77]](#footnote-77) Several similar quotations can be found, especially when Burke addressed imperial abuses in India and Ireland (although fewer can be found regarding America).

Even though Burke’s appeals to natural law were not part of a systematic treatise, there are too many to categorise him as either utilitarian, historicist, legalist or traditionalist, notwithstanding the presence of such characteristics as well. For Burke, they were unifying rather than contradictory principles. Even though moral law is universal and eternal, it is not directly comprehensible because of the limitations to reason. Natural law is thus discoverable in history, and manifested in social institutions, laws, and Christian revelation, Burke argued. A strand of scholarship has enlisted Burke in the natural law tradition in a strong sense and in opposition to utilitarianism.[[78]](#footnote-78) Yet for Burke natural law and utility were not only compatible but often inseparable. Burke’s thought was eclectic and attempts to assimilate it into a Thomist framework of natural law have been unsuccessful, since Burke only seems to have been vaguely familiar with Aquinas.[[79]](#footnote-79) Cicero, for whom utility, history and tradition were part of natural law rather than distinct from it, is a much likelier source for Burke, and someone he cited frequently throughout his career. The useful and the honourable were in alliance rather than in opposition for Cicero and Burke. Other natural law thinkers Burke cited were Francisco Suárez, Samuel Pufendorf, and Emer de Vattel. Burke’s association of the principles of utility and prudence with the providential God has been identified as a Christian appropriation of Cicero.[[80]](#footnote-80) The compatibility of natural laws and utility was also key for Hutcheson, who coined ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’ formula.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Hume had notoriously called justice an artificial as opposed to a natural virtue, and reduced it to utility.[[82]](#footnote-82) Burke himself identified justice with utility several times in his career.[[83]](#footnote-83) According to Hume, this was the case for the entire natural law tradition. ‘Examine the writers on the laws of nature’, he wrote, ‘and you will always find, that, whatever principles they set out with, they are sure….to assign, as the ultimate reason for every rule which they establish, the convenience and necessities of mankind.’[[84]](#footnote-84) But Cicero had anticipated such an argument in *De Legibus*: ‘there is no justice at all if it is not by nature, and the justice set up on the basis of utility is uprooted by that same utility’.[[85]](#footnote-85)In other words, Cicero, unlike Hume, viewed utility as the effect and not the cause of justice.[[86]](#footnote-86) Even though Burke at many times identified utility as a pillar of law, he appears to be closer to Cicero in this regard. In his *Tracts relating to Popery Laws* (1765), Burke associated himself with Cicero when he prized utility ‘connected…with, and derived directly from, our rational nature; for any other utility may be the utility of a robber’.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Burke used the principle of utility in a broad sense, as did Hume, and he was certainly not a hedonistic Benthamite utilitarian.[[88]](#footnote-88) As a practical politician, however, he put plenty of emphasis on the consequences of action. He famously said on the question of American taxation: ‘The question with me is, not whether you have a right to render your people miserable; but whether it is not your interest to make them happy.’[[89]](#footnote-89) But Burke stressed that feelings often preceded calculations of utility, which was why utility could not form the basis of either our aesthetic attitudes or ultimately our moral attitudes.

Unlike Hume, Burke also used the language of natural rights. As he said in his *Speech on Fox’s India Bill*: ‘The rights of men, that is to say, the natural rights of mankind, are indeed sacred things; and if any public measure is proved mischievously to affect them, the objection ought to be fatal to that measure, even if no charter at all could be set up against it.’[[90]](#footnote-90) In the *Reflections,* when attacking the idea that human beings had a natural right to equal wealth or a share in government, Burke elaborated on what he believed were the *real* rights of men:

In denying their false claims of right, I do not mean to injure those which are real, and are such as their pretended rights would totally destroy. If civil society be made for the advantage of man, all the advantages for which it is made become his right. It is an institution of beneficence; and law itself is only beneficence acting by a rule. Men have a right to live by that rule; they have a right to justice; as between their fellows, whether their fellows are in politic function or in ordinary occupation. They have a right to the fruits of their industry; and to the means of making their industry fruitful. They have a right to the acquisitions of their parents; to the nourishment and improvement of their offspring; to instruction in life, and to consolation in death. Whatever each man can separately do, without trespassing upon others, he has a right to do for himself; and he has a right to a fair portion of all which society, with all its combinations of skill and force, can do in his favour. In this partnership all men have equal rights; but not to equal things. He that has but five shillings in the partnership, has as good a right to it, as he that has five hundred pound has to his larger proportion. But he has not a right to an equal dividend in the product of the joint stock; and as to the share of power, authority, and direction which each individual ought to have in the management of the state, that I must deny to be amongst the direct original rights of man in civil society; for I have in my contemplation the civil social man, and no other. It is a thing to be settled by convention.[[91]](#footnote-91)

Importantly, this did not imply that Burke’s politics could be based on *any* convention, since it had to be founded on the real rights he had outlined. These rights were clearly linked to utility, and Hume would hardly have disagreed about the usefulness of Burkean rights of man. It is true that Burke contended, in a Hobbesian manner, that human beings on entering civil society ‘in a great measure abandon the right of self-defence, the first law of nature’, and their natural liberty.[[92]](#footnote-92) If this were not the case, a system of justice could not be administered, and human beings could not securely enjoy property rights. With Hume (and many others), Burke identified rules of justice to protect property as necessary for human society and civilisation.[[93]](#footnote-93)

In a document on scarcity drafted for William Pitt the Younger, Burke associated the ‘laws of nature’ with the ‘laws of God’ and ‘Divine Providence’.[[94]](#footnote-94) When discussing religion and religious institutions, however, Burke was particularly eager to stress utility. European civilisation was indebted to ‘the spirit of religion’, along with ‘the spirit of a gentleman’, he stressed.[[95]](#footnote-95) The utility of religion did not only apply to Christianity, whose truth he assumed, but also to Hinduism in India.[[96]](#footnote-96) Burke was a friend of toleration, and was supported by leading Quakers and Presbyterians as a member of parliament for Bristol between 1774 and 1780.[[97]](#footnote-97) He was not only committed to toleration for Protestant Dissenters and Catholics, but also for Jews, Muslims and pagans.[[98]](#footnote-98) Although the Bristol clergy opposed Burke, and he was often accused of being quasi-Catholic, Burke was also a strong supporter of the established Church of England, and in 1772 he opposed the Feathers Tavern Petition for the abolition of the clergy’s subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. There were limits to Burke’s toleration, as he had little patience for atheism, calling it ‘a foul, unnatural vice, foe to all dignity and consolation of mankind.’[[99]](#footnote-99) Convinced of the importance of revelation, he viewed Deism as both wrong and anti-social, and criticised Bolingbroke’s philosophical writings on these grounds. He also became increasingly critical of the tendency among Protestant Dissenters to politicise religion. As he wrote against the Unitarian Richard Price in the *Reflections*: ‘politics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement. No sound ought to be heard in the church but the healing voice of Christian charity.’[[100]](#footnote-100)

Burke’s religious commitments set him apart from Hume, who often treated religion with irony and derision. Interestingly, however, Hume’s political approach to religion was not entirely at odds with Burke’s. In the Tudor volumes of the *History,* Hume argued not only that toleration was ‘the true secret for managing religious factions’, but also that this should be accompanied by a state church in order to supervise the nation’s zealots.[[101]](#footnote-101) In this regard, Hume’s position was closer to Burke’s than to Smith’s, who proposed free competition among sects, not so that the best opinion would win out, but in order for them to check and balance each another.[[102]](#footnote-102) Hume and Burke thus agreed on the utility of both religious establishments and toleration. The important difference was that Burke did not question the truth of Christianity.[[103]](#footnote-103) His religious conviction, however unelaborated,[[104]](#footnote-104) is likely to be a key reason why Burke viewed utility as part of natural law rather than its foundation.

**V: Whiggism and Constitutionalism**

The political perspectives of Hume and Burke were different, and necessarily so since Hume had essentially stopped writing *publicly* about contemporary British politics after ‘Of the Coalition of Parties’ (1758). By contrast, most of Burke’s political writings (and speeches) were shaped by his entry into parliament in 1765, and they were thus formulated in different circumstances.[[105]](#footnote-105) Insofar as Hume commented in his private letters on some of the chief political events of the day, including ‘Wilkes and Liberty’ and the American crisis, his positions differed from Burke’s. Burke disliked John Wilkes as an individual, yet he defended the rights of the voters of Middlesex to elect him as their representative. He also collaborated with supporters of Wilkes in the petitions of 1769, even though he quickly became estranged from the more extreme elements within the reform movement.[[106]](#footnote-106) For Hume, the turbulence associated with Wilkes made him deeply pessimistic about British and especially English politics.[[107]](#footnote-107) It is not impossible that Hume was referring to Burke when writing to his publisher William Strahan on 25 October 1769: ‘I think, indeed, that no body of common Sense coud take the Road of Faction and Popularity, who woud not upon occasion have joind Catiline’s Conspiracy; and I have no better opinion of the Gentleman you call my Friend.’[[108]](#footnote-108) Since Strahan’s letter is missing, we cannot know for sure, but it is plausible that he, who was also a member of parliament, had referred to one of Burke’s speeches against the government’s handling of Wilkes.[[109]](#footnote-109) Wilkes himself, whom Hume had known in Paris, may be thought of as the main candidate, but Strahan’s letter to Hume from April 1768 makes him less probable.[[110]](#footnote-110)

In contrast with Hume, Burke’s positions were not exclusively based on his personal preferences but were also party positions. As a political essayist and historian, Hume sought to analyse the origin of party in British politics and the intellectual weaknesses of the ideologies of both parties, and to a lesser extent their utility, from the perspective of a non-partisan.[[111]](#footnote-111) As time wore on, Hume became harsher towards the Whigs, who had dominated British politics since the Hanoverian Succession in 1714.[[112]](#footnote-112) He took pride in refusing to yield to the ‘senseless clamour’ of ‘the Whig party’, even though it was ‘in possession of bestowing all places, both in the state and in literature’.[[113]](#footnote-113) In 1748, he wrote that he hoped his essays would ‘form a short, but compleat Refutation of the political Systems of Sydney, Locke and the Whigs’, which were ‘repugnant to Reason & the Practice of all Nations.’[[114]](#footnote-114) By contrast, many of Burke’s political arguments were formulated in the context of what he viewed as the *retreat* of Whiggism after the accession of George III and the alleged birth of a new Toryism centred on the new, native monarch. In 1760, George III came to the throne with a mission of breaking the power monopoly of the aristocratic Whigs. The Rockingham Whigs, the inheritors of the Old Corps of Whigs with the Duke of Newcastle as the crucial linkage, became almost a permanent party of opposition to a new system of new system of politics which Burke called the ‘double cabinet’. In this landscape, Burke stressed the importance of party solidarity in general and Whiggism in particular, understood as the protection of Britain’s mixed and balanced constitution.[[115]](#footnote-115)

In ‘My Own Life’, Hume described how he found it increasingly ‘ridiculous to consider the English constitution…as a regular plan of liberty.’[[116]](#footnote-116) As we have seen, Burke was an admirer of the intellectual effort of the *History.* In his early, unpublished writings, *An Abridgement of the English History* (1757-?) and a short fragment on the English law (*c.* 1757), Burke was also a critic of ‘vulgar Whiggism’ and English exceptionalism in a way resembling Hume.[[117]](#footnote-117) By the time Burke began and probably wrote most of these historical texts, however, only the Stuart volumes of Hume’s *History* had been published, and the volumes treating the same period as Burke were not published until the end of 1761. It was thus certainly not a question of straightforward influence, and probably rather one of similar sources (for instance, Thomas Carte’s *General History of England,* published between 1747 and 1755). In any case, there are echoes of Hume’s *Essays* in the *Abridgement*, in which Burke argued that the English had improved through commerce and ‘communication with the rest of Europe’ in the wake of the Norman Conquest.[[118]](#footnote-118) In a similar vein, Hume had stressed the importance of the principle of emulation among neighbouring states in ‘Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences’ (1742).[[119]](#footnote-119) In ‘Of the Jealousy of Trade’ (1758), he wrote that ‘Every improvement’ which Britain had made in the last two centuries ‘has arisen from our imitation of foreigners’.[[120]](#footnote-120)

Burke is more famous, however, as a proponent of the key tenet of what Hume regarded as vulgar Whiggism: the belief that English liberty was ancient and not modern. In a well-known draft of a speech he never delivered against representation as a natural right, drawn up in 1784 (previously usually dated as 1782), Burke argued that the British constitution was prescriptive and its sole authority was that it had existed ‘time out of mind’. In the 1750s, Burke had criticised Matthew Hale and the seventeenth-century ‘lawyers’ for entertaining opinions about the antiquity of English law which were ‘flattering to national vanity’.[[121]](#footnote-121) In the *Reflections,* by contrast, Burke drew onthe doctrine of Hale, Edward Coke, and William Blackstone when he argued that the Magna Carta was ‘nothing more than a re-affirmation of the…antient standing law of the kingdom.’[[122]](#footnote-122) The arguments of the common lawyers, which Burke now believed to be right on the whole (though ‘perhaps not always’), demonstrated the orientation towards antiquity among the English legislators and people.[[123]](#footnote-123) As J. G. A. Pocock has stressed, Burke’s English common-law thought is a significant area in which Burke talked past not only Hume but ‘the great Scottish theorists’ more broadly.[[124]](#footnote-124)

Ancient constitutionalism was not the exclusive property of Whigs but had been used by Tories since the Convocation Crisis of 1697-1701. In 1716 Tories used the language of the ancient constitution to argue against the introduction of septennial parliamentary elections, and later to restore ‘ancient rights’.[[125]](#footnote-125) In this context, Bolingbroke appropriated the ancient constitutionalism of Paul de Rapin-Thoyras’s *History of England.* Superficially, Burke’s belief in the ‘ancient constitution’ might appear to have much in common with Bolingbroke. When we examine the details, however, we see that this is not the case*.* In the 1784 draft speech, Burke rejected the Bolingbrokean ‘ancient constitution’ argument in favour of reform. The ‘county movement’, including William Pitt the Younger, Major Cartwright and James Burgh, justified reform on the basis that the constitution had fallen away from its original principles.[[126]](#footnote-126) This had been a crucial assumption of Bolingbroke’s Country party opposition, which continued to inspire writers around this time.[[127]](#footnote-127) For Burke, by contrast, the constitution could not be restored to its original principles because ‘[a] prescriptive government, such as ours, never was the work of any legislator, never was made upon any foregone theory.’[[128]](#footnote-128) We can only know the principles of the constitution from its structure and since it is ‘immemorial’, we know little about its original foundation.[[129]](#footnote-129) Reform was still possible, but on utilitarian rather than prescriptive grounds.[[130]](#footnote-130) Burke’s response to the Bolingbrokean argument was different from Hume’s, who, like the Court Whig Lord Hervey before him and Josiah Tucker afterwards,[[131]](#footnote-131) held that the past was barbarous, but it was a different and less bold take on the ancient constitution than Bolingbroke’s. Whereas for Hume the Glorious Revolution represented a new beginning, for Burke ‘The Revolution was made to preserve our *antient* indisputable laws and liberties’.[[132]](#footnote-132) This represents a fundamental difference in political outlook between Hume and the mature Burke.

As a Whig, Burke was also a proponent of contract and resistance theory, whereas Hume had sought to demolish Lockean contractarianism.[[133]](#footnote-133) Some of Burke’s writings and speeches are infused with Lockean rhetoric, notably his *Speech on Fox’s East India Bill* (1783), in which he said: ‘I ground myself therefore on this principle – that if the abuse is proved, the contract is broken; and we re-enter into all our rights; that is, into the exercise of all our duties.’[[134]](#footnote-134) In the *Reflections,* Burke based society on a contract, but distinguished it from a commercial contract that could be broken at the will of one of the parties.[[135]](#footnote-135) Famously, he defined it as ‘a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.’[[136]](#footnote-136) It was incorporated into his conception of the Providential natural law, since each contract of each state was ‘but a clause in the primæval contract of eternal society, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place.’[[137]](#footnote-137)

Even though Hume shared Burke’s general worries about ‘radical’ reform, much of Burke’s rhetoric would have been metaphysical obscurantism for Hume, or at least part of a Whig system of thought he had sought to explode. Importantly, however, when Burke went on to make allowance for resistance to government in the *Reflections* on the basis of necessity, he approximated Hume’s own views about when resistance was permissible. As Burke wrote: ‘It is the first and supreme necessity only, a necessity that is not chosen but chooses, a necessity paramount to deliberation, that admits no discussion, and demands no evidence, which alone can justify a resort to anarchy.’[[138]](#footnote-138) Hume had written in ‘Of the Original Contract’ (1748):

common sense teaches us, that, as government binds us to obedience only on account of its tendency to public utility, that duty must always, in extraordinary cases, when public ruin would evidently attend obedience, yield to the primary and original obligation…Resistance, therefore, being admitted in extraordinary emergencies, the question can only be among good reasoners, with regard to the degree of necessity, which can justify resistance, and render it lawful or commendable. And here I must confess, that I shall always incline to their side, who draw the bond of allegiance very close, and consider an infringement of it, as the last refuge in desperate cases, when the public is in the highest danger, from violence and tyranny.[[139]](#footnote-139)

Even though Hume’s acceptance of resistance is couched in the idiom of utility and Burke’s is closer to establishment Whiggism as well as modern natural law,[[140]](#footnote-140) the effect and even the tone are similar since this is exactly the kind of basic utility which Burke regarded as part and parcel of natural law. On occasions such as these, Hume and Burke could arrive at similar places even when they had different starting points.

**VI: Corruption, reform and public spirit**

Despite differing political outlooks, both Hume and Burke defended Britain’s mixed and balanced constitution. By recognising that the civilised monarchy of France was equally legitimate, Hume did so in a less chauvinistic way than most British Whigs,[[141]](#footnote-141) but this was also the position Burke would take up after the outbreak of the French Revolution.[[142]](#footnote-142)However, one area which set Burke apart from Hume is the importance he placed on virtue and public spirit, among legislators as well as the people at large. This emphasis was accompanied by Burke’s relentless attack on government corruption. As he told parliament in his speech on ‘economical reform’ on 15 February 1781: ‘all free countries were corrupted by bribery. When virtue, which was the spirit of commonwealths and of all free states, was gone, liberty could not long survive.’[[143]](#footnote-143) In opposition to Bolingbroke’s political writings, Hume had struck an entirely different tone in his *Essays.* In ‘That Politics may be reduced to a Science’ (1741), he argued that ‘checks and controuls’ were more vital than ‘men’ in a free government with representative politics, since the purpose of such constitutions was to make it in the interest of bad men to act for the public good.[[144]](#footnote-144) In ‘Of the Independency of Parliament’ (1741), moreover, Hume condoned executive influence over the legislature under the heading of ‘corruption’ as a way for the crown to hold its own against an increasingly powerful House of Commons.[[145]](#footnote-145)

Many of Burke’s political writings and speeches in the service of his party before the French Revolution were aimed at reducing the influence of the crown. It is true that he did not go as far as the Bolingbrokean ‘Country party’ platform and its reformist offspring, which sought to exclude all government employees from the Commons. Burke accepted that a degree of executive influence was legitimate, and that correspondence between the legislature and the executive was desirable.[[146]](#footnote-146) But the practice of borrowing money to top up the civil list had resulted in a court system based on systematic corruption.[[147]](#footnote-147) The contrast with Hume is stark, since the latter was worried that the government was too weak precisely at this time, as he expressed in his private letters, especially those to Strahan.[[148]](#footnote-148)

Burke was never a starry-eyed reformer, and it would be wrong to conclude that he became more pessimistic with age. As he wrote privately in 1770: ‘all that wise men ever aim at is to keep things from coming to the worst. Those who expect perfect reformations, either deceive or are deceived miserably.’[[149]](#footnote-149) He echoed similar views twenty years later in the critical circumstances of the French Revolution. However, as a politician, usually in opposition, his career was largely devoted to reform of various kinds, and in office as Paymaster General he implemented ‘economical reforms’ in 1782 and 1783, aimed at reducing the influence of the crown. In 1783, when the king brought down the Fox-North Coalition, Burke’s disappointment was immense, since it looked as if the court system had won the day, and party had failed. ‘We have been labouring for near twenty years to make [the Commons] independent’, he wrote to William Baker, ‘for me to look forward to the event of another twenty years toil – it is quite ridiculous.’[[150]](#footnote-150)

Hume and Burke agreed about the undesirability of voters instructing their MPs.[[151]](#footnote-151) However, in addition to his concern for the reduction of government corruption of parliament, Burke put more emphasis on the need for public spirit and patriotism, even among the electorate, than Hume did. In the *Present Discontents,* he stressed that voters must pay more attention to the conduct of representatives, organise meetings and establish ‘Standards, for judging more systematically upon their [MPs] conduct’.[[152]](#footnote-152) The public needed access to division lists to see how their MPs voted. In a public letter to the Stewards of the Bell Club in Bristol of 1 Nov 1777, published in the *Bristol Gazette*, Burke argued for the need for voters to keep abreast of politics. He addressed his constituents in Bristol:

You will therefore not listen to those who tell you, that these matters are above you and ought to be left entirely to those into whose hands the King has put them. The publick interest is more your Business than theirs…For in this very thing lies the difference between free men, and those that are not free. In a free Country, every man thinks he has a concern in all publick matters; that he has a right to form, and a right to deliver an opinion upon them. They sift, examine, and discuss them. They are curious, eager, attentive, and jealous…And this it is, that fills free Countries will men of ability in all Stations…In free countries there is often found more real publick wisdom and sagacity in Shops and manufacturers than in the Cabinets of Princes, in Countries, where none dares to have an opinion until he comes into them. Your whole importance therefore depends upon a constant discreet use of your own reason. Otherwise you and your Country sink to nothing.[[153]](#footnote-153)

Against this backdrop, there are evidently key strands in Burke’s political writings which are different from Hume, who had few positive comments to make about popular participation. Moreover, Humean political science was largely about manipulating self-interest, at least as it was formulated in his early essays.[[154]](#footnote-154) For Burke, by contrast, a minimal commitment to the welfare of others was needed for a society to work. Authority, hierarchy and leadership were crucial, but friendship was the basis of every community, and the love of the ‘little platoon’ could progress towards love of country.[[155]](#footnote-155) Indeed, according to Burke, one of the disasters of the French Revolution was that its architects tried to base politics solely on self-interest.[[156]](#footnote-156)

**VII: Empire, political economy, and the spectre of public debt**

It has been said that Hume and Burke held ‘shared’ views on America.[[157]](#footnote-157) Burke served the first Rockingham administration which repealed the Stamp Act, but simultaneously passed the Declaratory Act, confirming parliamentary sovereignty over the colonies. In 1771, Burke became the London agent for the New York assembly. The legislation of the governments succeeding Rockingham’s, notably the Townshend Duties of 1767-8 and the Tea Act of 1773, intensified the American crisis, which gave coherence to both government and opposition, with Burke and the Rockingham Whigs presenting themselves as friends of America. Hume’s position was hardly the same as theirs. Burke and the Rockingham Whigs wanted America to tax themselves but to remain within the British Empire. Only after war had broken out did Burke concede that the Americans would settle for nothing less than independence.[[158]](#footnote-158) In 1771, Hume had predicted that the union with America was unsustainable,[[159]](#footnote-159) and in 1775 he declared himself ‘an American in my Principles, and wish we would let them alone to govern or misgovern themselves as they think proper’.[[160]](#footnote-160) However, the reason why Hume wanted the American colonies to detach themselves from Britain was not that they had been mistreated but rather that their enthusiasm for liberty threatened the stability of the metropole.[[161]](#footnote-161) Moreover, defending them fuelled the national debt, which he was deeply worried about, as we shall see below.

Superficially, some of Hume’s views on the British empire in India resembles Burke’s. In an amusing comment, Hume said in 1769 that he wanted ‘the total Revolt of America’ to be accompanied by ‘a public Bankruptcy’ and ‘the Expulsion of the English from the East Indies’.[[162]](#footnote-162) Once again, it is clear that Hume’s worry was overexpansion of the empire and the swelling of the factious London, which he hoped would shrink to less than half of its size.[[163]](#footnote-163) These comments may seem hyperbolic, but they reflect his anxieties at this time and are consistently expressed in several letters. In 1772, Hume supported an enquiry into the proceedings of the East India Company, when he wrote of George III’s indignation over ‘the Oppressions exercisd over the poor Natives’.[[164]](#footnote-164) Although Burke would later emerge as the leading critic of the East India Company and the abuses of the British empire in India, in the 1760s he and the Rockingham Whigs had stressed the importance of the corporate property and chartered privileges of the Company and resisted Chatham’s attempts to regulate it. In 1772, Burke declined to serve on the Commission of Supervisors and he remained averse to Company reform until 1777.[[165]](#footnote-165) Burke’s reasons for resisting reform were complex and related to his fear of the court aggrandising its power. The point here is not that he, unlike Hume, was unconcerned with the plight of the Indian natives before 1777, but simply that he and Hume appear to have been in different political camps on the question before Hume’s death in 1776.

The spirit of Burke’s political economy was close to Smith’s, which, as is well-known, was indebted to Hume’s economic essays in the *Political Discourses* (1752). Burke agreed with Hume (and Smith) that foreign trade was not a zero-sum game between nations but could be mutually beneficial, and that the wealth of nations did not stem from bullion but from industry and commerce.[[166]](#footnote-166) In *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland* (1778), Burke wrote that ‘Trade is not a limited thing; as if the objects of mutual demand and consumption, could not stretch beyond the bounds of our Jealousies’, echoing the basic arguments of Hume’s essays ‘Of the Balance of Trade’ and ‘Of the Jealousy of Trade’.[[167]](#footnote-167) In *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795)*,* Burke argued against redistributive measures, since the ultimate source of all wealth was the labour of the people. For this reason, it was the people who had to provide for the government and the rich, and not the other way.[[168]](#footnote-168) The specific measure Burke attacked was Samuel Whitbread’s bill to introduce a minimum wage for agricultural workers. Burke believed that legislating for wage levels would be both ‘arbitrary’ and damaging for all parties, since it would create unemployment and higher food prices. The Burke of the *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* appears to insist on pure market relations to a greater degree than his friend Smith, and at least in this text seems to have been closer to Hume.[[169]](#footnote-169) His attitude to merchants was more positive than Smith’s, and resembled that of Hume, who viewed them as ‘one of the most useful races of men’.[[170]](#footnote-170) As usual, however, there was a religious dimension to his argument that was absent in Hume’s. As Burke wrote against protectionist merchants in Bristol: ‘we should form to ourselves a way of thinking, more rational, more just, and more religious.’[[171]](#footnote-171)

We must remember that Burke was no free trade absolutist, as he approved of the Navigation Acts, and opposed the easing of trade restrictions with France, Britain’s political and commercial rival, in 1787.[[172]](#footnote-172) Moreover, neither Burke nor Hume was a doctrinaire libertarian in any meaningful sense. Burke wanted the state to be confined ‘to every thing that is truly and properly public’, but this entailed the ‘public prosperity’ as well as the ‘public peace’.[[173]](#footnote-173) The state thus needed to reward public-spirited citizens, establish and maintain public buildings which inspired awe and patriotism, and provide funding to advance culture and education. In this spirit, Burke supported state funding to the British Museum, the conversion of Somerset House into a national administrative building, and a school for the children of French émigrés after the French Revolution.[[174]](#footnote-174) In the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40)*,* Hume wrote that ‘government extends farther its beneficial influence’ than simply the administration of justice, and needed to play a positive role in infrastructure development, since collective action at a large scale was impractical without the aid of government. As he wrote: ‘bridges are built; harbours open’d; ramparts rais’d; canals form’d; fleets equip’d; and armies disciplin’d; every where, by the care of government’.[[175]](#footnote-175)

It has been suggested that Burke’s defence of Britain’s traditional system of subordination differentiated him from Smith.[[176]](#footnote-176) Smith is likely to have shared this political commitment, however, since he viewed a system of ranks as a fundamental principle of politics, and wrote at length about the importance of deference to the rich, which was in itself a sign of corruption but a salutary one that contributed to stability*.*[[177]](#footnote-177)Our key concern here, however, is that the defence of Britain’s system of ranks and subordination was undoubtedly a commitment shared by Hume, who at the time of ‘Wilkes and Liberty’ wanted to see ‘the Restoration of the Government to the King, Nobility, and Gentry of this Realm.’[[178]](#footnote-178) C. B. Macpherson thus exaggerates when he notes that Burke was the first to make a dual commitment to the market and traditional social values central to his political thought.[[179]](#footnote-179) In this regard, Hume and Burke’s thought overlapped.

Burke’s conviction that manners supported commerce rather than the other way around has been presented by Pocock as Burke’s *reversal* of ‘the Scottish thesis’, which saw commerce as the engine in the progress of European civilisation.[[180]](#footnote-180) Be that as it may, we should stress that Hume, along with the other leading Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, were firm supporters of Britain’s traditional institutions, with the exception of the quasi-feudal structure of the Scottish Highlands and its Jacobite association. As we have seen, the notorious infidel Hume even supported the institution of a state church, which sat better with the Church of England than the anti-Erastian Scottish kirk. Moreover, Burke’s emphasis on chivalry drew on several Scottish accounts, including those of Adam Ferguson and William Robertson, who were both inspired by Hume’s historical writings.[[181]](#footnote-181)

Burke was outraged that the members of the French National Assembly were men of business who lacked concern for honour and rank.[[182]](#footnote-182) More precisely, he was worried about the influence of ‘monied men’, or ‘oeconomists’ and ‘calculators’, in French revolutionary politics.[[183]](#footnote-183) At this point and at least with regard to France*,* Burke shared Hume’s alarmism about public debt. ‘Public debts,’ Burke wrote, ‘which at first were a security to governments, by interesting many in the public tranquillity, are likely in their excess to become the means of their subversion.’[[184]](#footnote-184) Excessive public debt would lead to popular discontent because it required heavy taxation. More specifically, the ‘monied interest’ was potentially a revolutionary class since it was only loyal to governments that were loyal to it. By contrast, he implied that the financial interest was harmless in Britain because it was politically impotent and did not aspire to domination as in France.[[185]](#footnote-185) In any case, T. B. Macaulay can be said to have erred when distinguishing Burke from Hume on the question of public credit, arguing that Burke was ‘too wise to share in the general delusion’ that public debt was fatal to society.[[186]](#footnote-186) As Pocock has pointed out, the language of Burke’s denunciation of the ‘monied interest…grown up…by the vast debt’ came straight from ‘Queen Anne Toryism’, in other words, Bolingbroke.[[187]](#footnote-187) Considering Burke’s dislike of Bolingbroke, however, and that the *Reflections* was written against Richard Price, who was equally gloomy about public debt, Hume’s famous essay ‘Of Public Credit’ (1752) is a possible source for Burke. In this essay, Hume argued that public debt transferred power to a set of people ‘who have no connexions with the state’.[[188]](#footnote-188) Hume’s fear was that the fluctuating nature of the stock trade would undermine the political influence of hereditary, landed wealth:

Adieu to all ideas of nobility, gentry, and family. The stocks can be transferred in an instant, and being in such a fluctuating state, will seldom be transmitted during three generations from father to son. Or were they to remain ever so long in one family, they convey no hereditary authority or credit to the possessor; and by this means, the several ranks of men, which form a kind of independent magistracy in the state, instituted by the hand of nature, are entirely lost; and every man in authority derives his influence from the commission alone of the sovereign…the middle power between king and people being totally removed, a grievous despotism must infallibly prevail. The landholders, despised for their poverty, and hated for their oppressions, will be utterly unable to make any opposition to it.[[189]](#footnote-189)

These were similar fears expressed in the *Reflections* by Burke*,* who was convinced thatranks were a barrier against despotism, whether monarchical or democratic. A key source for the importance Burke placed on intermediate powers between people and monarchy as a bulwark against despotism was Montesquieu’s *Spirit of Laws* (1748),but the same principle was formulated here by Hume, who had also read Montesquieu. Of course, neither Hume nor Burke championed the ‘landed interest’ exclusively. Hume in 1741 had already written that Britain’s landed and trading bodies were ‘not really distinct, and never will be so, till our public debts encrease to such a degree, as to become altogether oppressive and intolerable.’[[190]](#footnote-190) Burke had echoed similar sentiments from *Tracts relating to Popery Laws* (1765) to *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796). In contrast with Britain, France had the misfortune of segregation between its landed and commercial interests before the revolution, which made the rising monied interest menacing, since it was motivated by resentment and jealousy, rather than self-interest connected to the welfare of the whole.[[191]](#footnote-191)

**VIII: Conclusion**

As set out in the introduction, many scholars have attempted to place Hume and Burke either close together or far apart on a liberal-conservative spectrum. This article has shown that an historical investigation into their personal and intellectual relationship is bound to challenge and complicate such efforts. Hume and Burke belonged to the same intellectual world, and their relationship therein was marked by mutual respect as well as controversy and disagreement. In political terms, Hume felt little affinity for Burke’s Whig tribe, and they tended to view political events differently, notably ‘Wilkes and Liberty’ and the American crisis. Regardless, it is evident that Burke was an avid reader of Hume’s writings and used some of Hume’s arguments for his own purposes in different contexts, while differing with Hume on several fundamental questions. Although he shared aspects of Hume’s critique of rationalism, he was not prepared to subscribe to so thorough a scepticism that risked undermining religion and morality. However, Christianity and civil order could also be threatened by the extreme rationalism of Bolingbroke and the French *philosophes,* who were the targets of Burke’s criticism in his *Vindication* (1756) and his writings against the French Revolution in the 1790s. Burke’s emphasis on the passionate and feeling aspects of human nature in these contexts shares certain dimensions with Hume’s thought, but their similarity can be, and has been, exaggerated. Burke may have been influenced by Hume insofar as Rousseau’s ‘vanity’ was directly conveyed to him by Hume, at least according to the account in the *Reflections*.[[192]](#footnote-192) As Iain Hampsher-Monk has argued, however, the sources of Burke’s scepticism are likely to have been more religious and specifically Anglican in orientation, beginning with readings of Locke’s epistemology which emphasised the limits of human understanding.[[193]](#footnote-193)

The comparison between Hume and Burke suggests that there may have been a substantial difference between Burke, the practical politician, and Burke, the man of letters. That he went from a critic of ancient constitutionalism and the common law mind as a writer in the late 1750s to its foremost spokesperson in the *Reflections* is a case in point. His attitude to parties and partisanship is another. Burke consistently held party to be ineliminable from free governments, as did Hume.[[194]](#footnote-194) Burke’s most famous defence of political parties in the *Present Discontents* was primarily a justification of his own party, the Rockingham connection, and Whiggism more broadly, even though it was also a broader argument since his key opponents – whether George III, Chatham, or Catharine Macaulay – decried party as such. In any case, his argument was partisan and in that sense different from that in an unpublished essay written before Burke entered politics, and in which he had favoured the constitutional parties of ‘Court’ and ‘Country’ as opposed to power-seeking factions.[[195]](#footnote-195) In the *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1797), written towards the end of his life and several years after he had had cut his ties with the Foxite Whigs, Burke presented an even stronger nonpartisan statement in favour of parties when he argued that the old Whig and Tory parties had sustained the British mixed and balanced constitution ‘by their collision and mutual resistance’.[[196]](#footnote-196) Richard Bourke has cited this passage to signal intellectual distance between Burke and Hume.[[197]](#footnote-197) However, Burke’s words are reminiscent of a key quotation from Hume’s *History,* when Hume wrote of the Court and Country parties giving ‘permanent life and vigour’ to British politics.[[198]](#footnote-198) This way of thinking anticipates Herbert Butterfield’s classic argument *against* Whig history: ‘[The Whig historian] is apt to imagine the British constitution as coming down to us by virtue of the work of long generations of whigs and in spite of the obstructions of a long line of tyrants and tories. In reality it is the result of the continual interplay and perpetual collision of the two.’[[199]](#footnote-199) During his party career, Burke occasionally spoke in these terms privately, for instance when he told Boswell that the ‘true Genius’ of the British constitution was ‘Tory Language and Whigg measure’.[[200]](#footnote-200) For the most part, however, his defence of party *when he was acting in a party* was concentrated on vindicating his own connection, and the principle of aristocratic Whiggism, in opposition to the ‘king’s men’ or the ‘court faction’.[[201]](#footnote-201)

This shows that when Burke wrote as an independent man of letters, he occasionally approximated Hume. But in the guise of a party man – and Burke believed that the *Reflections* would honour rather than split the Whigs[[202]](#footnote-202) – he often found himself far removed from Humean scepticism, even when he continued to cite Hume occasionally for his own purposes. This distinction between Burke’s identities in the 1750s and after 1790-1 can thus be said to be significant. This is not meant to rehabilitate any Foxite charge of inconsistency,[[203]](#footnote-203) nor to suggest that there was a real Burke and a contrived one. We have every reason to take Burke at his word when he said that he knew that his principles were Whig and that he joined the Rockingham connection for this reason.[[204]](#footnote-204) Hume, by contrast, was neither Whig nor Tory, and was impatient with partisans and party arguments, and more sympathetic to George III and Bute. While he agreed with Burke about the utility of stable regimes, ranks and property, and in a similar vein viewed habit*,* or prejudice, as the key supporting principle of political stability, it is not a farfetched speculation that he would have had little time for the more ‘metaphysical’ aspects of Burke’s *Reflections,* especially its ancient constitutionalism and ‘the primæval contract of eternal society’. As Burke would have been all too happy to admit, Hume’s scepticism was more comprehensive than, and of a very different nature from, his own.

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3. Part of the conversation is missing, but there is no mention of religion in relation to Hume: ‘He [Burke] was elated with the Retreat from Boston. Wished they’d mention it in the House of Commons; it would give ’em a little small-talk. Burke. “I would not treat the irish as prisoners; it is inexcusable. The Scotch are a part – nay the prime mover – of the power. The Irish have none of it. I doubt that keeping company with David Hume, in a strict light, is hardly defensible. But in the present state of society I see all men. ’Tis making myself of too much consequence not to. Gentlemen are abject in a despotic monarchy, but it is difficult to keep any government from it. A Republic never can be in this country, so I live in charity with my friends who think of it.’ The notion that Scots wielded great power in the British government had been a Whig shibboleth since the ascendency of Lord Bute at the beginning of George III’s reign, and his supposed influence ‘behind the curtain’ subsequently. At the time of Burke’s remark, William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield, was Lord Chief Justice. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Robert Bisset, *The Life of Burke* (2 vols., London, second edn., 1800 [1798]), 2: 33, 77. See also Prior, *Memoir of Burke*, 1: 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. James Mackintosh, *Vindiciae Gallicae and Other Writings on the French Revolution*, ed. Donald Winch (Indianapolis, 2006 [1791]), 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, 2015), esp. 18-19, 193;Richard Bourke, ‘Liberty, Authority, and Trust in Burke’s Idea of Empire’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61 (2000), 453-71, at 463-5; David Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume’s Political Thought* (Oxford, 1981), 196-205; Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (2nd edn., Munich, 1946), 2: ch. 6; G. H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York, 1945), 605-7, 612, 614, 618. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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9. Andrew Sabl, *Hume’s Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the History of England* (Princeton, 2012), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John B. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1992), 7, 274-5, 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Donald W. Livingston, *Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago, 1984), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Richard Bourke, ‘What is Conservatism? History, Ideology and Party’, *European Journal of Political Theory,* 17(2018),449–475; James Harris, ‘Hume’, in *Conservative Moments: Reading Conservative Texts*, ed. M. Garnett (London: 2018), 27-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I discuss the problems of the Whig interpretation of Hume in Max Skjönsberg, ‘Hume and the Jacobites’, *Scottish Historical Review* (forthcoming in 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hume to Smith, 28 July 1759, *The Letters of David Hume,* ed. J. Y. T. Greig(2 vols., Oxford, 1932)*,* 1: 312. (Hence: *Hume Letters.*) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Hume to Hugh Blair, 19 September 1763, ibid*.,* 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Hume to Smith, 12 April 1759, *New Letters of David Hume,* ed. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford, 1954)*,* 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Burke, *Sublime and Beautiful, The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* ed. Paul Langford et al*.* (9 vols., Oxford, 1970-2015),1: 220. (Hence: *W&S*.) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hume to Smith, 28 July 1759, *Hume Letters,* 1: 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Burke to Smith, 10 September 1759, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W.

    Copeland et al. (10 vols., Chicago, 1958–1978),1: 129. (Hence: *Burke Correspondence.*) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Bisset, *The Life of Burke,* 2: 429. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Thomas Copeland, ‘Edmund Burke and the Book Reviews in Dodsley’s *Annual Register’*, *PMLA*, 57 (1942), 446-468, at 451. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *The Annual Register for the year 1776* (London, 1777)*,* 31. According to James Prior, however, Burke was less satisfied with Hume’s *History,* especially the early parts, which Burke himself treated in the *Abridgement*;see Prior, *Memoirs of Burke,* 1: 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford, CA, 2001 [1790]), 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), *W&S*, 8: 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Bisset, *The Life of Burke,* 2: 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Hume, *History of England,* ed. William B. Todd(6 vols., Indianapolis, IN, 1983 [1754-61])*,* 4: 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. He was described as such by Charles Francis Sheridan, the brother of Richard Sheridan, in *The Roman Catholic Claim to the Elective Franchise Discussed, In An Essay upon the True Principles of Civil Liberty and of Free Government* (Dublin, 1793), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Bisset, *The Life of Burke,* 2: 427-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Cited in David Berman, ‘David Hume on the 1641 Rebellion in Ireland’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 65 (1976), 101-112, at 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid., 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For the episode, see Ross Carroll, ‘Revisiting Burke’s Critique of Enthusiasm’, *History of Political Thought,* 35 (2014), 317-44, at 329-37. Carroll interprets key parts of Burke’s *Tracts relating to Popery Laws* (1765), an unfinished text against the anti-Catholic penal laws, as a response to Hume’s *History.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Prior, *Memoirs of Burke,* 2: 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Hume to Ferguson, 10 March 1767, *Hume Letters,* 2:127. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Burke to O’Hara, 11 November 1766, *Burke Correspondence,* 1: 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Burke, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), *W&S,* 4: 408. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Burke, *Speech on American Taxation* (1774), *W&S,* 2: 450. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 14 July 1765, *Hume Letters,* 1: 512. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Burke was friends with Elliot’s son, Sir Gilbert Elliot, 1st Earl of Minto, who was ecstatic about the *Reflections,* calling it ‘the new and better Aristotle’ in a letter to Burke, 6 November 1790, *Burke Correspondence,* 6: 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Further Letters of David Hume,* ed. Felix Waldmann (Edinburgh, 2014), 64. For Bute and the general rage against the Scots, see also *Hume Letters,* 1: 382, 519. The exclusion of Bute was celebrated by Burke in his *Short Account of a Late Short Administration* (1766), *W&S*, 2: 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Hume to Hugh Blair, 23 August 1765, *Hume Letters,* 1: 517. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Prior, *Memoirs of Burke,* 1: 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* (1769)*, Works,* 2: 196; Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1978 [1739-40])*,* 415. See also Burke, *Sublime and the Beautiful, W&S,* 1: 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. For Burke’s ambition to refine Hume’s philosophical insights, see Francis Canavan, ‘Edmund Burke’s Conception of the Role of Reason in Politics’, *Journal of Politics,* 21 (1959), 60-79, at 60-1; Neal Wood, ‘The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke’s Political Thought’, *Journal of British Studies,* 4 (1964), 41-64, at 56; Morton Frisch, ‘Burke on Theory’, *Cambridge Journal,* 7 (1954), 292-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Burke, *The Sublime and Beautiful, W&S*, 1: 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, for the year 1771* (London, 1772)*,* 255. For Burke’s authorship of the review, see Thomas W. Copeland, *Edmund Burke: Six Essays* (London, 1950), 121-2, 127, 144. See also Canavan, ‘Edmund Burke’s Conception of the Role of Reason’, 72-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *The Annual Register 1771,* 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. ‘It is four years now since the enquiry was finished’; Burke, *The Sublime and Beautiful, W&S,* 1: 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Dario Perinetti, ‘Between Knowledge and Sentiment: Burke and Hume on Taste’, in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard (Dordrecht, 2012), 283-304, at 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Paddy Bullard, ‘Burke’s Aesthetic Psychology’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke,* ed. David Dwan and Christopher Insole (Cambridge, 2012),53-66, at 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 24 October 1754, *Hume Letters,* 1: 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Bourke, *Empire and Revolution,* 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Burke, *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777), *W&S,* 3: 314-5. On this theme, see Paul Sagar, *The Opinion of Mankind: Sociability and the Theory of the State from Hobbes to Smith* (Princeton, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Political Thought in the English-speaking Atlantic’, in idem (ed.), *The Varieties of British Political Thoughts* (Cambridge, 1994), 304; Richard Bourke, ‘Popular Sovereignty and Political Representation’, *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective,* ed. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 2017), 229-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 251-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Jeffrey Hart, ‘Burke and Radical Freedom’, *The Review of Politics,* 29 (1967), 221-38, at 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Hume, ‘Of the Origin of Government’ (1777) and ‘Of the Original Contract’ 1748), *Essays,* 37, 39, 469. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Hume, *Essays,* 476-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Hume, ‘Of the Origin of Government’, *Essays,* 40-1; Burke, *Speech at Arrival at Bristol* (13 October 1774), *W&S,* 3: 59; Burke, *Appeal*, *W&S,* 4: 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Burke, *Appeal, W&S,* 4: 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Burke to William Weddell, 31 January 1792, *Burke Correspondence,* 7: 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Reed Browning, ‘The Origin of Burke’s Ideas Revisited’, *Eighteenth Century Studies,* 18 (1984), 57-71, at 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Burke, *Letters to the Sheriffs of Bristol, W&S,* 3: 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Hume, ‘Of Civil Liberty’ (1741), *Essays,* 92-3. (Originally entitled ‘Of Liberty and Despotism’.) [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Burke, *Letters to the Sheriffs of Bristol, W&S,* 3: 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Burke, *W&S,* 8: 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1795), *W&S,* 9: 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Hume, ‘Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic (1741), *Essays,* 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1795), *W&S,* 9: 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. For other examples not discussed here, see Carroll, ‘Revisiting Burke’s Critique of Enthusiasm’, 329; David Armitage, ‘Edmund Burke and Reason of State’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 61 (2000), reprinted in *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), 154-71, at 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770)*, W&S,* 2: 317-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See especially Charles Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke’s Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1956); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire:* *The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, 2005), 77-85; Armitage, ‘Edmund Burke and Reason of State’; Ross Hoffman (ed.), *Burke’s Politics: Selected Writings and Speeches on Reform, Revolution and War* (New York, 1949), preface; Peter Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1958); Francis J. Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (Durham, NC, 1960); Frederick A. Dreyer, *Burke’s Politics: A Study in Whig Orthodoxy* (Waterloo, ON, 1979), ch. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ted Honderich (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 111. For Burke as a utilitarian, see John Morley, *Edmund Burke: A Historical Study* (London, 1867): Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols., London, 1881), 2: 223-7; Laski, *Political Thought in England,* 236-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Burke, *Speech in Reply at the Hastings Trial* (28 May 1794), *W&S,* 7: 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Burke to Dr William Markham, 9 November 1771, *Burke Correspondence,* 2: 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Burke, *Speech on the Opening of Impeachment*, *W&S*, 6: 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law*; Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke.* [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. See note 73 and Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1965 [1953]), 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Christopher Insole, ‘Burke and the Natural Law’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Burke,* 117-130; Canavan, ‘Edmund Burke’s Conception of Reason’, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. J. R. Dinwiddy, ‘Utility and Natural Law in Burke’s Thought: A Reconsideration’, *Studies in Burke and His Time,* 16 (1974), 105-28, at 36-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature,* 477-84; Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (1751)*,* in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals,* ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975),183. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. David Dwan, ‘Burke and Utility’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Burke,* 131-45, at 136-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Morals,* 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws,* ed. James E. G. Zetzel (Cambridge, 1999), 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Despite this difference, it should be noted that Hume was an avid reader of Cicero and adopted the ‘academic scepticism’ position from the Roman statesman-philosopher; see Tim Stuart-Buttle, *From Moral Theology to Moral Philosophy: Cicero and Visions of Humanity from Locke to Hume* (Oxford, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Burke, *Tracts Relating to Property Laws* (1765), *W&S,* 9: 456. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Dinwiddy, ‘Utility and Natural Law in Burke’s Thought’, 105-28. Burke did, however, use the language of hedonistic psychology in the *Sublime and the Beautiful;* see Neal Wood, ‘The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke’s Political Thought’. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Burke, *Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies* (1775), *W&S,* 3: 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Burke, *Speech on Fox’s India Bill* (1783), *W&S,* 5: 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 217-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid., 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Dinwiddy, ‘Utility and Natural Law in Burke’s Thought’, 51-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Burke, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), *W&S,* 9: 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Burke, *Reflections*, ed. Clark, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Burke, *Speech of Fox’s India Bill, W&S*, 5:422. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See esp. G. E. Weare, *Edmund Burke’s Connection with Bristol, from 1774 till 1780* (Bristol, 1894). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Burke to William Burgh, 9 February 1775, *Burke Correspondence*, 3: 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. William Cobbett (ed.), *The Parliamentary History of England from the earliest period to the year 1803* (36 vols., London, 1802-20), 28: 355 (9 February 1790). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Hume, *History,* 3: 134-6; 4: 352 (see also 4: 18-19, 54 and 1: 311-12). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1981 [1776]),2:791-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ian Harris, ‘Burke and Religion’, *The Cambridge Companion to Burke,* 92-103; F. P. Lock, ‘Burke and Religion’, in I. Crowe (ed.), *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke* (Colombia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 19-36; F. A. Dreyer, ‘Burke’s Religion’, *Studies in Burke and his Time,* 17 (1976), 199-212. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. ‘My particular religious sentiments are not of much importance to anyone but myself. I am attached to Christianity at large; much from conviction; more from affection.’ Burke to unknown, 26 January 1791, *Burke Correspondence,* 6: 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. For earlier political essays, see Richard Bourke, ‘Party, Parliament and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts’, *Historical Journal,* 52 (2012), 619–52. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. George Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Study of 1763 to 1774* (Oxford, 1962), esp. chs. 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. J. G. A. 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)*,* 125-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. *Hume Letters*, 2: 210. (The editor has not identified the person to whom Hume referred.) [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. For instance, on 15 April 1769, when Burke ‘accused the ministry of the steps they had taken to sow discord between the King and the people.’ See Cobbett (ed.)*, The Parliamentary History of England,* 16: 587. This was one of the last sessions of the year since parliament was prorogued on 9 May 1769 to 14 June 1769 and then immediately until 9 January 1770. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. *Letters of Eminent Persons addressed to David Hume,* ed. J. H. Burton(Edinburgh, 1849), 86-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. This is Hume’s own description in ‘My Own Life’, in *Essays,* xxxvii, and in many places in his correspondence. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Skjönsberg, ‘Hume and the Jacobites’. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Hume, ‘My Own Life’, in *Essays,* xxxviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Hume to Lord Elibank, 8 January 1748, in E. C. Mossner (ed.), ‘New Hume Letters to Lord Elibank, 1748-76’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 4 (1962), 431-60, at 437. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. These arguments were most famously formulated in Burke’s *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770). [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Hume, ‘My Own Life’, in *Essays,* xxxviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Séan Patrick Donlan, ‘“A Very Mixed and Heterogenous Mass”: Edmund Burke and English Jurisprudence, 1757-62’, *University of Limerick Law Review,* 4 (2003), 79-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Burke, *Abridgement of English History* (1757-?), *W&S*, 1:453. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Hume, *Essays,* 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Hume, *Essays*, 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Burke, ‘Fragment on the Laws of England’ (*c.* 1757)*, W&S,* 1: 322-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. By stressing the ‘perhaps not always’ part, it has been argued that Burke was more eager to emphasise the utility rather than the accuracy of the common law tradition; see Dreyer, *Burke’s Politics,* 85-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. J. G. A. Pocock, ‘The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse’, in idem, *Virtue, Commerce, and History,* 297-8. For the common law mind, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century, a Reissue with a Retrospect* (New York, 1987 [1957]). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Max Skjönsberg, ‘Ancient Constitutionalism, Fundamental Law, and Eighteenth-Century Toryism in the Septennial Act (1716) Debates’, *History of Political Thought*, 40 (2019), 270-301. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution – A Problem in the History of Ideas’, *Historical Journal,* 3 (1960), 125-43, at 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. David Armitage, ‘A Patriot for Whom? The Afterlives of Bolingbroke’s Patriot King’, *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), 397-418. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Burke, *Speech on Parliamentary Reform,* 16 June 1784 [previously dated as 7 May 1782], *W&S,* 4: 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. On this, see Pocock, ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution’. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Dreyer, *Burke’s Politics,* 88-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Cambridge, 1989 [1971]), 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Jeremy Bentham hailed Hume for this achievement in *A Fragment on Government* (Cambridge, 1988 [1776]), 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Burke, *Speech on Fox’s India Bill* (1783), *W&S,* 5: 386. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 260-1. See also ibid., 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Ibid., 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Ibid. See also ibid., 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Hume, *Essays*, 489-90. See also Hume, *History*, 5: 544. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Elsewhere in the *Reflections,* Burke argues that James II was deposed because he broke the ‘original contract’ between king and people, and that ‘[t]he punishment of real tyrants is a noble and awful act of justice.’ Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 177, 245. See also Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought,* 161-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Hume, *Essays*, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. ‘I do not recognize [in the French monarch] the despotism of Turkey.’ Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Burke, *Economical Reform Bill* (15 February 1781), *W&S,* 4: 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Hume, *Essays*.*,* 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Ibid., 42-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Caroline Robbins, ‘Edmund Burke’s Rationale of Cabinet Government’, *Burke Newsletter* (1965), 457-65; William Selinger, *Parliamentarism: From Burke to Weber* (Cambridge, 2019), ch. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Burke, *Present Discontents* (1770), *W&S,* 2: 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. See, e.g., *Hume Letters,* 2: 210, 216, 217-8, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Burke to Richard Shackleton, *ante* 15 August 1770, *Burke Correspondence,* 2: 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Burke to William Baker, 22 June 1784, *Burke* *Correspondence,* 5: 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Hume, ‘Of the First Principles of Government’ (1741), *Essays,* 35-6; Burke, *Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll* (3 November 1774), *W&S,* 3: 68-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Burke, *Present Discontents, W&S,* 2: 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Burke to Richard Champion, 25 Sep 1777, *Burke Correspondence*, 3: 397-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. But see Paul Sagar, ‘Between Virtue and Knavery: Hume and the Politics of Moderation', *Journal of Politics* (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. On this, see Wood, ‘The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke’s Political Thought’, 50-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Robert H. Murray, *Edmund Burke: A Biography* (Oxford, 1931), 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Burke, *Letters to the Sheriffs of Bristol, W&S*, 3: 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Hume to Strahan, 11 March 1771, *Hume Letters,* 2: 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Hume to Baron Mure of Caldwell, 27 October 1775, ibid., 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Pocock, ‘Hume and the American Revolution’. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Hume to Strahan, 25 October 1769, *Hume Letters,* 2: 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Hume to Strahan, 22 February 1772, ibid., 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Bourke, *Empire and Revolution,* ch. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. See especially Gregory M. Collins, *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke’s Political Economy* (Cambridge, 2020); Margaret Schabas and Carl Wennerlind, *A Philosopher’s Economist: Hume and the Rise of* *Capitalism* (Chicago, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Burke, *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland* (1778), *W&S,* 9: 514-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Burke, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity, W&S*, 9: 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. This point is made by C. B. Macpherson, ‘Edmund Burke’, *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada,* 53 (1959), 19-26, at 21. The fact that Hume was more optimistic about market liberty than Smith has recently been emphasised in Schabas and Wennerlind, *A Philosopher’s Economist* and Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Infidel and the Professor: David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Friendship that Shaped Modern Thought* (Princeton, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Hume, ‘Of Interest’ (1752), *Essays,* 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Burke, *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland* (1778), *W&S,* 9: 514. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Collins, *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke’s Political Economy,* 378-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Burke, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity, W&S*, 9: 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Collins, *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke’s Political Economy,* 185-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature,* 539. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty?: A Historical Debate* (London, 2004); Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996);Donald Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (Cambridge, 1978), 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, 1982 [1759])*,* 50-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Hume to Strahan, 25 October 1769, in *Hume Letters*, 2: 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Macpherson, ‘Edmund Burke’, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 242; Pocock, ‘The Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis of the French Revolution’, *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), 336-7, 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Pocock, ‘Political Thought in the English-speaking Atlantic’, 304-5; Winch, *Riches and Poverty,* 175-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. For discussion, see Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain,* c. *1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995), 22-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. These terms are taken from Burke’s discussion of Marie Antoinette: ‘the age of chivalry is gone. –

     That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and [[170]] the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.’ Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Ibid., 326. For Burke’s rhetoric and argument against ‘public credit’ and ‘stock-jobbing’, sometimes with an anti-Semitic element, see also ibid., 191, 198, 205, 209, 269, 274, 278, 359-64, 401-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Ibid., 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. T. B. Macaulay, *The History of England* (5 vols., Philadelphia, 1849 [1848]), 4: 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Pocock, ‘The Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis of the French Revolution’, 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Hume, *Essays,* 357. On this essay, see esp. Istvan Hont, ‘The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and Voluntary State Bankruptcy’, in *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: 2005)*,* 325-353. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Hume, ‘Of Public Credit’ (1752), *Essays,* 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Hume, ‘Of Parties in General’ (1741), *Essays,* 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Collins, *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke’s Political Economy,* 447-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Burke, *Reflections,* ed. Clark, 342 [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Iain Hampsher-Monk, ‘Burke and the Religious Sources of Skeptical Conservatism’, in *The Skeptical Tradition around 1800,* ed. J. van der Zande and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht, 1998), 235-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Max Skjönsberg, *The Persistence of Party: Ideas of Harmonious Discord in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2021), chs. 4, 6-8, 10-13. See also Sagar, ‘Between Virtue and Knavery: Hume and the Politics of Moderation’. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Burke, ‘[On Parties]’ (1757), in Bourke, ‘Party, Parliament and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts’,at 644-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Burke, *W&S,* IX, 326. It is also noteworthy that Burke in the same context refers to the Glorious Revolution as a ‘union’ between Whigs and Tories rather than a Whig affair. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Bourke, *Empire and Revolution,* 22-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Hume, *History,* 5: 556. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York, 1965 [1931]), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Burke to Boswell, 1 September 1782, *Burke Correspondence*, 5: 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. I elaborate all these points in Skjönsberg, *The Persistence of Party.* [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. He wrote to Fitzwilliam, Rockingham’s heir: ‘I wished the Book to be, in the first instance, of service to the publick, in the second, to the party…I believe the service to the party was only second in my thoughts; but perhaps it was the first.’ Burke to Fitzwilliam, 5 June 1791, *Burke Correspondence,* 6: 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. See, e.g., the charge of John Millar, Smith’s student, in *A Historical View of the English Government* (Indianapolis, 2006), 806. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Burke, *Appeal,* W&S, 4: 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)