

**The Two Faces of the Opposition of Interests  
in David Hume's Political Philosophy**

Marc Hanvelt  
Carleton University

Prepared for delivery at the 2012 Annual Conference of the  
Canadian Political Science Association, June 12-15.  
University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

**DRAFT: Please do not cite without permission of the author**

In his analysis of the British constitution, David Hume writes, “the chief support of the BRITISH government is the opposition of interests; but that, though in the main serviceable, breeds endless factions.”<sup>1</sup> The political effects of faction have pre-occupied political philosophers for millennia. Different philosophers have identified different problems of factionalism and, consequently, have proposed very different solutions to those problems. Hume, however, points to a question that is of particular significance to democratic theory. How should we deal with the two faces of the opposition of interests? On the one hand, democratic polities, especially those in societies characterised by deep pluralism (be it ethnic, religious, or moral), should provide space for the articulation of various and competing interests. On the other hand, the opposition of interests in the public realm can often give rise to factionalism, or its contemporary equivalent, rabid partisanship, which can have very deleterious effects on the politics of a country. The question Hume forces us to confront is the following: how, precisely, do we distinguish an opposition of interests in the public realm that contributes positively to the politics of a country, or at a very minimum, that we can consider to be legitimate, from factionalism?

In the tradition of democratic theory, the thinker most commonly associated with addressing the problem of faction is James Madison. In many respects, Madison’s treatment of faction is plainly influenced by the work of David Hume. However, Madison’s solution to the problem of faction, which rests on the notion that the multiplication of factions will impede the ability of any one of them to consolidate political power, seems in complete contradiction to Hume’s suggestion that religious factionalism could be tamed through the adoption of a national church and a policy of bribing the priests into indolence.

In this paper, I argue that the disagreement between Madison and Hume is not as stark as it might at first seem. Instead, it reflects the fact that Madison’s project was far less ambitious than was Hume’s. Where Madison did not make any important distinction between religious and political factions, Hume did. Though they posed similar and related problems to the politics of Britain, Hume thought that immoderate patriots should be treated differently from enthusiastic Puritans. And where Madison focused primarily on the effects of faction on political stability, Hume addressed the political, moral, and epistemological problems caused by factionalism. Though Madison certainly did pick up on certain elements of Hume’s analysis of faction, those elements are only part of a much greater whole. At its core, Hume’s analysis shows us that particular constitutions will produce particular permanent interests that may clash with one another and that may, under the right circumstances, lead to factional conflict. In the case of Britain, Hume’s analysis suggests that a legitimate opposition of interests can be distinguished from factionalism in that the former does not deny the place of competing interests in shaping the political playing field and conducts political discourse in a conversational manner. The richness of Hume’s analysis of faction suggests that democratic theorists should look beyond Madison to include Hume in the conversation about the place of interests in contemporary democratic politics and the distinction between legitimate or positive oppositions of interests and factionalism. Though Hume’s analysis of faction may be

---

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” p.525. [References to the *Essays* take the form *Essays* followed by the title of the essay and a page reference in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).]

particular to the British case, the method he employs is not so limited. It offers important insights that could enrich contemporary democratic political theory.

For literally millennia, political philosophers have been concerned with the political effects of faction. In the *Republic*, Plato argues that the development of faction is an important development in the decline of the ideal regime. The factionalism that Plato argues will necessarily emerge in a democratic polity ultimately, on his account, leads to political violence and establishes the requisite conditions for the emergence of a tyrant. For Plato, Democracy is the second worst regime. Tyranny is the worst. Factionalism contributes to bringing that worst regime into being.<sup>2</sup> For Plato, therefore, the problem of faction was a problem of violent decline from an ideal regime.

For Rousseau, the problem of faction was very different. On Rousseau's account, factionalism, or what he termed the development of "partial societies,"<sup>3</sup> presented a decidedly moral problem. The legitimacy of the laws under Rousseau's social contract rests on a very precise arrangement according to which individuals assume the roles of both citizen and sovereign. The social contract remains legitimate only so long as all individuals subject to it remain as free as they were in the state of nature. On Rousseau's account, this outcome is made possible by the notion of moral freedom, or life according to self-given laws. So long as the laws of the state are genuine expressions of the general will, the conditions of moral freedom obtain for all of its citizens (they live according to laws that they have given themselves through the general will). When a partial society forms, Rousseau argues, it will form its own general will. Once members of that partial society begin voting in the assemblies according to the general will of their faction, and not of the whole, the conditions of moral freedom will no longer obtain. Some citizens will come to be subject to laws that are not genuine expressions of the general will. Rather, those laws will be expressions of the will of other individuals. To be subject to such laws, according to Rousseau, is slavery. And as soon as some of its members become enslaved, and therefore less free than they were in the state of nature, Rousseau argues that the state is lost.

In the tradition of democratic political theory, the thinker who is usually most associated with addressing the problem of faction is James Madison. For Madison, the problem of faction is not the moral problem described by Rousseau, nor is it necessarily the problem of political violence described by Plato. Instead, in *Federalist #10*, Madison describes the problem of faction as "the instability, injustice, and confusion introduced into the public councils" which, according to him, have been "the mortal diseases under which popular governments have everywhere perished."<sup>4</sup> Despite the great danger posed by faction, however, Madison famously argues for controlling the effects of faction, rather than attempting to snuff out its causes. "Liberty," Madison writes, "is to faction what air is to fire, an aliment without which it instantly expires. But it could be not be a less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See Plato's *Republic*.

<sup>3</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Basic Political Writings*. Donald A. Cress, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p.156.

<sup>4</sup> James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. *The Federalist Papers*. Isaac Kramnick, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 122.

<sup>5</sup> Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, p.123.

It is now conventional wisdom that Madison's treatment of faction was significantly influenced by the work of David Hume.<sup>6</sup> Madison's discussion of faction as arising from a difference of interests or from "a zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well of speculation of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions,"<sup>7</sup> closely mirrors Hume's division of factions "into those from *interest*, from *principle*, and from *affection*."<sup>8</sup> And Madison's claim that "so strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities that where no substantial occasion presents itself the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts"<sup>9</sup> is a close echo of Hume's discussion of parties based on, what he termed, abstract speculative principles:

Where different principles beget a contrariety of conduct, which is the case with all different political principles, the matter may be more easily explained. A man, who esteems the true right of government to lie in one man, or one family, cannot easily agree with his fellow-citizen, who thinks that another man or family is possessed of this right. Each naturally wishes that right may take place, according to his own notions of it. But where the difference of principle is attended with no contrariety of action, but every one may follow his own way, without interfering with his neighbour, as happens in all religious controversies; what madness, what fury can beget such unhappy and such fatal divisions?<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Madison, central claim that "the advantage in controlling the effects of faction is enjoyed by a large over a small republic,"<sup>11</sup> is a clear echo of Hume's claim that, "though it is more difficult to form a republican government in an extensive country than in a city; there is more facility, when once it is formed, of preserving it steady and uniform, without tumult and faction."<sup>12</sup>

Despite these important similarities, however, Madison's account of faction differs from Hume's in at least one significant respect. Madison famously argues that the proliferation of faction in an extended republic will neutralize some of its most harmful effects. Specifically referencing religious factions – which were Hume's primary concern throughout much of his life – Madison writes, "a religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the Confederacy; but the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure the national councils against any danger from that source."<sup>13</sup> This solution to the problem of religious faction is in marked contrast to Hume's

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Douglass Adair, "'That Politics May be Reduced to a Science': David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist" *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol.20, no.4, Early American History Number (August 1957), 343-360.

<sup>7</sup> Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, p.124.

<sup>8</sup> *Essays*, "Of Parties in General," p.59.

<sup>9</sup> Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, p.124.

<sup>10</sup> *Essays*, "Of Parties in General," p.60.

<sup>11</sup> Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, p.128.

<sup>12</sup> *Essays*, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," p.527.

<sup>13</sup> Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, p.128.

preferred remedy: namely, a national church. Hume writes, “without the dependence of the clergy on the civil magistrates... it is in vain to think that any free government will ever have security or stability.”<sup>14</sup> Not only did Hume advocate for a national church (seemingly a strange choice for a philosopher renowned in some quarters, condoned in others for his atheism), but he even went so far as to argue that “the most decent and advantageous composition, which [one] can make with the spiritual guides, is to bribe their indolence, by assigning stated salaries to their profession, and rendering it superfluous for them to be farther active, than merely to prevent their flock from straying in quest of new pastures.”<sup>15</sup>

How do we explain this difference of opinion between Madison and Hume? More precisely, how do we explain the fact that Hume seems both to argue for and against the notion that the proliferation of faction will dilute its effects? In examining these questions, we find that Hume’s analysis of faction was much more developed and, consequently, more nuanced than was Madison’s, likely due to the fact that Hume’s project was much more ambitious than was Madison’s. Concern with the effects of faction was a central preoccupation of Hume’s writings. In his brief autobiography, he writes, “I wantonly exposed myself to the rage of both civil and religious factions.”<sup>16</sup> The point of entry into Hume’s analysis of faction is his claim that the existence of a diversity of competing interests in the public realm is essential to the political stability of the British government. However, as we have seen, Hume adds an important caveat to the effect that this opposition of interests also tends to breed dangerous factions that can threaten the very constitution that gave birth to them.<sup>17</sup> Hume, therefore, begins this discussion by acknowledging that British politics are particularly likely to produce factions. His presentation of the opposition of interests as Janus-faced in this way also presents us with an important question: what, precisely, is the difference between the types of competing interests that support the British government and a faction that, in Hume’s words, “subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other.”<sup>18</sup>

Hume never defines faction explicitly in his published writings. To further complicate matters, unlike contemporaries such as Bolingbroke who distinguished parties as divisions based on “a genuine disagreement as to what was in the national interest” from factions (what parties become when they succumb to self-interest), Hume used the two terms interchangeably, making clear that he “did not make a distinction between them.”<sup>19</sup> Madison would later define faction as “a number of citizens, whether accounting

---

<sup>14</sup> *Essays*, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” p.525.

<sup>15</sup> *History of England*, III, ch.xxix. [References to the *History of England* list the volume and page number in *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. Forward by William B. Todd, 6 vols. 1778 Edition; rpt. (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1983).]

<sup>16</sup> *Essays*, “My Own Life, p.xli.

<sup>17</sup> *Essays*, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” p.525.

<sup>18</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.55.

<sup>19</sup> Duncan Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.200-202.

to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”<sup>20</sup> Hume does write, “the influence of faction is entirely contrary to that of laws.”<sup>21</sup> But, in order to understand what he means by this claim, we need to look closer at his analysis of faction.

Hume divides factions into two broad categories, then further divides the second category into three. In the first place, he distinguishes “personal” from “real” factions. The former are “founded on personal friendship or animosity among such as compose the contending parties,” the latter “on some real difference of sentiment or interest.”<sup>22</sup> Hume then divides real factions into those “from *interest*, from *principle*, and from *affection*.”<sup>23</sup> Parties that arise from a difference of interests, he argues, “are the most reasonable, and the most excusable” on account of the fact that different societal groups, what Hume terms “different orders of men,” will have real differences of interest.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Hume argues that parties from principle, “especially abstract speculative principle, are known only to modern times, and are, perhaps, the most extraordinary *phænomemon*, that has yet appeared in human affairs.”<sup>25</sup> Finally, of parties of affection, by which Hume means parties “which are founded on the different attachments of men towards particular families and persons, whom they desire to rule over them,” Hume writes, “these factions are often very violent.”<sup>26</sup> Pondering how it could be that “men should attach themselves so strongly to persons, with whom they are no wise acquainted, whom perhaps they never saw, and for whom they never received, nor can ever hope for any favour,” Hume concludes that, “the splendor of majesty and power bestows an importance on the fortunes even of even a single person. And when a man’s good-nature does not give him his imaginary interest, his ill-nature will, from spite and opposition to persons whose sentiments are different from his own.”<sup>27</sup>

One of Hume’s central claims about faction is that different constitutions will generate particular parties. In this sense, Hume’s analysis of faction is heavily informed by his view that politics admits of certain regularities. In his essay “That Politics May be Reduced to a Science,” Hume writes,

Were it once admitted, that all governments are alike, and that the only difference consists in the character and conduct of the governors, most political disputes would be at an end, and all the *Zeal* for one constitution above another, must be esteemed mere bigotry and folly. But, though a friend to moderation, I cannot forbear condemning this sentiment, and should be very sorry to think, that human affairs admit of no greater

---

<sup>20</sup> Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, p.123.

<sup>21</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.55.

<sup>22</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.56.

<sup>23</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.59.

<sup>24</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.59.

<sup>25</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.60.

<sup>26</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.63.

<sup>27</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.63.

stability, than what they receive from the casual humours and characters of particular men.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, this is not to say that the characters of particular politicians will have no effect on the politics of their country. Hume argues, “the strength and violence” of factions “will much depend upon the particular administration.”<sup>29</sup> However, a particular constitution will, with regularity, produce particular factions. Of Britain, Hume writes, “however the nation may fluctuate between them, the parties themselves will always subsist, so long as we are governed by a limited monarchy.”<sup>30</sup>

A central feature of politics, Hume argues, is that “in all governments, there is a perpetual intestine struggle, open or secret, between AUTHORITY and LIBERTY; and neither of them can ever absolutely prevail in the contest.”<sup>31</sup> Under the British constitution, this battle took the form of a struggle between parliament and the crown, or between the republican and monarchical elements of the constitution. In a lengthy passage describing the parties of Great Britain, Hume writes,

The just balance between the republican and monarchical part of our constitution is really, in itself, so extremely delicate and uncertain, that, when joined to men’s passions and prejudices, it is impossible but different opinions must arise concerning it, even among persons of the best understanding. Those of mild tempers, who love peace and order, and detest sedition and civil wars, will always entertain more favourable sentiments of monarchy, than men of bold and generous spirits, who are passionate lovers of liberty, and think no evil comparable to subjection and slavery. And although all reasonable men agree in general to preserve our mixed government; yet, when they come to particulars, some will incline to trust greater powers to the crown, to bestow on it more influence, and to guard against its encroachments with less caution, than others who are terrified at the most distant approaches of tyranny and despotic power. Thus are there parties of PRINCIPLE involved in the very nature of our constitution.<sup>32</sup>

These parties, Hume argued, were the parties of Court and Country. And, though they might initially appear as simply parties of principle, Hume argued that they were also “fomented by a difference of INTEREST” because an individual’s principles in this regard would almost assuredly influence his or her chances of receiving benefits – in the form of trust or power – from the crown. Therefore, Hume argues that “*Court* and *Country*, which are the genuine offspring of the BRITISH government, are a kind of mixed parties, and are influenced both by principle and by interest.”<sup>33</sup>

Hume understood these parties to be permanent features of the polity on account of the particular nature of Britain’s mixed constitution. However, though they were, in his words, “genuine offspring” of the constitution, the parties still posed significant dangers to the constitution and to the British polity. These can be categorized as three very

---

<sup>28</sup> *Essays*, “That Politics May be Reduced to a Science,” p.15.

<sup>29</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Parties of Great Britain,” p.65.

<sup>30</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Parties of Great Britain,” p.65.

<sup>31</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Origin of Government,” p.40.

<sup>32</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Parties of Great Britain,” p.64-5.

<sup>33</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Parties of Great Britain,” p.65.

different, though inter-related, dangers of faction. The first of these is the familiar problem of political instability and political violence. On Hume's account, this danger had never manifest itself so clearly and so forcefully as during the civil war.

For Hume, the causes of the civil war were complex. One extremely important factor was the mixing of religion and politics. He writes, "of all European nations, the British were at that time, and till long after, the most under the influence of that religious spirit, which tends rather to inflame bigotry than encrease peace and mutual charity."<sup>34</sup> In the lead-up to the civil war, the pulpits "were called in aid and resounded with the dangers, which threatened religion, from the desperate attempts of papists and malignants."<sup>35</sup> At the same time, "the press, freed from all fear or reserve, swarmed with productions, dangerous by their seditious zeal and calumny, more than by any art or eloquence of composition. Noise and fury, cant and hypocrisy, formed the sole rhetoric, which, during this tumult of various prejudices and passions, could be heard or attended to."<sup>36</sup> But, Hume is clear in his estimation that it was the mixing of religion with politics that pushed what would have been merely a factional dispute into a full civil war. He writes, "the altercation of discourse, the controversies of the pen, but, above all, the declamations of the pulpit, indisposed the minds of men towards each other, and propagated the blind rage of party."<sup>37</sup>

Though it was on the religious dynamic that Hume ultimately layed the primary blame for the civil war, that dynamic only exacerbated an already-existent conflict, one that, as we have seen, Hume believed to be sewn into the very fabric of the constitution. Hume writes,

The hopes of success being nearly equal on both sides, *interest* had no general influence in this contest: So that ROUND-HEAD and CAVALIER were merely parties of principle; neither of which disowned either monarchy or liberty; but the former party inclined most to the republican part of our government, the latter to the monarchical. In this respect, they may be considered as court and country-party, enflamed into a civil war, by an unhappy concurrence of circumstances, and by the turbulent spirit of the age.<sup>38</sup>

In his *History of England*, Hume argues that the parliamentary side went further in threatening to unbalance the constitution than did the supporters of the crown. He writes, "in their attack on the hierarchy," the parliament "still more openly passed all bounds of moderation; as supposing, no doubt, that the sacredness of the cause would sufficiently atone for employing means the most irregular and unprecedented. This principle, which prevails so much among zealots, never displayed itself so openly as during the transactions of this whole period."<sup>39</sup> The principle that the sacredness of the cause would excuse the means was particularly in evidence when "the upper house sent down terms of accommodation, more moderate than had hitherto been insisted on," which "even passed

---

<sup>34</sup> *History of England*, V, 164.

<sup>35</sup> *History of England*, V, 362.

<sup>36</sup> *History of England*, V, 295.

<sup>37</sup> *History of England*, V, 401.

<sup>38</sup> *Essays*, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," p.68-9.

<sup>39</sup> *History of England*, V, 360.



by a majority among the commons, that these proposals should be transmitted to the king.” In response, Hume writes, “the zealots took the alarm... The pulpits thundered, and rumours were spread about twenty thousand Irish, who had landed, and were to cut the throat of every protestant. The majority was again turned to the other side.”<sup>40</sup>

The explanation for why Hume thought the supporters of the parliament had gone further in threatening the constitutional balance than had the supporters of the crown can be found, not in their cause, but in their religion. In his essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” Hume argues that a superstitious religion (such as Catholicism), “renders men tame and submissive.”<sup>41</sup> By contrast, an enthusiastic religion (such as the various Protestant sects), “being founded on strong spirits, and presumptuous boldness of character, it naturally begets the most extreme resolutions; especially after it rises to that height as to inspire the deluded fanatic with the opinion of divine illuminations, and with a contempt for the common rules of reason, morality, and prudence.”<sup>42</sup>

Hume’s analysis of the civil war showed how religious beliefs, especially amongst adherents to enthusiastic religions, had distorted people’s perceptions of the appropriate constitutional balance and the rightness of their actions and, thus, led to significant political instability and ultimately violence. However, religion is not the only force capable of producing false or inaccurate beliefs amongst people. The essential conclusion of Hume’s analyses of belief in both the *Treatise of Human Nature* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding* is that the necessary connection in causal reasoning is supplied by our imagination. Therefore, there is no independent, autonomous faculty of reason. Instead, the very same processes of mind lead individuals to both reasonable and unreasonable conclusions.

Beliefs, Hume argues, consist “not in the nature and order of our ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind... which distinguishes the ideas of judgment from the fictions of the imagination.”<sup>43</sup> As we experience a cause and its effect together more and more often, we come to expect the one when confronted with the other. For Hume, reasoning is simply associating. Judgments are the effects of custom on the imagination.<sup>44</sup> In inferring a cause from an effect, or vice versa, we are simply completing a pattern that experience has taught us to expect. It is from this basis that Hume argues, “all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation.”<sup>45</sup> Because the necessary connection between a cause and an effect is supplied by our imagination, Hume writes that “our judgment and imagination can never be contrary... custom cannot operate on the latter faculty after such a manner, as to render it opposite to the former.”<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> *History of England*, V, 414.

<sup>41</sup> *Essays*, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” p.78.

<sup>42</sup> *Essays*, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” p.77.

<sup>43</sup> T 1.3.7.7; SBN 629. [References to the *Treatise* take the form of T followed by the book, part, section, and paragraph from which the passage is taken from *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), followed by a page reference in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).]

<sup>44</sup> T 1.3.13.20; SBN 155.

<sup>45</sup> T 1.3.8.12; SBN 103.

<sup>46</sup> T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149.

What is more, the process through which we reason – i.e. the process through which we associate causes with their effects – is not one over which Hume believed that we exert complete, or even significant, conscious control. He writes, “when set into any train of thinking,” the imagination “is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse.”<sup>47</sup> It is, therefore, evident that experience can also operate on our minds to produce erroneous conclusions. In his chapter on unphilosophical probability, Hume describes particular ways in which the mind can be led to draw false conclusions by the same processes of association that lead it to make sound or philosophical judgments.<sup>48</sup> Distance in time or space, or the number of steps in an argument can all diminish the force and vivacity that, for Hume, constitute belief.

The fourth type of unphilosophical probability is that derived from general rules. Once our mind has come to associate a particular cause with a particular effect, our imagination connects the two “by a natural transition, which precedes reflection, and which cannot be prevented by it.”<sup>49</sup> The problem, however, is that we do not always transfer our past experiences to exactly corresponding situations in the present. Hume argues that the relation of resemblance has so strong an influence on the mind that our imagination often transfers “our experience in past instances to objects which are resembling, but are not exactly the same with those concerning which we had experience.”<sup>50</sup> General rules can be very useful, because it is “by them we learn to distinguish the accidental circumstances from the efficacious causes.”<sup>51</sup> However, general rules are also the bases of prejudice. The effect of resemblance on the mind can carry “us to a lively conception of the usual effect, tho’ the object be different in the most material and most efficacious circumstances from that cause.”<sup>52</sup>

A particular danger of factions is their tendency to promote dogmatic adherence to a set of general rules or general principles. Such dogmatic belief is understandable given Hume’s view that, “we are placed in this world, as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event are entirely concealed from us.”<sup>53</sup> Fear of uncertainty leads people to cling to dogmatic beliefs. But, Hume’s epistemology shows us why we should maintain a controlled sense of uncertainty instead. He argues that we can never have certainty in our beliefs about the causal relations that determine our world, but only greater and greater degrees of probability following from repeated experiments. This, of course, is precisely what may factions, or more precisely, factional leaders, deny. They promote supposedly certain truths that offer their members respite from a world of uncertainty. At the same time, Hume believed, they often manipulate their members’ beliefs.

---

<sup>47</sup> T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198.

<sup>48</sup> See *Treatise* 1.3.13.

<sup>49</sup> T 1.3.13.8; SBN 147.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149.

<sup>52</sup> T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150.

<sup>53</sup> *Natural History of Religion*, p.28. [References to *The Natural History of Religion* are to *The Natural History of Religion*, H.E. Root (ed.), (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).]

This epistemological danger of faction, if it can be so termed, is obviously related to the first danger of faction: namely the danger of political instability and violence. Hume famously argues that, “as FORCE is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded.”<sup>54</sup> This opinion is can be of three kinds, either opinion of one’s own interest, opinion of who rightfully wields power, or opinion of right to property.<sup>55</sup> As we have already seen, Hume was well aware of how easily peoples’ opinion of those in power could be altered.<sup>56</sup> He was well aware of the ways in which factional leaders had, in the past, manipulated the beliefs of their members for their own political gains.

It was against precisely these sorts of distortions that Hume conceived his notion of political courage. For Hume, the politically courageous individual resists dogmatism through a steadfast defense of the public combined with an equally steadfast resistance to the seduction of party. This form of courage is the political sibling of the philosophical courage that Hume demonstrates for his readers in the famous conclusion to Book One of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, when he describes himself as setting out to sea in a “leaky weather-beaten vessel,” despite his “disadvantageous circumstances,” his “memory of past errors and perplexities,” and “the wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties” he must employ.<sup>57</sup> The philosophically courageous individual is one who eschews dogmatism and resists the siren call of demonstrative reason in favour of the humbled reason that Hume leaves us in the *Treatise*. Similarly, Hume’s politically courageous individual develops stable moral and political commitments while facing the dangerous reality that the same underlying processes of association that lead us to make sound and defensible judgments can also lead us into error.

This form of political courage is important for Hume because, as in other facets of human life, in politics, “effects will always correspond to causes.”<sup>58</sup> The politically courageous individual, the one who resists the allure of faction, recognizes that causal relations can never be demonstrated. He or she does not “contend, as if they were fighting *pro aris & focis*, and change a good constitution into a bad one, by the violence of their factions.”<sup>59</sup> Hume implores his compatriots to “be moderate and consistent,” so that “their claims might be admitted; at least might be examined.”<sup>60</sup>

Of course, the inclination to engage moderately and consistently with one’s compatriots is rarely generated except where one feels a sense of common attachment or share destiny with them. And this sense of commonality is directly undermined by factionalism. The third danger of faction that Hume identifies may be understood as a moral danger. It is not, as Rousseau believed a threat to individual freedom. Rather, it is a threat to the very capacity of individuals to make moral judgments. As factional disputes heat up, Hume argues, individuals unite “themselves more intimately with their friends” and separate “themselves wider from their antagonists” until finally, the distinction

---

<sup>54</sup> *Essays*, “Of the First Principles of Government,” p.32.

<sup>55</sup> *Essays*, “Of the First Principles of Government,” p.33.

<sup>56</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.63.

<sup>57</sup> T 1.4.7.1; SBN 264

<sup>58</sup> *Essays*, “That Politics May be Reduced to a Science,” p.24.

<sup>59</sup> *Essays*, “That Politics May be Reduced to a Science,” p.31.

<sup>60</sup> *Essays*, “That Politics May be Reduced to a Science,” p.30.

becomes “quite uniform and regular.”<sup>61</sup> As Jennifer Herdt argues, “factional zeal, and the passive, contagious sympathy by which it spreads, are directly opposed to the sympathetic understanding needed to appreciate different points of view” and make good moral judgments.<sup>62</sup> An essential aspect of Hume’s account of moral evaluation is “that it be shared and articulated.”<sup>63</sup> Factions impede this moral intercourse. For this reason, Hume argues,

It is, therefore, a just *political* maxim, *that every man must be supposed a knave*: Though at the same time, it appears somewhat strange, that a maxim should be true in *politics*, which is *false* in fact. But to satisfy ourselves on this head, we may consider, that men are generally more honest in their private than in their public capacity, and will go greater lengths to serve a party, than when their own private interest is alone concerned. Honour is a great check upon mankind: But where a considerable body of men act together, this check is, in a great measure, removed; since a man is sure to be approved of by his own party, for what promotes the common interest; and he soon learns to despise the clamours of adversaries.<sup>64</sup>

Although once again related to the other two dangers of faction (the danger of political instability or violence and the epistemological problem of dogmatism), the tendency of faction to divide people and so impede their capacity for moral judgment poses a distinct third danger.

The distinctions that Hume draws amongst different types of factions (personal vs. real, the latter of which can be further divided into parties from principle, from affection, and from interest), together with his recognition that some parties can be of more than one type, and his identification of three distinct, though often interrelated, dangers of faction (the dangers of political instability, the epistemological danger, and the moral danger), lead to the conclusion that the problem of faction cannot be understood as singular, nor can it be addressed through a single means. For example, as we have seen, Hume suggests that we deal with religious factions by establishing a national church<sup>65</sup> and then bribing the priests into indolence.<sup>66</sup> Political factions require a different response.

One of the principal objectives of Hume’s essay “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth” is to illustrate a political regime in which the opposition of interests does “all the good without any of the harm.”<sup>67</sup> He writes of the ideal regime that he defines in this essay that, he “cannot, in theory, discover any considerable objection.”<sup>68</sup> In Hume’s ideal republic, power is widely dispersed, and extensive checks are put in place

---

<sup>61</sup> *History of England*, V, 212

<sup>62</sup> Jennifer A. Herdt. *Religion and Faction in Hume’s Moral Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.206.

<sup>63</sup> Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.191.

<sup>64</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Independency of Parliament,” p.42-3.

<sup>65</sup> *Essays*, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” p.525.

<sup>66</sup> *History of England*, III, ch.xxix.

<sup>67</sup> *Essays*, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” p.525.

<sup>68</sup> *Essays*, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” p.516.

to guard against its consolidation. The commonwealth is divided into one hundred counties, each of which is in turn divided into one hundred parishes. Once a year, those eligible to vote gather in their parish to elect one representative.<sup>69</sup> The one hundred representatives in each county then gather to elect one senator and ten magistrates from amongst their ranks. The executive power is granted to the senate, which is made up of one hundred senators. The legislative power is granted to the county representatives and can be wielded either by the eleven hundred magistrates (all senators are also magistrates) or by the full ten thousand county representatives divided into their one hundred councils of representatives.<sup>70</sup>

Much like the British constitution, Hume's ideal commonwealth relies for its stability on a balance created by an opposition of interests. However, in the case of the ideal commonwealth, the institutional safeguards are sufficient to militate against the development of dangerous factions and the consolidation of power by any one group. Hume argues that in his ideal commonwealth, the politicians "have no power of controlling the senate: They only have the power of accusing, and appealing to the people."<sup>71</sup>

The situation under the British constitution was, of course different. As we have seen, Hume's concern with the British parties was precisely that they would acquire sufficient power to "change a good constitution into a bad one, by the violence of their factions."<sup>72</sup> The British constitution did establish a set of conventions and institutions, what Hume terms "forms and institutions," that secured "the liberty of the people" and provided means through which "the public good [could be]consulted, and the avarice and ambition of particular men restrained and punished."<sup>73</sup> These forms and institutions were most important because, as Hume writes, "general virtue and good morals in a state, which are so requisite to happiness, can never arise from the most refined precepts of philosophy, or even the severest injunctions of religion; but must proceed entirely from the virtuous education of youth, the effect of wise laws and institutions."<sup>74</sup> Because the British constitution established a mixed form of government, its forms and institutions could never impede the development of faction as completely as could the institutional structure of Hume's ideal commonwealth.

It is for this reason that, in the case of Britain, Hume puts so much emphasis on the terms of political discourse as a further means of impeding the development of dangerous faction. He writes, "the only dangerous parties are such as entertain opposite views with regard to the essentials of government, the succession of the crown, or the more considerable privileges belonging to the several members of the constitution; where there is no room for any compromise or accommodation, and where the controversy may appear so momentous as to justify even an opposition by arms to the pretensions of

---

<sup>69</sup> In Hume's ideal commonwealth, the right to vote is limited to freeholders of twenty pounds per year in the country and householders worth five hundred pounds in the town parishes (*Essays*, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," p.516).

<sup>70</sup> *Essays*, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," pp.516-7.

<sup>71</sup> *Essays*, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," p.525.

<sup>72</sup> *Essays*, "That Politics May be Reduced to a Science," p.31.

<sup>73</sup> *Essays*, "That Politics May be Reduced to a Science," p.26.

<sup>74</sup> *Essays*, "Of Parties in General," p.55.

antagonists.”<sup>75</sup> The irony, of course, is that parties in Britain who sought to fundamentally alter the constitution were, in fact seeking to alter the very source of their party. As we have seen, Hume argues that, court and country “are the genuine offspring of the BRITISH government.”<sup>76</sup> Recognition of this fact, Hume thought, combined with a recognition of the limitations of human cognition and of the manipulative tendencies of parties, should lead individuals to become more politically courageous: more willing to resist the temptation of faction and to engage in more moderate, or polite political discourse.

Hume defines politeness as “the arts of conversation.”<sup>77</sup> The polite individual is one who can sustain conversation. In his brief autobiography, Hume defines himself as “a man of mild dispositions, of command of temper, of an open, social, and cheerful humour, capable of attachment, but little susceptible of enmity, and of great moderation in all my passions.”<sup>78</sup> Each of these characteristics is polite, on Hume’s account, because each contributes to sustaining conversation. If one accepts Hume’s skeptical epistemology, one must also accept the impossibility of ever fully demonstrating a causal relation. Therefore, as sure as one might be of one’s position, it remains imperative to keep the conversation going and to consider further opinions, even if they be contrary to one’s own. For this reason, Hume writes, “among the arts of conversation, no one pleases more than mutual deference or civility, which leads us to resign our own inclinations to those of our companion, and to curb and conceal that presumption and arrogance, so natural to the human mind.”<sup>79</sup> While it might be extremely difficult to do, Hume insists that we must always remain open to the possibility that those with whom we disagree, even those with whom our disagreements are most vehement, could possibly be correct.

This is the challenge that Hume set for the parties of his day. “As no party, in the present age, can well support itself, without a philosophical or speculative system of principles, annexed to its political or practical one;” Hume writes, “we accordingly find, that each of the factions, into which this nations is divided, has reared up a fabric of the former kind, in order to protect and cover the scheme of actions, which it pursues.”<sup>80</sup> However, if the parties really had the best interest of the country in mind, he argues, they would have to moderate their positions. He writes, “there is not a more effectual method of promoting so good an end, than to prevent all unreasonable insult and triumph of the one party over the other, to encourage moderate opinions, to find the proper medium in all disputes, to persuade each that its antagonist may possibly be sometimes in the right, and to keep a balance in the praise and blame, which we bestow on either side.”<sup>81</sup> Hume illustrates this approach in his challenge to the Whig doctrine of original contract: “My intention here is not to exclude the consent of the people from being one just foundation of government where it has place. It is surely the best and most sacred of any. I only

---

<sup>75</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Coalition of Parties,” p.493.

<sup>76</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Parties of Great Britain,” p.65.

<sup>77</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” p.127

<sup>78</sup> *Essays*, “My Own Life,” p.xl.

<sup>79</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” p.126.

<sup>80</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Original Contract,” p.465.

<sup>81</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Coalition of Parties,” p.494.

pretend, that it has very seldom had place in any degree, and never almost in its full extent. And that therefore some other foundation of government must also be admitted.”<sup>82</sup>

Experience, Hume argues, must be consulted during debates over political principles. His challenge to partisans of both Whig and Tory parties is that, were they to “look abroad into the world, they would meet with nothing that, in the least, corresponds to their ideas, or can warrant so refined and philosophical a system.”<sup>83</sup> Philosophical precepts of this sort must be submitted to the wisdom of common experience. Hume writes, “in all questions with regard to morals, as well as criticism, there is really no other standard, by which any controversy can ever be decided. And nothing is clearer proof, that a theory of this kind is erroneous, than to find, that it leads to paradoxes, repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind, and to the practice and opinion of all nations and all ages.”<sup>84</sup>

Madison argued for the extended republic on the grounds that it would cut factions off at the knees. He writes, “extend the sphere and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength and to act in unison with each other.”<sup>85</sup> Though Hume was no great friend of mass participatory democracy, and though he wrote often of the “rabble,” he does here make an argument for an extended and divided republic that is decidedly different from Madison’s in that it emphasizes the effect on political discourse. “Though the people, collected in a body like the ROMAN tribes, be quite unfit for government,” Hume writes, “yet when dispersed in small bodies, they are more susceptible both of reason and order; the force of popular currents and tides is, in a great measure, broken; and the public interest may be pursued with some method and constancy.” But Hume then quickly reminds himself and his reader that he is not here writing of some fictitious republic, but of the mixed government of Britain: “But it is needless to reason any farther on a form of government, which is never likely to have a place in GREAT BRITAIN, and which seems not to be the aim of any party amongst us. Let us cherish and improve our ancient government as much as possible, without encouraging a passion for such dangerous novelties.”<sup>86</sup>

The reminder is, for Hume, important. He was writing in a British context and his analysis was of the parties of Great Britain. The principle that every constitution will give rise to particular parties, a principle that was derived from experience, was born out in the British case by the presence of court and country, the one’s interests aligned with the crown, the other’s with the republican element of government. Because the British constitution did not contain safeguards against any one party consolidating power that were as sure as those found in the institutional arrangements of Hume’s ideal commonwealth, a further brake on factional dominance was needed in the British context. Hume found that in a mode of political discourse imbued with the notion of politeness

---

<sup>82</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Original Contract,” p.474.

<sup>83</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Original Contract,” p.469-70.

<sup>84</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Original Contract,” p.486.

<sup>85</sup> Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, p.127.

<sup>86</sup> *Essays*, “Of the First Principles of Government,” p.36.

that he drew from his experience of the discursive environments of the salons of Paris and the clubs of Edinburgh.

With this analysis in place, we can now understand how Hume distinguished the legitimate opposition of interests that he took to be the “the chief support of the BRITISH government”<sup>87</sup> from the dangerous factions that he thought would invariably arise under it. The key to this understanding is Hume’s account of permanent interests. The mixed government of Britain gave rise to two different accounts of where power should be concentrated: either in the crown or in parliament. The parties of court and country formed around these two principles of government. “But besides this difference of *Principle*,” Hume writes, “those parties are very much fomented by a difference of INTEREST, without which they could scarcely ever be dangerous or violent.”<sup>88</sup> The competition of interests introduces a danger into British politics. However, it is also a permanent feature of the constitution. On Hume’s account, there are two primary ways in which the opposition of interests can turn dangerous, and hence, two principal criteria for distinguishing a legitimate opposition of interest from a dangerous faction.

The first way in which the opposition of interests can turn dangerous is when one or both of the contending parties deny or attempt to eradicate competing interests that, like their own, are also permanent features of the constitution and, hence, shape the playing field upon which politics in Britain is conducted. In his analysis of the causes of the civil war, Hume writes, “the pretensions of parliament, if yielded to, broke the balance of the constitution, by rendering the government almost entirely republican. If not yielded to, the nation was, perhaps, still in danger of absolute power, from the settled habits and inveterate habits of the king.”<sup>89</sup> Even though, Hume argues, the natural instincts of human beings “lead us, either to indulge ourselves in unlimited freedom, or to seek dominion over others,”<sup>90</sup> he believed that neither of these impulses could ever be allowed to completely win out under the British constitution that balances liberty and authority through a mixed form of government. The two elements of the constitution, though always in tension with one another, must both subsist. Therefore, to advocate the interests of one’s party, especially when confronted with the possibility of losing ground to the other side, is to maintain the opposition of interests that supports the constitution. To attempt to eradicate the other party and fundamentally alter the constitution by radically shifting the balance of power toward either parliament or crown is to threaten the stability of the constitution and to devolve into factionalism. It is in this sense that Hume argues, “the influence of faction is entirely contrary to that of laws.”<sup>91</sup>

The second criterion for distinguishing the legitimate opposition of interests from factionalism in the British context is the mode of political discourse through which a party engages with the other. Hume acknowledges a paradox in the very essence of factionalism: “When men act in a faction, they are apt, without shame or remorse, to neglect all the ties of honour and morality, in order to serve their party; and yet, when a faction is formed upon a point of right or principle, there is no occasion, where men

---

<sup>87</sup> *Essays*, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” p.525.

<sup>88</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Parties of Great Britain,” p.65.

<sup>89</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Parties of Great Britain,” p.68.

<sup>90</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Original Contract,” p.480.

<sup>91</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.55.



discover a greater obstinacy, and a more determined sense of justice and equity. The same social disposition of mankind is the cause of these contradictory appearances.”<sup>92</sup> Hume certainly thought a determined sense of justice and equity to be an essential element of public spiritedness. He urges his compatriots to cultivate a “zeal for the public” and to increase “the industry and passion, with which every individual is bound to pursue the good of his country.”<sup>93</sup> But the determined sense of justice and equity can turn dangerous when dogmatism sets in. It is for this reason that Hume’s notion of conversational politeness is so important to his account of the public realm. The opposition of interests remains a positive support of the constitution so long as the contending parties remain open, even if just in principle, to the idea that their answers may not be infallible and that their opponents might, under certain circumstances, be correct.

Various forms of political enthusiasm – for example, what Hume perceived in the Wilkes affair that produced rioting in London towards the end of 1768, and that he thought to be based on such frivolous principles as to be “based on nothing”<sup>94</sup> – can be based upon and can generate the kind of anti-conversational dogmatism that Hume believed to distinguish factions from legitimate oppositions of interest. But, for Hume, the most likely source of this type of dogmatism was religion. “The controversy about an article of faith,” he writes, “which is utterly absurd and unintelligible, is not a difference in sentiment, but in a few phrases and expressions, which one party accepts of, without understanding them; and the other refuses in the same manner.”<sup>95</sup> He writes, the fanaticism of religion is “a principle the most blind, headstrong, and ungovernable, by which human nature can possibly be actuated. Popular rage is dreadful, from whatever motive derived: But must be attended with the most pernicious consequences, when it arises from a principle, which disclaims all control by human law, reason, or authority.”<sup>96</sup>

Those consequences were most clearly in evidence during the civil war. Hume writes, Among the generality of men, educated in regular, civilized societies, the sentiments of shame, duty, honour, have considerable authority, and serve to counterbalance and direct the motives, derived from private advantage: But, by the predominancy of enthusiasm among the parliamentary forces, these salutary principles lost their credit, and were regarded as mere human inventions, yea moral institutions, fitter for heathens than for christians. The saint, resigned over to superior guidance, was at full liberty to gratify all his appetites, disguised under the appearance of pious zeal. And, besides the strange corruptions engendered by this spirit, it eluded and loosened all the ties of morality, and gave entire scope, and even sanction, to the selfishness and ambition, which naturally adhere to the human mind.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> *Essays*, “Of the First Principles of Government,” p.33.

<sup>93</sup> *Essays*, “That Politics May be Reduced to a Science,” p.27.

<sup>94</sup> *Letters*, II, p.178 [References to *Letters* take the form *Letters* followed by the volume and page number in *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 Vols., J.Y.T. Greig (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932).]

<sup>95</sup> *Essays*, “Of Parties in General,” p.59.

<sup>96</sup> *Essays*, “Of the Coalition of Parties,” p.500.

<sup>97</sup> *History of England*, V, 493.

But while the civil war presented the most egregious case of the constitution coming under threat from a mixture of religion and politics, Hume certainly believed that wherever the dynamic of religion was injected into politics, it risked bringing with it the kind of dogmatism that could so easily produce dangerous factions.

How, then, do we assess Hume's answer to the question of how to distinguish a legitimate opposition of interests from dangerous factionalism? Most likely, Hume will be criticized from both sides, namely for being both too conservative and for being insufficiently attendant to the problem of political stability. On the one hand, Hume's conception of a legitimate opposition of interests is conservative in the sense that it makes space in the public realm for interests that are embedded in the constitution, but says little about the articulation of other interests. Certainly, Hume does take account of other oppositions of interest that should be given voice in the country's political discourse. Most notably, Hume explicitly acknowledges the permanent differences of interest that exist between "the distinct orders of men, nobles and people, soldiers and merchants."<sup>98</sup> Here, we again see strong affinities between Hume's writings and those of Madison. The latter, of course, argued that "the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property."<sup>99</sup> Even with these inclusions, however, there can be no denying that, at least to a significant extent, Hume's account of the opposition of interests favours established interests that arise from the nature of the constitution.

What about the question of political stability? Certainly, Hume's answer of locating it in political practice that is grounded and contoured by forms and institutions will prove unsatisfactory to some. The injunction to engage in polite political discourse that does not seek to eradicate one side in a dispute over constitutional principles, in other words, that does not seek to radically re-balance the constitutional division of power, cannot be legally enforced and relies, instead on the goodwill and public spiritedness of the participants. The Wilkes and Liberty affair, in particular, made clear to Hume how difficult it would be to render the British political discourse more polite. However, he still held out hope. A general improvement in political rhetoric would go far in the direction of introducing such an improvement into British politics.<sup>100</sup> "The heart of man," he writes, "is made to reconcile contradictions."<sup>101</sup> The people simply need some guidance toward discovering such reconciliations. Hume saw political leaders or orators as being the most likely source of such guidance. "Where shall we find a DEMOSTHENES?" he asks.<sup>102</sup>

Returning to Madison, we now find plainly that Madison's advocacy of an extended republic and representative government as means of combatting faction do not mark a significant deviation from Hume's argument for an established church with an indolent clergy to accomplish the same end. Instead, Madison merely picked up on only a part of Hume's more ambitious project of combatting faction. Madison's solution is very

---

<sup>98</sup> *Essays*, "Of Parties in General," p.60.

<sup>99</sup> Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, p.124.

<sup>100</sup> See Marc Hanvelt. *The Politics of Eloquence: David Hume's Polite Rhetoric*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

<sup>101</sup> *Essays*, "Of the Parties of Great Britain," p.71.

<sup>102</sup> *Essays*, "Of Eloquence," p.106.

much in keeping with the solution to the problem of political faction that Hume details in his essay “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth.” Hume simply distinguished the project of combatting religious factionalism from that of combatting political factions. He also addressed the question of how to counter factions whose political programs were infused with religion.

When we survey Hume’s analysis of faction, he appears to be playing the role of the painter, or the normative theorist, much more than we would expect, given his portrayal of himself as an anatomist.<sup>103</sup> Still Hume retains the anatomist’s concern with starting by understanding what you have in front of you. In Hume’s case, this was a British constitution that gave rise to a permanent set of interests that, while they were by definition in opposition to one another, had to both be maintained for the stability of the British government. Therefore, Hume’s contribution to democratic theory is not a general theory, but rather a theory of British democracy. The specific answers he gives us to questions about the political effects of faction are not necessarily transferable to other countries. But Hume’s method certainly is. And adopting that method will force us to re-think the place of interests in shaping democratic politics.

---

<sup>103</sup> In the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume writes of uniting two species of philosophy. Painters extol virtue, “borrowing all helps from poetry and eloquence, and treating their subject in an easy and obvious manner, and such as is best fitted to please the imagination, and engage the affections” (EHU 1.1.1; SBN 5). Anatomists endeavour to “understand” the nature of people rather than to cultivate their manners (EHU 1.1.2; SBN 6). Hume considered himself to be an anatomist and pointed to Hutcheson, in a deprecating way, as a model of the painter. “The anatomist,” Hume advises, “ought never to emulate the painter... An anatomist, however, is admirably fitted to give advice to a painter; and ‘tis even impracticable to excel in the latter art, without the assistance of the former” (T 3.3.6.6; SBN, p.620-1). [References to the *Enquiries* take the form of EHU or EPM followed by the relevant section, part, and paragraph numbers from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and *An Enquiry Concerning The Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) respectively, followed by a page reference in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. 1777 Edition. Reprint. 3rd Edition. ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).]