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The Praises of Modernity: Hume and Machiavelli on Founders, Factions, and Faiths

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Abstract: Machiavelli's influence on David Hume's political thought is a subject of growing scholarly attention. I analyze Hume's "Of Parties in General" to show that the introduction to this essay is a critical appropriation of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*. I argue that Hume's appropriation of Machiavelli provides a meaningful frame to an essay in which Hume will consciously build upon one of Machiavelli's most controversial teachings, that good political founding is hampered by the effects of Christianity on political thinking. My analysis contributes to our understanding of Machiavelli's influence on Hume by showing Machiavelli's imprint much beyond where it is usually the subject of debate, in Hume's political science.

> Nonetheless, afterward, deceived by a false good and a false glory, almost all let themselves go, either voluntarily or ignorantly, into the ranks of those who deserve more blame than praise.
>
> —Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*

The momentous influence of Machiavelli can be attributed in some measure to the various faces with which he has appeared to his many readers.[1]

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[1]The following shorthand will be used for works cited in this article: references to Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* (DL) are from Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), using book, chapter, and paragraph number. References to Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (E) are from David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1985), using page number; references to the *Treatise of Human Nature* (THN) are from David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford:

Though many write of Machiavellian ideas in the history of political thought, it is rarely clear which Machiavelli the term refers to. Scholars who contend Machiavelli contributed "to a well-established tradition of Republican political thought"[2] famously portray the Florentine transmitting a system of ancient republicanism by way of Harrington to British and American shores.[3] Critics of this thesis, however, point to Machiavelli's radical departure from both ancient and Christian ways of thinking, and find that Machiavelli instead inaugurated a series of revolutions in political thought.[4] On this latter view the Machiavellian republicanism articulated by many Anglo thinkers does not represent a continuity of thought, but a critical appropriation leading to Machiavellian syntheses Machiavelli would not have endorsed.[5] In short, Machiavelli's intention of creating new modes and orders was more successful, or rather more prolific, than he imagined. By considering the possible divergence between Machiavelli and Machiavellian modes of thought, we can speak, as Rahe does, of a "species of Machiavellianism" against which competing traditions of thought also claiming Machiavellian pedigree can be examined.[6]

I wish to investigate one instance of competing Machiavellianisms by looking at Machiavelli's influence on David Hume, particularly with regard to the Scot's contribution to the British party debates of the 1730s and

Clarendon, 2007), using book, section, chapter, paragraph number, and page number from the Selby-Bigge and Nidditch edition; references to the *Natural History of Religion* (NHR) are from David Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions: The Natural History of Religion*, critical ed., ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), using section and paragraph number; references to the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (EHU) are from David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), using section and paragraph number; and references to the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (EPM) are from David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, David Fate Norton, and M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), using section and paragraph number.

[2]Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1, *The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 180.

[3]J. G. A. Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century," in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 104–47; Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[4]Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, vol. 2, *New Modes and Orders in Early Modern Political Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Rahe, *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[5]Vickie B. Sullivan, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the Formation of a Liberal Republicanism in England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

[6]Rahe, *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, 91.

1740s. The republican face of Machiavelli made frequent appearance in these debates, and as we will see, lived behind both the uniform hostility towards "faction," those groups organized for selfish gain, and the growing tolerance for "party," understood as a principled combination for some conception of the public good. Hume advanced a minority view on these matters. Though Hume may have hinted at a possible distinction between the concepts of party and faction, he did not feel the distinction was important enough to strictly apply.[7] In "Of Parties in General," he condemns parties of shared principle while offering a measure of tolerance for factions of interest, calling the latter the "most reasonable, and most excusable" (E 59–60). These views were as unpopular then as they may be now: "Hume's thoughts on parties are quite unremarkable and, had their author written nothing else, they would surely have been forgotten. Hume's dislike of parties 'from principle' did not command a large following; most men felt that if one were to have parties at all, they should be associations based on principle."[8]

Though overlooked by Hume's contemporaries, the philosophical insights found in "Of Parties in General" have been brought to light by a number of scholars.[9] Yet a crucial feature of this essay remains largely overlooked: though Hume fails to mention Machiavelli by name in "Of Parties in General," he begins the essay by critically appropriating the beginning of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* 1.10. That Hume is making reference to Machiavelli here has been suggested before,[10] but the reference's possible import for understanding Machiavelli's influence on Hume, and on Hume's intention in this essay, remains unexamined.

I argue that Hume's appropriation of Machiavelli provides a meaningful frame to an essay in which Hume will consciously build upon one of

[7]Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 202; Caroline Robbins, "'Discordant Parties': A Study of the Acceptance of Party by Englishmen," *Political Science Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1958): 528; Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2005), 7; Frederick G. Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli: Political Realism and Liberal Thought* (New York: Lexington Books, 2004), 78–79. Though Hume does not maintain the usual conceptual distinction between party and faction, for the sake of clarity I will. My analysis will focus primarily on two Humean types of division, those based on partial interest and those based on principle, which, following custom, I will call factions and parties, respectively.

[8]J. A. W. Gunn, *Factions No More: Attitudes to Party in Government and Opposition in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Cass, 1972), 258.

[9]See, e.g., Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 202–3; Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 313; Thomas W. Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 140–46; John B. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 236–38.

[10]Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 316; Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 141.

Machiavelli's most controversial teachings, that good political founding is hampered by the effects of Christianity on political thinking. For Hume, the correct analysis of parties—and of politics generally—requires a Machiavellian reorientation of what is praised and blamed in politics. If modern politics was properly reordered without the Christian veil, it would be understood that parties are not to be tolerated owing to their principles, nor are factions to be blamed owing to their lack of principles; they are to be praised or blamed with respect to their effect on what is truly praiseworthy, institutions that are founded on the Machiavellian assumption that in politics "every man ought to be supposed a *knave*" (E 42, Hume's emphasis; DL 1.3.1). Much like Machiavelli had diagnosed Christian modernity with failing to see what was praiseworthy for political founding, so does Hume think that demands for virtue and principle in party debates, fostered so successfully by the philosophic modern religion,[11] praise in theory what experience demonstrates is quite blameworthy for political founding.

My analysis of "Of Parties in General" makes a unique contribution to the growing literature on Machiavelli's influence on Hume's political thought. By showing Hume's engagement with Machiavelli in his analysis of parties, I significantly deepen our understanding of Machiavelli's place in Hume's thought, as this place is usually seen in the methodology of Hume's science of politics. Whelan provides the most extensive account of the broad agreement between Hume and Machiavelli, particularly with respect to their sciences of politics.[12] Merrill, in discussing Hume's *Essays*, claims "the 'general,' even 'eternal' truths on which Hume bases his political science are all traceable in one way or another back to Machiavelli."[13] This follows in the footsteps of Istvan Hont, who in an unpublished article showed that Hume, though rejecting most of Machiavelli's substantive judgments and later Machiavellian modes of thought, adopted for his science of politics Machiavelli's methodological spirit.[14] However, though Whelan points to similarities in Hume's and Machiavelli's analyses of parties,[15] he and other scholars have yet to explore Hume's direct engagement with Machiavelli in "Of Parties in General."

My analysis of "Of Parties in General" also sheds new light on the "knave maxim" in Hume's "Of the Independency of Parliament," where scholarship

[11]"Modern religion" is a term Hume occasionally uses to refer to Christendom and its effects on the judgments of the modern mind. As we will see, I use this term to indicate Hume's thought that Christianity is less a religion than a theistic philosophical system that resulted from the union of theism and false philosophy.

[12]Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli*, esp. chap. 2.

[13]Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 136.

[14]Istvan Hont, "Hume's Knaves and the Shadow of Machiavellianism" (conference paper, Brighton, May 28–29, 2010).

[15]Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli*, 76–84.

frequently turns to discuss Machiavelli's influence.[16] I show that this Machiavellian reference is applied to the analysis of factions of interest in "Of Parties in General," and plays a role in Hume's Machiavellian intention to show that prevailing opinions about what is praiseworthy and blameworthy in political founding are wrong. Like Whelan, I find that Hume's Machiavelli is more the political realist than virtuous republican, and from this I suggest that part of Hume's intention is to displace the latter view, prominent among his contemporaries, with the former. I thus suggest that Hume's Machiavellian political science is a partial solution to the problem of the modern religion, which he diagnoses by appropriating Machiavelli in "Of Parties in General," even though, as Danford argues, Machiavelli may have contributed to this very problem: "Machiavelli's distrust of the surface of things led, in the hands of his successors, to a certain approach to political issues that Hume regarded as detached from common life."[17] Though this may be historically true, I show that this is not Hume's perspective, for he does not trace the problem back to Machiavelli's inauguration of modernity, but rather builds upon the Florentine to place its genesis with the philosophical theism of Christianity.

Faction Detected: The Machiavellian Milieu behind "Of Parties in General"

Hume wrote his moral and political essays in a charged partisan environment where Machiavelli was frequently invoked. I begin with a brief exploration into this context to better understand Hume's intended contribution to this debate, and the relevance of Machiavelli for this contribution.[18] The first volume of Hume's essays appeared in Edinburgh in the summer of 1741, followed six or seven months later by a second.[19] In Hume's prefatory advertisement, he writes that the essays were written "with a View of being published

[16]John W. Danford, "Getting Our Bearings: Machiavelli and Hume," in *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, ed. Paul Rahe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 115; Hont "Hume's Knaves"; Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 136; Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli*, 40.

[17]Danford, "Getting Our Bearings, 115."

[18]The analysis of parties in the history of political thought must especially consider historical and political circumstance: "Understandably, party and opposition came first and political philosophy followed, for unlike some other questions of political thought, those concerned with party necessarily responded only to actual political practice" (Gunn, *Factions No More*, 3).

[19]M. M. Goldsmith, "Faction Detected: Ideological Consequences of Robert Walpole's Decline and Fall," *History* 64, no. 210 (1979): 14, 17; James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 143; Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 140–41.

as WEEKLY-PAPERS, and were intended to comprehend the Designs" of the popular forums for political debate, the "SPECTATORS & CRAFTSMAN," and were to handle topics of "Party-Rage" with "Moderation and Impartiality."[20] Hume's choice of epigraph for the *Essays* reflects the salience of party division: the same line from the *Aeneid* that was found in the epigraph to Addison's *Spectator*, no. 126, an essay on party rage from decades before.[21] The reader would not be surprised by the topic, as the essays were published at the climax of the debate over the king's minister, Robert Walpole. Walpole had used the patronage and influence of the crown to ensure that a significant portion of those sitting in Parliament had an interest in supporting his wishes, thus creating a "Court" faction dependent on the Crown, against which the opposition "Country" party formed, condemning Walpole for this apparent constitutional corruption and for the absence of public virtue which fostered it. Hume would contribute to this debate with the novelty of being scientific and politically neutral,[22] a posture that led him to reject many of the prevailing views within this debate. In "Of Parties in General," as we will see, Hume writes against the view that saw faction as uniquely dangerous and incompatible with balanced constitutional politics, a principled view that was understood to rest in part on Machiavelli's *Discourses*.

Hume's condemnation of principled parties was uncommon for a time that was beginning to distinguish "parties" from what Cato called "a factious combination for preferment and power."[23] Throughout that century, "party was for most men tolerable only when it embodied principle and so was capable of virtue; two parties representing different particular interests would perpetuate the reign of corruption and fantasy."[24] This was particularly the case for those out of power and opposed to the king's administration. In *The Craftsman*, the periodical of record for the Opposition, we find multiple examples: "By *Party* … was always meant a national Division of Opinions … for the benefit of the *whole Community*… . I conceive a *Faction* to be a Set of Men arm'd with Power, and acting upon no one Principle of *Party*, or any

[20]David Hume, *The Philosophical Works*, vol. 3, ed. Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose (London: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1964), 41–42.

[21]"Tros rutulusve fuat, nullo discrimine habebo" (*Aeneid* 10.108). See Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, 154–66, and Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), chap. 2, concerning the extent to which Hume saw his *Essays* as an Addisonian project. Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 16, also shows that Hume follows Addison by casting his project in the Socratic terms voiced by Cicero, "bringing philosophy down from the heavens."

[22]Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 219; Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, 169.

[23]John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters, or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*, ed. Ronald Hamowy (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1995), 1:120 (letter no. 16).

[24]Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 483–84.

Notion of *Publick Good*."[25] Soon after "Of Parties in General," a man named John Perceval deserted the principled Opposition to join the ministry, and felt the need to write *Faction Detected*, a "clever, but cynical justification" for his self-interested move.[26] Those remaining in the principled opposition responded with the *Detector Detected*, and attacked Perceval's mental gymnastics in part by relying on the toleration or opprobrium attached to accepted definitions: "*A Party* is, when a great Number of Men join together in *professing a Principle, or set of Principles*, which they take to be for the *publick Good*… . *Faction* again is, when a Number of Men unite together *for their own private advantage*." Thus a "Partyman, properly so called, may be a very honest man."[27]

Similar themes singling out "faction" for abuse can be seen from the chief party thinker of the time and Hume's most explicit target in the *Essays*, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke.[28] Bolingbroke's chief claim was that distinctions of principle ceased following the settlement of 1688, and any divisions that remained were factious and condemnable.[29] Thus Bolingbroke tells us that the Court party that rallied behind Walpole was nothing more than a faction for "power, profit, or protection," and "it is in that our greatest and almost our whole danger centres."[30] On the other hand, Bolingbroke's Country party was "formed on principles of common interest," and was thus a "party," understood as "the nation, speaking and acting in the discourse and conduct of particular men."[31]

Given Machiavelli's considerable influence on English political thought,[32] it is unsurprising to see Machiavelli being cited on both sides of these party debates. Frequently cited is *Discourses* 3.1, where "Machiavel tells us, that

[25]*The Craftsman*, no. 674 (June 9, 1739), in Gunn, *Factions No More*, 104, emphasis in original.

[26]Goldsmith, "Faction Detected," 9. Hume probably read this work at some point, as he asks for the book in a letter (*The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig [Oxford: Clarendon, 1932], 1:55). Exactly when this reading might have occurred is uncertain, as the estimated dating of the letter relies on this request.

[27]Gunn, *Factions No More*, 146, emphasis in original.

[28]On the significance of Bolingbroke to Hume's party essays, see Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, esp. chap. 6, though cf. Goldsmith, "Faction Detected," 17.

[29]For a more extended treatment of Bolingbroke's political thought, see Harvey C. Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) and Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968).

[30]*Dissertation upon Parties*, Letter IX, *Craftsman*, no. 394 (January 19, 1734), in *Bolingbroke: Political Writings*, ed. David Armitage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 85–86.

[31]*Dissertation upon Parties*, Letter IV, *Craftsman*, no. 284 (November 17, 1733), in *Political Writings*, 37.

[32]Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies"; Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964); Rahe,

no government can long subsist, but by recurring often to its first principles."[33] In the *Craftsman* we find that "liberty" is best secured by "preserving this constitution inviolate, or by drawing it back to the principles on which it was originally founded, whenever it shall be made to swerve from them."[34] Similarly, the Court party's *London Journal* argued that "it is necessary once in an age or two, to make a noble stand and bring governments back to their first principles."[35] What is precisely meant by "first principles" depends on which party you ask, but it was understood by both to refer to the balance of the British constitution, which realized an ideal of a mixed regime that was understood to be Machiavellian in pedigree. In the *Discourses* Machiavelli echoes Polybius in teaching that the "brevity of life in the three good" regimes can be counteracted by incorporating features of all three, thus preventing the damaging excesses of each, "for the one guards the other, since in one and the same city there are the principality, the aristocrats, and the popular government" (DL 1.2.5).[36] This teaching, resurrected and revised by Harrington's *Oceana*, [37] can be found throughout the Augustan age, in both Court and Country arguments.[38]

Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy; Sullivan, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the Formation of a Liberal Republicanism*.

[33]Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's Letters*, 1:121 (letter no. 16).

[34]*Dissertation upon Parties*, Letter XII, *Craftsman*, no. 436 (November 9, 1734), in *Political Writings*, 118.

[35]*London Journal*, no. 552 (February 28, 1730), in Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, 164.

[36]Polybius describes a natural cycle of six regimes, alternating between the good and the bad, which both Sparta and Rome counteracted by mixing elements of the three good (see *Histories* 6.3–10). As is his wont, Machiavelli never cites Polybius, but adheres so closely to the Polybian story that his innovations are made clear (see Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001], 32–41). One notable innovation is the addition of the problem of foreign adversaries, which would prevent any republic from completing the cycle, thus leading to the conclusion that the "better ordered republic is simply the one that conquers its neighbor revolving in the cycle" (Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, 38). Though the need to become an acquisitive republic is at the core of Machiavelli's advice to involve the people in public things, this martial purpose is underemphasized in the republican face of Machiavelli (see Sullivan, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the Formation of a Liberal Republicanism*, 38–43).

[37]Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies"; Raab, *English Face of Machiavelli*, 190–95; David Wootton, "The Republican Tradition: From Commonwealth to Common Sense," in *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society*, ed. David Wootton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 14.

[38]Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, 147; Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies," 132.

The party debate at the time thus concerned the constitution or the proper way one is supposed to understand and maintain the constitution. For Bolingbroke, a proper application of the Polybian-Machiavellian balance was essential for understanding why Walpole was so dangerous. Bolingbroke's argument rested on a narrow conception of institutional corruption: by influencing the interests of its members, Walpole had violated the independence of Parliament by which the constitutional balance was purportedly maintained. The balance was previously secure through the ownership of property, by which members of Parliament had independent power and could stand against the wishes of the Crown. But the new economy of credit and stock-jobbing created money independent of the propertied gentry, and thus weakened the mechanism by which the Parliament could check the court—calling into question the entire constitutional scheme.[39] Bolingbroke's genius lay in clothing this argument in the venerable language of republican civic virtue. By arguing that liberty was secure only by way of a particular constitutional arrangement, the concept of public virtue could be narrowly redefined to mean merely "the disposition to support a balanced constitution."[40] Thus Bolingbroke could paint Walpole as corrupt and corrupting without even considering the effects of constitutional change, for if Walpole violated the constitutional balance and was not thrown out of office, then one could conclude that his corrupt practices had enervated the public spirit required of a free people.[41] Though this concept of virtue is only nominally related to what we find in the *Discourses*, [42] Bolingbroke gilds his cause with the name of "Machiavel," citing *Discourses* 1.17 to account for how a "wise and brave people" may "sink into sloth and luxury."[43]

In short, at the time Hume publishes "Of Parties in General," the attentive reader would not have found a reference to Machiavelli in a critical essay on factions and parties all that remarkable. It was the opinion of dominant thinkers that the constitution represents a Polybian ideal refined by Machiavelli and transmitted by Harrington; that partisan combination was tolerable only when it was a virtuous part combined for the whole, that is, for the maintenance of the "matchless" constitution; that factious combination for power was a corruption of this matchless constitution and of the public virtue required to maintain it; and that if the constitution were out of balance, then what was required was a Machiavellian dictum, a return to the first principles of the mixed regime. In various writings, Hume would critique or

[39]Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, 78–79.

[40]Shelley Burtt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688–1740* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 91.

[41]Ibid., 93.

[42]Ibid., 99–100.

[43]*Dissertation upon Parties*, Letter XII, *Craftsman*, no. 436 (November 9, 1734), in *Political Writings*, 111.

dismantle each of these arguments, as well as criticize the Machiavellian teachings upon which many of these arguments rested.[44] Yet, as I will show, Hume levels a more foundational criticism of these views in "Of Parties in General," using the *Discourses* to show that the Machiavelli whom many party thinkers had praised also provides a foundation upon which to diagnose these party divisions as the dangerous products of a uniquely modern problem.

Departing from the Orders of Others: Hume's Reordering of the *Discourses* Ranking

Thus far we have seen the intellectual context in which Hume writes his *Essays* and the way in which Machiavelli was often utilized in this context. I turn now to analyze "Of Parties in General" and to Hume's curious use of Machiavelli. As I will show, Hume's use of Machiavelli gives the essay a new frame, one that rests the correct analysis of party and constitutional politics on subverting the prevailing opinions of what is praiseworthy and blameworthy in modern political thinking. Hume models the first two paragraphs of "Of Parties in General" after the first paragraph of *Discourses* 1.10. Though ungainly, I quote both passages nearly in full to illustrate the reference. Consider first Machiavelli, from the chapter entitled "As Much as the Founders of a Republic and of a Kingdom Are Praiseworthy, So Much Those of a Tyranny Are Worthy of Reproach":

> Among all men praised, the most praised are those who have been heads and orderers of religions. Next, then, are those who have founded either republics or kingdoms. After them are celebrated those who, placed over armies, have expanded either their kingdom or that of the fatherland. To these literary men are added; and because these are of many types, they are each of them celebrated according to his rank. To any other man, the number of which is infinite, some share of praise is attributed that his art or occupation brings him. On the contrary, men are infamous and detestable who are destroyers of religions, squanderers of kingdoms and republics, and enemies of the virtues, of letters, and of every other art that brings utility and honor to the human race, as are the impious, the violent, the ignorant, the worthless, the idle, the cowardly. (DL 1.10.1)

[44]Hume denounces Bolingbroke's "Machiavellian moralists" and talk of corruption (Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 225), and provides "an elaborate response to the political science of the classical republicans" (James Moore, "Hume's Political Science and the Classical Republican Tradition," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 4 [1977]: 810). He rejects the Harringtonian singular focus on property (E 47–48, 515), and though he adopts the oft-cited Machiavellian dictum to return to first principles (E 516), he is cautious about its application to England, since he thought the constitution was neither "matchless" (E 30) nor ancient (as was shown throughout the *History of England*).

Hume appropriates Machiavelli's hierarchy of praise and blame, with intentional revision. His "Of Parties in General" begins as follows:

> Of all men, that distinguish themselves by memorable atchievements, the first place of honour seems due to Legislators and founders of states, who transmit a system of laws and institutions to secure the peace, happiness, and liberty of future generations. The influence of useful inventions in the arts and sciences may, perhaps, extend farther than that of wise laws, whose effects are limited both in time and place; but the benefit arising from the former, is not so sensible as that which results from the latter. Speculative sciences do, indeed, improve the mind; but this advantage reaches only to a few persons, who have leisure to apply themselves to them. And as to practical arts, which encrease the commodities and enjoyments of life, it is well known, that men's happiness consists not so much in an abundance of these, as in the peace and security with which they possess them; and those blessings can only be derived from good government. Not to mention, that 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. I must, therefore, presume to differ from Lord BACON in this particular, and must regard antiquity as somewhat unjust in its distribution of honours… . As much as legislators and founders of states ought to be honoured and respected among men, as much ought the founders of sects and factions to be detested and hated; because the influence of faction is directly contrary to that of laws. Factions subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other. (E 54–55)

Before turning to my argument that Hume is responding to Machiavelli, we must first consider the possibility that Hume intended to respond only to Bacon. In the first book of Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, the scientist-philosopher praises the judgments of antiquity, when "founders and uniters of states" were "honoured with titles of worthies or demi-gods," while "inventors and authors of new arts" were "consecrated amongst the gods themselves."[45] Hume reverses the ordering and ranks founders above inventors. Importantly, Hume was also aware of Bacon's *Essays*, citing the work in both his own *Essays* (E 266) and in the *History of England*, [46] and so was surely familiar with another of Bacon's rankings, found in "Of Honour and Reputation." There Bacon does not mention inventors, and like Hume ranks "founders" as first in honor. As is widely noted, the "Of Honour and

[45]*The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longman, 1860), 3:301

[46]David Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1983), 5:130.

Reputation" ranking is a conscious revision to the *Discourses* 1.10 ranking, with Bacon audaciously omitting Moses in his list of founders deserving of praise.[47] Bacon's engagement with Machiavelli is unsurprising, since he was outspoken in his admiration for "Machiavel and others," who "write what men do and not what they ought to do," and also spoke favorably about the esoteric or "enigmatical method," which intends "by obscurity … to exclude the vulgar (that is the profane vulgar) from the secrets of knowledges."[48] Perhaps, by adopting the Machiavellian style and argument found in "Of Honour and Reputation," Hume unintentionally ushered the *Discourses* ranking into his essay within the Trojan horse of the Baconian copy. It is therefore possible that Hume did not have Machiavelli in mind, and only intended to engage with Bacon.[49]

However, it is difficult to make sense of Hume's introductory critique of Bacon as a meaningful frame for an essay that will analyze threats to good founding, without also supposing that Hume is engaging with the original ranking found in the *Discourses*. Hume proclaims that Bacon is wrong in his ranking, because the benefits afforded by inventors cannot be utilized unless good laws and orders are first established (E 55). The importance of good orders is the foundational premise for the essay's analysis of parties. In the *Treatise*, when Hume first introduces his "science of man"—which includes the science of politics—he seems to ignore Bacon's political judgments by drawing an analogy between Thales and Bacon on the one hand, and Socrates and "some late philosophers in *England*" on the other (THN Intro.7, xvii Hume's emphasis). Bacon is thus cast as a model for experimental reasoning, but not as it applies to the political science of founding. Instead, a few essays before "Of Parties in General," in "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," Hume singles out Machiavelli's realist orientation as praiseworthy for knowledge of good founding (E 23). In short, the praise due to Baconian inventors is conditional on good founding, and it is on this subject that Hume looks not to Bacon but to Machiavelli. We are not surprised to find, then, that after his ranking of praise, Hume singles out those deserving of blame, the founders of sects and factions. In so doing Hume ensures that his ranking resembles the *Discourses* more than Bacon, for in none of the Baconian rankings do we find parallel rankings of those deserving blame. Hume wishes to

[47]Timothy H. Paterson, "On the Role of Christianity in the Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon," *Polity* 19, no. 3 (1987): 439–41; Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 2:113; Howard B. White, *Peace among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 45–55. On Bacon's admiration of Machiavelli, see Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 2:31–37, and Raab, *English Face of Machiavelli*, 74.

[48]*Works of Francis Bacon*, 3:430, 4:450.

[49]For a third Baconian ranking, and one which reflects the judgments found in the *Advancement of Learning*, see *Novum Organum* 1.129 (*Works*, 4:113–15).

engage with both Bacon and Machiavelli. It is to the engagement with Machiavelli that I shall now turn.[50]

We can begin to shed light on why Hume introduces his essay in this manner by considering his conspicuous revisions to the ranks of the most praised and most blamed. In the *Discourses* ranking, "heads and orderers of religion" are considered the most praised, and "destroyers of religion" most detestable (DL 1.10.1). Hume promotes founders of laws by ranking first "legislators and founders of states" (E 54–55), but withholds praise for founders of religion. This is not because Hume has nothing to say about religion: he condemns those who have placed the refined precepts of philosophy and the severe injunctions of religion over wise laws and institutions. Then, in his ranking of the most blameworthy, he cites "founders of sects and factions" as those to "be detested and hated," thus hinting that the ranking in the *Discourses* gets the most important judgment wrong: founders of religion, or at least founders of religious sects, are deserving of the highest blame.

That the demotion of religious founding is central to Hume's appropriation of the *Discourses* is further shown by his careful use of terms. He introduces the essay by excoriating "founders of sects and factions" as those most responsible for damaging the accomplishments of "founders of states" (E 55). The word "sect" is reserved for his analysis of parties of abstract speculative principle, which relate to "one sect of religion," that is, the "Christian religion" (E 61). Hume is also careful with "founders": of the four types of parties or factions discussed—personalistic, interest, principle, and affection—only parties of principle are given founders. No founders are mentioned for personalistic factions, for these factions of friendship and animosity arise from divisions already established. No founders are mentioned for factions of affection, as these factions are birthed from divergent affections towards possible or actual authorities, such as the Jacobite affection for the house of Stuart. Factions of interest, founded on the expectation of benefit from the established government, also lack founders. The only "founders" of factions or sects Hume analyzes in the essay are founders of sects, the priesthood, which was "allowed to engross all the authority in the new sect," and promoted "keenness in dispute" to beget a "mutual hatred and antipathy among their deluded followers" (E 61–63). By naming priests as the founders of parties of speculative principle, Hume distinguishes them as the "founders of sects and factions" most condemned in the introduction to the essay. He introduces "Of Parties in General" by pointing to the

[50]Why Hume decides to veil his engagement with the *Discourses* (which he considered a work of "great judgment and genius" [E 634]) in this instance while explicitly engaging with Machiavelli elsewhere is a perplexing question I do not intend to answer conclusively. As will become clear, my interpretation offers the suggestion that Hume may be wary given his task of displacing one popular Machiavellian teaching with a revised version of one of Machiavelli's most controversial opinions regarding Christianity.

preeminent importance of institutions, and then singles out Christian leaders near the end of the essay as the preeminent source of damage to these institutions. Thus, Hume thinks the *Discourses* ranking is wrong, and points the reader to the effects of Christianity as his reason for thinking so.

Hume's disagreement with the *Discourses* ranking, however, is likely not a disagreement with Machiavelli, only with the ranking Machiavelli reports in the *Discourses*. This can be seen by considering what Hume would have known about Machiavelli's stated opinions about religious founders and Christianity. Hume's ranking is given in his own voice and appears to be his own opinion. Yet we cannot say the same about the *Discourses* ranking, which Machiavelli does not explicitly endorse, nor give in his own voice. Tellingly, Machiavelli gives a contrary ranking later, this time in his own voice, when he praises Romulus and Tullus above Numa, condemning Numa's religious orders as dependent on fortune (DL 1.19.4). It seems the *Discourses* 1.10 ranking is the opinion of the many, and their judgment is suspect. This misjudgment is warned of in the *Prince*, where Machiavelli demonstrates that blame or praise is readily but often wrongly attributed to those who are "placed higher."[51] It is likely, then, that Hume was aware that Machiavelli himself demotes religious founding.

Machiavelli's opinion on the Christian religion Hume has in mind, however, offers considerable interpretive difficulty, as Machiavelli's view of Christianity is a subject of substantial debate. Some forms of religion are for Machiavelli valuable tools for politics. Religion allowed Rome to "command armies, to animate the plebs, to keep men good, to bring shame to the wicked" (DL 1.11.2). The fear of God in Rome made "easier whatever enterprise the Senate or the great men of Rome might plan to make," because the citizens "feared to break an oath much more than the laws" (DL 1.11.1).[52] The usefulness of religion extends to the problems of faction, as it was used to "Reorder the City" and "Stop Tumults" (DL 1.13.T). Machiavelli is far less sanguine about the usefulness of Christianity (see esp. DL 1.12, 2.2, 2.5, 3.1). He condemns Christianity for causing us to "esteem less the honor of the world," and for producing citizens who "think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them" (DL 2.2.2). Some scholars see Machiavelli's judgment as a call for a reformation, as he blames the weakness of the modern world on the "cowardice of men who have interpreted our religion according to idleness and not according to virtue" (DL 2.2.2). Viroli, for example, holds that Machiavelli advocates a religion of republican liberty, and argues that the "Christian religion properly interpreted is apt to serve

[51]Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 61.

[52]Machiavelli's other examples of religion show its limitations; the example of Scipio forcing the people to swear an oath "with naked steel in hand" suggests that religion may have to be armed to be useful (DL 1.11.1).

such a civic task."[53] Sullivan, in contrast, rejects the possibility for reform: "Machiavelli finds that Christianity exerts a type of tyrannical rule over human beings, one that deprives them of their honor, dignity, and power."[54] Disagreements continue for the subject of faction: Mansfield interprets Machiavelli's analysis of factions that use "alien forces" in *Discourses* 1.7 as a critical reference to the "alien" forces of heaven,[55] while others interpret this same passage without reference to Christianity at all.[56]

We can set aside the difficulty of interpreting Machiavelli's intention by limiting our consideration to Hume's stated interpretation of Machiavelli. His reading of Machiavelli's opinion of Christianity is that the religion leads to opinions that damage that which is most to be praised, good political founding. This can be found in the *Natural History of Religion*, where Hume cites Machiavelli's judgment that Christianity, at least under the Roman church, is a source of subjection and tyranny: "This gave rise to the observation of MACHIAVEL, that the doctrines of the CHRISTIAN religion (meaning the catholic; for he knew no other) which recommend only passive courage and suffering, had subdued the spirit of mankind, and had fitted them for slavery and subjection" (NHR 10.5; see DL 2.2.2). Like many of Hume's citations of Machiavelli, he feels this needs revision: "An observation, which would certainly be just, were there not many other circumstances in human society which controul the genius and character of a religion" (NHR 10.5). When Hume demotes founders of religion while referencing Machiavelli in "Of Parties in General," the Florentine's contentions regarding Christianity would surely have been in Hume's mind, primarily Machiavelli's claim that modern politics is plagued by a religion that esteems those virtues that lead to subjection and blames the *virtù* that might lead to freedom. As we will see, Hume revises Machiavelli's understanding of Christianity's genius and character in of "Of Parties in General."

Hume's appropriation of Machiavelli in the introduction to "Of Parties in General" thus provides a rich frame for understanding the analysis found

[53]Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), xi.

[54]Vickie B. Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes: Religion, Human Liberty, and Politics Reformed* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 38.

[55]Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, 57. Mansfield interprets the *Florentine Histories* in a similar way (Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 137–75), claiming that Machiavelli's condemnation of Florentine factions involving "sects" is a reference to the influence of Christianity (cf. Filippo Del Lucchese, "Crisis and Power: Economics, Politics and Conflict in Machiavelli's Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* 30, no. 1 [2009]: 75–96).

[56]See, for example, Claude Lefort, *Machiavelli in the Making*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 234–49; John P. McCormick, "Subdue the Senate: Machiavelli's 'Way of Freedom' or Path to Tyranny?," *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 714–35.

in the rest of the essay. Hume introduces his analysis of parties by offering a ranking of what ought to be praised, and with this ranking he refers his reader to Machiavelli's famous ranking of what the many praise. The implied disjunction between what is and what ought to be praised is made explicit by the radical revision Hume makes to the *Discourses* ordering, not only refusing to praise religious founders, but pointing to their role in damaging the efforts of those founders most deserving of praise. Yet Hume does not mean religious founders generally, nor does he wish to engage with Machiavelli's opinions on pagan religions. Hume means the Christian religion, the same Christianity—albeit in its Roman form—that he knew Machiavelli thought had caused men to esteem or praise the wrong things, a misjudgment that had prevented good political founding. Hume frames his analysis of parties by pointing his reader to the idea that Christianity may blind us to the effectual truth of the thing in political life.

Praise and Blame in the Modern Religion

The Christianity of Machiavelli's experience created men more concerned with "enduring their beatings than of avenging them." Thinking themselves in the possession of the "truth and the true way," they sought after heaven at the expense of earth (DL 2.2.2). Yet in the postreformation world of religious wars and factious enthusiasm, Christianity ceased to be a force of idleness and weakness requiring the ferocity exemplified in ancient politics. The problem had been reversed: Christians no longer passively denied earth for heaven, they wished to forcibly bring heaven down to earth. Yet Machiavelli's original thesis remains foundational for Hume: the dominance of the Christian manner of thinking continues to harm the needs of good political founding. Machiavelli therefore plays an integral part of Hume's attempt to provide a scientific or neutral analysis of parties, for as we will see, in order to account for what has led to the parties of the British experience, Hume adopts and revises Machiavelli's original insights about what plagues modern thinking.

Following his appropriation of Machiavelli in the introduction to "Of Parties in General," Hume establishes the need for an analysis of parties by pointing to the unfortunate truth that parties and factions grow quite naturally in all governments, and may cause the "total dissolution" of the government of which they are a part (E 55). The task of the founder and legislator, then, is to categorize their types, rank order their dangerous tendencies, and discern their causes. "Personal" factions are divisions of animosity, and though they are most frequent in small republics where factional animosities are easily incited and propagated, they plague all forms of division, as any real division is met with personal animosity. "Real" factions are those which contain in addition to personal animosity a real difference of interests or principles, or divergent affections toward competing royal lineages. Hume

begins with the first, describing factions of interest as the "most reasonable, and the most excusable." There are various "orders of men" in society, Hume continues, and whenever one of these orders gains some authority in government, it will seek to use government to satisfy its interest to the exclusion of others. We cannot expect "a different conduct, considering that degree of selfishness implanted in human nature" (E 59).

The foundation of this explanation is what Hume would explore and apply in "Of the Independency of Parliament," where Hume prefaces his analysis of Walpolean corruption with a realist political maxim: "Political writers have established it as a maxim, that, in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controuls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave*" (E 42). The possible candidates for these "writers" are many,[57] but Hume was surely aware of its original source in Machiavelli: "it is necessary to whoever disposes a republic and orders laws in it to presuppose that all men are bad, and that they always have to use the malignity of their spirit whenever they have a free opportunity for it" (DL 1.3.1). Hume stipulates that this maxim is false in private life,[58] but because men "will go greater lengths to serve a party, than when their own private interest is alone concerned," it remains "true in *politics*" (E 43). He then tells us how to take this maxim and apply it to the analysis of constitutional governments, where "power is distributed among several courts, and several orders of men," by seeing if through the constitution the distinct interests are checked and directed to the public good (E 43). It was supposed by the Country party that the constitution had failed on these grounds when Walpole had created a faction in Parliament to vote for his interests. Hume places practice over theoretical principle and shows that the public good remained tolerably protected: had the venerated independence of Parliament been maintained, the overwhelming power of the commons would have destroyed the balance.[59] Though inconceivable from

[57]The British reader at the time would have recalled, as readily as Machiavelli, the call to realism in the introduction to Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*: "One of the greatest Reasons why so few People understand themselves, is, that most Writers are always teaching Men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their Heads with telling them what they really are" (Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* [Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998], 1:39).

[58]See Danford, "Getting Our Bearings," on the different grounds of Humean and Machiavellian empiricism.

[59]Hume's refutation of Bolingbroke's constitutional analysis is a prime example of Hume's science of politics as found in the *Essays*. This science is predicated on the notion that experience and observation would reveal that laws have consequences "almost as general and certain" as the natural sciences (E 16), and would thus be a science primarily of use to the designer of political institutions (Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 135), displacing the well-established advice of the classical republican tradition (Moore, "Hume's Political Science").

Bolingbroke's theoretical perspective, factional corruption was in fact preserving the British mixed constitution (E 45).[60]

This realist analysis of the British constitution is the background for the claim Hume makes in the context of factions of interest in "Of Parties in General": "It requires great skill in a legislator to prevent such [factions of interest]; and many philosophers are of opinion, that this secret, like the *grand elixir*, or *perpetual motion*, may amuse men in theory, but can never possibly be reduced to practice" (E 59). As Harris points out, the usual British reader would expect Hume to go on and disagree with these philosophers, and assert that the British constitution had in fact achieved this elusive arrangement.[61] Yet Hume leaves the opinion of the "many philosophers" uncorrected, and continues to expand upon the claim that divisions of interest cannot be prevented in practice. Hume's purposes here are not so much to defend the "many philosophers" but to subvert the notion that the praiseworthiness of the constitution depends upon its holding to a providential or theoretical ideal over the data of experience. At the core of Hume's analysis of factions of interest is thus the application of the Machiavellian knave maxim, from which Hume rejects the prevailing opinions about what is praiseworthy and blameworthy in political institutions. Quite naturally then, Hume transitions to a critique of parties of principle, where he will diagnose one source of this misjudgment.

Parties of principle are "known only in modern times, and are, perhaps, the most extraordinary and unaccountable *phœnomenon*, that has yet appeared in human affairs" (E 60). The parties are easier to explain when the speculation is political in nature, for if we disagree about who should rule, our disagreement reflects two incompatible states of affairs; a monarchist and a republican cannot both be satisfied in practice. But if these speculative disagreements are theological or philosophical in nature, then the division is seemingly unaccountable, "for there is nothing outside the minds of those involved over which to divide."[62] An Arminian and a Calvinist may disagree about the role of man's will in Christian salvation. Yet why would these theological speculations be joined to any violence of sentiment? Surely these speculations have little connection to the experiences of life that commonly energize our passions (THN 2.3.4.1, 419). Why such animosity when we can be perfectly secure in the "internal satisfaction" of our minds (THN 3.2.2.7, 488)? Does believing the other a heretic prevent both from peaceably using the same road? Engaging in commerce? Draining a meadow?

[60]Though less founded on a science of politics, Walpole's rationalizers offered similar-sounding arguments in the *London Journal*. See Gunn, *Factions No More*, 113–18.

[61]Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, 169–70.

[62]Knud Haakonssen, "The Structure of Hume's Political Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton and Jacqueline Taylor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 369.

Hume begins to explain this "madness" by repeating in the essay the principles of human nature articulated a year or two before in the *Treatise*. Because the mind assumes that whatever it perceives perfectly reflects reality, it finds great pain when presented with the possibility of the alternative, and will seek to flee from or discredit the source of this pain (THN 1.4.2.37, 206). Though the mind certainly contains dissonant ideas, we have a natural propensity to ignore this, as we relate without reflection our own ideas into a seemingly coherent whole. This tendency makes us much more likely to perceive and be pained by the experience of interacting with those who disagree with our understanding of reality (THN 1.4.6.19, 261). Hume repeats this principle in "Of Parties in General": "But such is the nature of the human mind, that it always lays hold on every mind that approaches it … so [it] is shocked and disturbed by any contrariety. Hence the eagerness, which most people discover in a dispute; and hence their impatience of opposition, even in the most speculative and indifferent opinions" (E 60–61).

Yet if the above tendency is a universal feature of the human mind, why are parties of religious and philosophical principle unique to the modern experience? Hume provides two explanations. The first contains shadows of Machiavelli (DL 2.5). Hume thinks Christianity's apolitical emergence led to the empowerment of an ambitious class of priests who find it in their interest to promote persecution. Prior to Christianity, whenever new religions would emerge, both rulers and ruled would be disposed to accept these new pieties. Rulers "embrace[d] the religion of the people," and readily "united the ecclesiastical with the civil power" (E 61). The Christian religion, however, emerged in a different world, where "principles directly opposite to it were firmly established in the polite part of the world," causing the civil authorities to reject the new "sect" (E 61). As a result, the priests of this burgeoning sect adopted the ecclesiastical authority the civil authorities rejected. The priests' use of this authority, or rather misuse, informed the lasting character of Christianity as a persecuting religion. Interested in maintaining this ecclesiastical authority, the priests maintained an "imprudent zeal and bigotry," instilled "violence" in their followers, and "engendered a spirit of persecution, which has ever since been the poison of human society, and the source of the most inveterate factions in every government" (E 61). The priests, then, should not be categorized with their followers: the followers of these factions comprise a faction of principle, but for the priests who are able to maintain their power by exciting these principles, they are factions of interest (E 62). In "Of the Parties of Great Britain," Hume applies the same categories to the secular principled parties of the British constitution: the leaders of the parties are motivated by interest, and to ensure their own power, they will "go greater lengths than their principles would otherwise carry them" (E 65). This critical analysis follows from the knave maxim that *politicians* will be knaves—principles, no matter how honest and public-spirited in the hands of the citizen, become mixed with factious interest when placed in the hands of the ambitious.

Yet why have principles garnered such esteem in the modern mind in the first place, such that principles can be used by ambitious leaders for their own ends? And why do these esteemed principles, when placed in the center of public life, have such a tendency to promote zealous division? To account for this, Hume points to philosophy, not just theistic religion, as the underlying cause. In the ancient world, "sects of philosophy" were "more zealous than parties of religion," yet in "modern times, parties of religion are more furious and enraged than the most cruel factions that ever arose from interest and ambition" (E 63). Factions of interest have calmed from their previous rage—as we learn elsewhere (E 407)—while religious parties have become enraged. There is something unique about Christendom to be accounted for. Those religions that emerged in ages "totally ignorant and barbarous" consisted of tales and fictions that either did not contradict the tales and fictions of other sects, or when they did, did not encourage hostile "reasoning and disputation" (E 62). Peaceful coexistence or even combination was possible. Christianity, however, emerged in a world already introduced to the systematizing speculation of philosophy. The leaders of this new sect, finding their personal interest tied to its survival, "were obliged to form a system of speculative opinions; to divide, with some accuracy, their articles of faith; and to explain, comment, confute, and defend with all the subtilty of argument and science" (E 62). These speculative systems assisted priests "in their policy, of begetting a mutual hatred and antipathy among their deluded followers" (E 63).

The modern religion of Christianity is thus an amalgam of theism and philosophy unknown in the ancient world, and it is through the dominance of this mixed religion in the modern mind that the divisiveness of philosophy has been ushered into politics and every other area of life.[63] Hume portrays this mixture as a historical accident, but one that is predictable given the nature of theism. Unlike polytheistic religions, but like the ancient sects of philosophy (E 63), theism is predisposed to zealotry and intolerance by nature of its exclusivist claims (NHR 9.2). Moreover, theism readily attached itself to philosophic speculation because the "tenet [of theism] is so conformable to sound reason, that philosophy is apt to incorporate itself with such a system of theology" (NHR 11.3). Whatever its beginnings, then, Christianity became inseparable from philosophic speculation; "without philosophy, Christendom would not be what it is."[64] The incorporation of philosophy into theism first made philosophy serve the interests of superstition, energizing philosophy's zealotry and directing this intolerance towards any

[63]An extensive and valuable account of Christianity as a union between theism and philosophy is provided by Donald W. Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. chap. 5.

[64]Ibid., 111.

philosophical system contrary to the Christian one (EHU 11.3). In becoming the dominant religion, or more accurately, the dominant philosophical system, Christianity ushered these intolerant speculations into every area of life. All philosophic speculation is dangerous to politics, for the "political interests of society" have no "connexion with the philosophical disputes concerning metaphysics and religion" (EHU 11.27). The ancient philosophers were thus dangerous, as they claimed "total dominion" for their speculations, but their dangers rarely spilled outside of the philosophical sects.[65] The "modern religion," however, which replaced these ancient philosophies, "inspects our whole conduct, and prescribes an universal rule to our actions, to our words, to our very thoughts and inclinations; a rule so much the more austere, as it is guarded by infinite, though distant, rewards and punishments; and no infraction of it can ever be concealed or disguised" (EPM Dialogue.53).

As modern life became saturated with philosophical theism, the divisiveness inherent to this modern religion would inevitably plague political life as well. Hume thought this plague continued well into his own century, even after the seeming religious concord reached after the Glorious Revolution. Immediately following "Of Parties in General," in "Of the Parties of Great Britain" and in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," Hume demonstrates how prominent theological divides readily match onto and exacerbate contrary political impulses toward authority and liberty. He would repeat this sentiment in "Of the Coalition of Parties": "the present fury of the people, though glossed over by pretensions to civil liberty, is in reality incited by the fanaticism of religion; a principle the most blind, headstrong, and ungovernable, by which human nature can possibly be actuated" (E 500).

In diagnosing modern religion, however, Hume seeks to provide an analysis not just of the religious wars which continue to echo in his century, but of what has led to, and what still characterizes, modern political division generally.[66] For Hume, the religious fervor that still afflicts party politics was merely one symptom of the underlying disease that modern religion had given the modern mind. This disease is the dangerous political opinion "that philosophy should be a political authority or that the Platonic philosopher-king, taken literally, is the appropriate model for political society."[67] Underlying all party politics in the modern age, then, is a common opinion that philosophic speculation confers legitimacy on partisan organization. We thus find that "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." As a result, "each of the factions, into which this

[65]Ibid., 117.
[66]Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 313.
[67]Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 146.

nation is divided, has reared up a [philosophical or speculative system], in order to protect and cover that scheme of actions, which it pursues" (E 465). Indeed, as Merrill points out, the virulent opposition between parties of principle would not be possible without a deep agreement, born of Christianity's dominance, "that speculative philosophy should be the authority for political life."[68] Thus, while Bolingbroke and others looked back to 1688 as a bookend to religious and philosophical difference, and a move beyond fatal division, Hume saw a present and a future that had yet to deal with the underlying cause.

What has yet to be noticed about the diagnosis of the modern mind in "Of Parties in General" is that Hume presents this diagnosis as a conscious innovation upon Machiavelli. For Hume, the ground of political authority, and of political understanding generally, is opinion (EMPL 32). Authority everywhere depends on the maintenance of the opinion that some person or some idea has a legitimate relationship to political rule. The danger of the modern religion is that it gives men opinions about legitimacy that are dissonant with practice, leading to political divisions that cast blame on the realist orientation by which good political founding is made possible and legitimate in the eyes of the citizen. The problem with the modern religion is thus the problem Hume refers to in the essay's Machiavellian introductory ranking of praise and blame: the praiseworthy acts of the political founder are damaged by the founders of the Christian sect. The founders of religion praised in the *Discourses* ranking must be blamed in "Of Parties in General," because the Christian founder's success hinders the political founder's success. The introduction to "Of Parties in General" is thus an announcement that Hume faces the same problem he saw Machiavelli face, the need to found altogether anew outside of the established orders of Christianity. So long as the people are drawn to divisions of speculative principle, the praiseworthy founding will remain elusive. Parties, like philosophers, must lower their aspirations, away from imagined republics and principalities back down to the "common course of the world" (THN Intro.10, xix). Hume's introductory praise of founders and legislators in "Of Parties in General" is then both descriptive and prescriptive: the praiseworthy founding will remain a difficult task until the praiseworthiness of proper founding is better understood.

[68]Ibid. Hume's lifelong defense of having a state church should thus be understood as an attempt to deal with the specific problem of priestly ambition, only one of the many problems resulting from modern religion. On church establishment in Hume's thought, see Frederick G. Whelan, "Church Establishments, Liberty and Competition in Religion," *Polity* 23, no. 2 (1990): 155–85; Will R. Jordan, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration of David Hume and Religious Establishment," *Review of Politics* 64, no. 4 (2002): 687–713; and Ryu Susato, "Taming 'the Tyranny of Priests': Hume's Advocacy of Religious Establishments," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, no. 2 (2012): 273–93.

Conclusion

Hume sees himself as having the same ambition Machiavelli described in the preface to the *Discourses*. To re-establish political founding on proper grounds, he must reform the current opinion that misunderstands what is truly praiseworthy in political thinking. What is required, as announced in the introduction to the *Treatise*, is an emancipation from the effects of the modern religion through a revolution in philosophy and the inauguration of the new science of man. For Hume, as Merrill argues, "to exaggerate only slightly, a political revolution sustainable in the long run requires a cultural revolution … the revolution Hume aims to effect in the opinions of his readers is at least as important a part of the project of the *Essays* as his more prominent institutional design."[69] We can portray Hume's controversial opinion on parties as an echo of the controversy surrounding Machiavelli's radical opinion on faction, for though Hume would reject Machiavelli's analysis of faction, like Machiavelli Hume understood that his analysis of faction was controversial precisely because it was the product of an attempt to "take a path as yet untrodden by anyone" in trying to introduce "new modes and orders" (DL Preface.1).

We can close by considering the implications of Hume's Machiavellian ambitions. For though Hume agrees with Machiavelli that the powerful force of Christianity is at the heart of what plagues modern politics, he fervently rejects much of the Florentine's solution. For Machiavelli, the inadequacy of the modern religion can be offset by imitating the ancients, a practical knowledge purchased through "a true knowledge of histories" (DL 1.preface). Whatever Machiavelli's ultimate intentions, it was this focus on the ancients that bewitched Hume's contemporaries, who looked to the Florentine to bolster their "classical preoccupation with corruption and decline."[70] Yet it was this obsession with Machiavellian classicism that blinded them to political truth. For Hume, admiration for the ancients was a problematic tendency of human nature, not the result of the "profoundest judgment and most extensive learning" (E 464). The ancients may be examples to study for a science of politics, but they are no longer exemplary.

Hume does, however, point to Machiavelli's method, the cautious empiricism that Harrington had stripped away from Machiavellianism,[71] as a tool to combat the unjust distribution of honors in the modern age. In "Of Civil Liberty," Hume makes explicit this point; he asserts that there "scarcely is any maxim in [Machiavelli's] *prince*, which subsequent experience has not entirely refuted" (E 88), but this is not because the Florentine was wrong in his method, which Hume supports (E 21–24), but because he "lived in too

[69]Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment*, 140.
[70]Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, 165.
[71]Raab, *English Face of Machiavelli*, 190.

early an age of the world, to be a good judge of political truth" (E 88). What Hume wishes to do is displace the Machiavelli of his contemporaries with the few insights from Machiavelli that remain true. Thus what was involved with repudiating his contemporaries was refounding their Machiavellian foundations, away from the fixation on singular reorderers and the necessity of public virtue.[72] This begins, as he does in the *Essays*, with offering a science of politics that adopts Machiavelli's method while largely rejecting his conclusions. In "Of Parties in General," Hume shows why a new science of politics is desperately needed, by diagnosing the modern mind with a diagnosis that was offered in nascent form in the *Discourses*. Hume thus attempts to usher a new Machiavelli into the British mind, without his reader knowing it: he criticizes the prevailing Machiavelli by offering a revision to one of Machiavelli's most controversial teachings.

[72]Moore, "Hume's Political Science," 825; Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 229.