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"Sweden Is Still a Kingdom": Convention and Political Authority in Hume's *History of England*

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> To balance a large state or society, whether monarchical or republican, on general laws, is a work of so great difficulty, that no human genius, however comprehensive, is able, by the mere dint of reason and reflection, to effect it.
>
> —Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," 124

Andrew Sabl's *Hume's Politics. Coordination and Crisis in the History of England* is an impressive tribute to the Tacitus of the eighteenth century. His study offers a reading of the *History of England* "as if it were a treatise on this one subject: how conventions of political authority arise, change, improve by various measures, and die" (7).[1] Hume's *History*, according to Sabl, is much more than a mere narrative of the gradual emergence of a stable constitutional monarchy on the English soil: it contains a systematic political theory that foreshadows some crucial devices of contemporary coordination theory. Hume the historian thus propagates an ingenious "liberalism of enlargement" (as Sabl calls it) from which we can still profit.

"Teasing out a coherent political theory from a 1.3 million words book" is of course no sinecure. Sabl admits that his study is more "analytic" than "humanistic" (18).[2] He focuses on the dynamics of conflict that yield conventions of political authority, and abstracts largely from a more moral reading of the *History*, such as we

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find for example in some of the latest essays by Annette Baier.[3] Sabl thinks Hume's intentions in writing the *History* were first and foremost political-practical. He also takes for granted that Hume the historian relies heavily on the philosopher: the *History*'s tale of the gradual emergence of a stable fabric of political authority in England confirms, in general, the theoretical account of the origin of government and political allegiance in the *Treatise*.

By confining his focus, Sabl is able to elaborate his reading of the *History*. He concludes his book with a plea for a politics of "charm and realism" as antidote for a strained political rationalism. For Sabl, Hume is not the antiquarian Tory conservative, as some would like him to be, nor a proponent of a Kantian liberalism of dignity. Hume is much more one of us: a political Enlightenment thinker of a post-modern blend: moderate, pragmatic, and propagating a non-perfectionist liberal pluralism. I agree firmly with Sabl that Hume's *History* contains hidden treasures. However, I worry that if we see Hume *too much* as one of us, we might ignore some of the less optimistic lessons his *History* contains. In the following, I point out why I think so.

1. Political Authority and Fundamental Conventions in the *Treatise* and *History*

According to Sabl, one finds in Hume's *History* an account of political authority that confirms the exposition of the *Treatise*. Here, Hume unfolds in a brilliant way his somehow uncanny normative internalism concerning the legitimacy of an established government or constitution: custom—not reason—forms the foundation of allegiance towards the sovereign (or the "governors"). Citizens, so Hume contends, obey a certain constitution because it is established, not because they silently consented to do so or explicitly agreed to do so through an original contract.[4] It might be the case that the willingness to obey a political convention arose, in uncivilised times, out of self-interest or a temporary quasi-contract (seeking protection in times of war): but the transformation of the merely factual interests of the parties forming a political society into a sense of allegiance implies a sort of repression of this non-normative origin of the constitution, a jump over the abyss, as Sabl himself nicely suggests at the end of his study.[5]

This implies that for Hume, the sense of political allegiance—the civil virtue shoring political authority—is deeply embedded in common life. Citizens habitually obey the sovereign and legislature spontaneously, out of a sense of obedience, and without further considerations of self-interest (at least in times of peace and prosperity). Political authority thus derives its normative force *solely* from convention. It is, as Sabl coins it, a form of *fundamental* convention. Fundamental conventions, as Sabl further explains, "consist of those ways of living together that provide such basic political and social goods that any challenge to them is

likely to be both fruitless and immoral" (32). For Hume life in civil society is hardly imaginable without political authority and a firmly established constitution. For Sabl, this is the main lesson concerning political authority, to be drawn from both the *Treatise* and *History*.

Fundamental conventions, as Hume's *History* illustrates time and again, take time to become established and consolidate. In this sense, the growth of a stable constitution might depend on the progress of knowledge and morality, but cannot be planned deliberately: constitutions derive, so Hume defends in Hegelian fashion, from the "cunning" of historical reason.[6] Here, and only *here*, Sabl stresses, lies the root of Hume's understated political conservatism: "To set oneself up against a fundamental convention is to propose, in effect, tearing one's existing society or polity up by the roots and beginning another—which typically involves, at the very least, fighting a generations-long war against those who quite liked the old plant" (32).

Hume thus deserves the title of a glorious inventor, as I read Sabl, insofar as he tried to explain "how institutions of property and authority could have arisen without the need for a divine guidance, natural law, deliberate human agreement or planning" (4). His *History* teaches us that political conventions are products of human making and contrivance. The *origin* of these conventions lies in the coordination of self-interest of individuals and parties making up a political community, not in some divine plan or sanctifying contract. Indeed, contingency is lurking underneath every political establishment: the *arcana imperii* cover up an abyss.[7] But once established, a complex of factors leads citizens to sustain their allegiance to government: they somehow forget about the abyss and consolidate an attitude of civil trust. Remarkably, as Sabl also stresses, the origin and the foundation of a convention can be widely divergent for Hume. Moreover, at the core of political allegiance lies a sense of identification that stems from feeling (imagination and custom), not self-interest as such.

This should not imply, so Sabl aptly explains, that Hume was not open to the idea that in times of crisis and conflict, shifts in constitutions could result from considerations of interest. Hume endorses, for example, a sort of pragmatic liberalism in believing that rebellion against "egregious tyrants" can become acceptable. He is also clearly open to the idea that changes in constitutions become recommendable when public interest requires so.[8] But this is rather an empirical than an *a priori* normative matter. It is exactly the logic of conventions to create, so to say, the normative pitch of political authority out of factual needs and considerations. For a fundamental convention, moreover, it is crucial that citizens adhere to it with a certain sense of reverence and awe, in order to preserve its foundational character. The change in a fundamental convention (civil disobedience in times of tyranny) will therefore indicate serious conflicts of interest that ask for a drastic solution: a change in constitution. However, in such episodes of crisis, there is no *tertium*

quid (no natural law, no divine rule) to assess the legitimacy of the considerations of interest at stake from an external point of view.

Hume's account of political legitimacy thus implies a sort of inversion of political theology. As Sabl contends, the *History* mirrors a deliberate attempt to conquer a strong belief that most people in Hume's time shared: "that political institutions resulted from some combination of a divinely ordained system of rank and order, a Providential history that looked toward the good of all human beings, and perfect ancient plans of liberty that corrupt contemporaries are in danger of losing through lack of virtue" (11). It is the great merit of Sabl's study to highlight how much we can still learn from the explanatory inventiveness *and* the normative intentions of Hume's *History*, despite the distance of 250 years. However, I would like to mention three areas for which I have some reservations, or at least questions, concerning the way Sabl reads the *History* and the lessons he thinks Hume wanted to teach us.

2. Game Theory and Beyond

Hume might be a political theorist ahead of his time, as Sabl argues, insofar as he understood the dynamics underlying political conventions. In fact, Hume's *History* evokes more than a mere narrative of the "sound and fury" of political change in Britain's history: it also contains a theory of political conventions, whose underlying logic Sabl tries to reconstruct through game theory.[9]

For Sabl, the *History* illustrates through a kaleidoscope of historical examples a crucial insight of the theory of coordination games, developed by Schelling and Hardin: political authority and the sense of allegiance to the government arise out of situations of uncertainty which necessitate *joint* decision making.[10] Political power conflicts require that, out of self-interest, individuals and groups weigh their decisions compared to those of others. Unaware exactly of what others will do, but fatally dependent on their decisions, agents choose *ad hoc* strategies that scan the most optimal options and seek for an equilibrium in which all parties somehow win, thus yielding a sense of common interest. A stable constitutional convention forms a solution to this coordination problem.

Game theory is obviously in consonance, as Sabl mentions, with Hume's proto-Marxist account of the messy march of history.[11] The main factor that marks the shifts of forms of government is the struggle for political power based on property relations and consumption patterns. "Barons spent their wealth on private armies; gentlemen spend it on luxuries" (66), we learn from the first volumes of the *History*. This implies that the dynamics of coordination yielding conventions of political authority (such as the "regular" monarchy and Magna Charta), broadly answer the logic of economic rationality. Sabl highlights why Hume was in favour of the "mixed constitution": with the rise of commercial

bourgeois society, conventions of authority became more firmly based on interest and a sober obedience to the rule of law. This marks the definitive break with the feudal ages, where political authority was based on arbitrary personal despotism and a shaky political culture of honour.[12]

However, to rely so heavily on game theory to unfold the underlying intentions of Hume's views on political authority might belie some crucial insights of the *History*. In fact, Sabl himself is percipient of this. Already on the first pages of his study he admits that "solving coordination problems requires traditions, symbols, a sense of 'naturalness', visual or rhetorical prominence, or interpersonal intuition," all aspects that a strict formal game theory is unable to take into account. Sabl concludes that therefore, a game theoretical approach "may be a counterproductive way of exploring coordination, not (as often assumed) the best or only way" (9). I fully agree, but wonder whether Sabl at certain instances does not overlook the profoundness of his insight.

Take the way he interprets the "strategy" of coordination with which General George Monck ended England's Civil War and restored a constitutional monarchy.[13] The strategy Sabl detects is that of "naked bandwagoning," a strategy of coordinative behaviour that typically copes with situations of uncertainty by integrating in a common perspective the beliefs and actions of other parties involved in "the game," by suggesting oneself solutions without exactly knowing whether one has any. As a strategy, "naked bandwagoning" relies, so Sabl explains, on "asserting vague or trivial goals until one has gathered enough support (with opponents lulled by one's seeming moderation) to insist on more specific and more far-reaching ones" (164).

General Monck's march from the North of England to London displayed no clear plan, but helped to channel, so to say, the grievances and uncertainties of the partisans supporting parliament and King, respectively. Dissatisfied with the regime of the New Model Army, both parties found in the person of Monck and his mobilising march a sort of "rallying point" to join forces and renew the convention underlying the English constitution under Charles II. Hume praises Monck for his genius in using his reputation that appealed to different parties, but also for the way he refused to set himself up as a new Cromwell, showing political *phronèsis*. In game theoretical jargon: Monck functioned as a "focal point" in which different interests of contesting parties could find an equilibrium, leading to the return of the Stuart Kings, the free parliament, and the reassertion of Magna Charta.

Sabl exposes how the "coordination game" to be detected here, leading to the lucky aggregation of interests, relies on parameters for which no formal theory can account: the reputation of a military leader, his virtues and genius, and the intuitions and contextual "knowledge" of the parties involved in political strife and conflict. Indeed, "names, symbols and traditions" appear to be *crucial* to find

a solution for the coordinative dilemma, that is, "a way out" of the convulsions that precede shifts in constitutional regimes.

But this implies, on closer look, that interpreting the bandwagoning strategy of Monck in terms of game theory relies on an *ex post* device that helps only *with hindsight* to account for the actions of the players involved in the alleged coordinative dilemma. As such, Sabl's explanatory model gives no full insight in the *actual* motivations, beliefs, and considerations that moved the General in the course of the historical events he helped to determine. The idea that he "used" a strategy to reach a goal of which he had, after all, no clear idea yet, forms a theoretical projection on his actual motivations and beliefs that do not fit a more empathic reading (or hermeneutic *Verstehen*) of this micro-episode in England's history. Nor does this model exactly reveal insight in how the parties he had to deal with assessed his moves and formed their motives to cooperate.

The coordination game that Sabl discerns in the kaleidoscope of events leading to a "solution"—the reestablishment of the monarchy—abstracts largely from such an internal understanding of historical events. Apparently, it therefore also risks ignoring how the alleged "coordination" game underlying these events is embedded in a much larger setting of parameters that have a decisive influence on this happy outcome. Hume might have been eager to show these aspects of the historical episodes in his narrative as well.

In fact, he does so. As Annette Baier has recently shown, the *History* is also an exercise in moral psychology.[14] Baier praises Hume's wit and wisdom in depicting and assessing the ruling passions and beliefs of the major *dramatis personae* of the *History*, such as, for example, Henry II, Thomas Beckett, Henry VIII, Elizabeth and Mary Tudor, Bishop Tunstal, Charles I, Cromwell, James II, and so on. Baier's reading thus reveals exactly the sort of more empathic, internal understanding that is brought to expression in Hume's *History*, in order to come to an adequate explanation of the complex psychology of human beings in historical perspective. Baier justly reminds us of the need of a moral psychology that explains actions in terms of traits of character, and the vices and virtues, of the personages that people the *History* (royals, noblemen, parliamentarians, religious leaders, and military men), in order to give an intelligible account of their behaviour.[15]

In this sense, a reading of specific passages in the *History* through the lens of game theory might distort what appears to be just a crucial insight of Hume's narrative: instrumental reason is, in matters of coordination of political conflict, more often than not a guide that is too weak to rely on.[16] After all, *when* and *how* do contesting parties in times of political conflicts or civil war decide to accept new conventions of political authority? Why did Cavaliers and Roundheads, one after the other, decide to follow Monck, to trust his leadership? What finally triggers the move towards the restoration of the House of the Stuarts? It is Monck's sense of initiative and honour, his ability to join forces and gain power, and the grandiose

aura of his reputation that seduces the conquering parties to join him. But one should also take in account, on the side of each faction, the ruling passions, the gradual shifting of opinions and beliefs, the sudden appeal of new identifications, that all bring forward the acceptance of a new constitution.

These ingredients form the real and multi-layered causes that shape what appear, with hindsight, to be the "interests" of all parties concerned in favour of one specific outcome. Gradually, to accept the return to the monarchy became for most concerned (but not necessarily for each party) the best option: the self-interest to acquiesce in the new constitution arises then out of the convention, which presupposes as such this "new" civil obedience, not the other way around. And this obedience is not "caused" by a deliberate coordination of interests, but by the tricks of the passions and imagination that shape the strife for political power and, mediated by custom and tradition, yield conventions of political authority.

3. Religion: A Pseudo-convention?

The *History* does not only contain a theory about the fundamental convention of political authority, as Sabl suggests, but also a theory of *ordinary conventions* (such as property, promises, chastity, good manners) and *pseudo-conventions*, the most important of which is religion. This distinction between types of conventions is not Hume's, though it allows Sabl to point out the *History*'s treatment of the various realms of civil life that condition change and conflict in politics in fundamental ways.[17] Sabl comments especially on one of these conditions, religion, to which Hume devotes specific attention at various instances throughout the *History*.

The characterisation of religion as "pseudo" and even "negative" convention comes down to the following.[18] In Hume's view, according to Sabl, religion is a convention that only has "local and temporary" impact, or, in other words, does only have a seemingly fundamental role to play in the establishment of a stable, embedded way of life. "The hallmark of pseudo-conventions is that they serve no real purpose, hence the name" (34). This definition fits the ironic comparison Hume makes in the *Treatise* between the civic ritual of promises and the religious one of transubstantiation, and a similar one, in the second *Enquiry*, between superstition and justice.[19] For Hume, the difference between promises and justice on the one hand, and religious rituals and beliefs on the other hand, is obvious: the first are useful conventions, the second not.

Sabl concludes that the main lesson the *History* has to teach when it comes to religion is wholly negative and dismissive. For Hume, religion is, allegedly, a pseudo-convention, because it only *seems* to give what it pretends to do, namely to coordinate the religious beliefs and pious preferences of a group in a "successful" (useful) way. Overall, Hume even considers religion, as Sabl remarks caustically, as a *negative* convention, insofar as it usually radically thwarts the establishment of a

stable political authority: religion is, after all, the main factor causing political factions to arise. Sabl thinks Hume would not be opposed to a "cavalier" undermining of religious traditions, and even, in principle, not fear "an aggressive opposition to religion in the public sphere" (35, 89), though he might perhaps avoid it on practical grounds. For Hume, as Sabl reads him, religion is, in general, a destructive force of life in the *polis*: a main intention of the *History* is to make this clear and thus raise hope to see its influence evaporate in time.[20]

One cannot ignore that Hume's *History* is a deliberate attempt to present a secular, non-providential understanding of England's political history. The whole corpus also exemplifies the naturalistic spirit of Hume's science of human nature, and avoids any reliance on a religious meta-narrative in explaining historical events and human action. Moreover, in Hume's empathic moral psychology one discerns a tacit but unmistakable critical stance towards religious passions and beliefs. When Hume treats of the figure of James I, for example, his admiration for the theological talents and sense of piety of this monarch are highly ironical and contrast with his disparagement of his political judgment and skills as governor. Leading figures as John Knox and Oliver Cromwell function as examples of "excellent hypocrites," whose religious zeal was a cause of civil turmoil and showed, according to Hume, a profound lack of humanity. A harsh and scornful Hume speaks, in volume 3 of the *History*, of the quarrels between Protestants and Catholics, calling the bloody persecutions under Mary Tudor "the object of general detestation, . . . which prove, that no human depravity can equal revenge and cruelty, covered with the mantle of religion" (H 3:435). In short, there is no doubt that Hume's *History* abounds with illustrations of the fact that, as Philo exclaims in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, "with the greater part of mankind, . . . the terrors of religion commonly prevail above its comforts."[21] (DNR, 12.25; 99).

And yet, to name religion a *pseudo-convention*, having mostly a negative impact on political life and the stability of the constitution, is unsatisfactory from the perspective of Hume's *History*. To begin with, Sabl's contention that religion only has a "local and temporary" significance sounds odd, given the almost universal prevalence of religion as a major force in civil life up to the dawn of the more enlightened ages (NHR 15.10).[22] In fact, Hume's *History* bears testimony to the fact that religion is an omnipresent feature of the human condition, deeply embedded in social life and the collective mind. Moreover, Hume himself stresses the beneficial role religion *can* have on moral life and the sustainment of a sense of piety, so essential for the preservation of the constitution. Referring to the reign of Elizabeth I, he observes the advantages of Catholic and Anglican ceremonies and outer observances that lay a fast hold on the mind of the masses and thus inculcate respect for the law and obedience to the public authority.[23] As Donald Siebert has also pointed out, Hume appeared to have become in his assessment of Bishop Laud, who propagated a more ceremonial religion as a worthwhile an-

tidote for Puritan enthusiasm, mild and moderate towards the idea that at least "in a very religious age," "no institutions can be more advantageous to the rude multitude" than "pious ceremonies" to mollify a too "fierce and gloomy spirit of devotion" (H 5:459).[24]

I would conclude that, if we regiment a bit Hume's views on religion, and follow the general tenor of his view that the tendency to religious worship and devotion takes a deep root in common life, we could see *religion as a sort of fundamental convention*, that has a specific function for human life. Despite his official Enlightenment stance towards the qualms and derailments of "religion as it is found in the world," Hume appeared at some instances to have been sensitive to the ineradicable character of the religious tendency. There might be some Humean wisdom in the observations brought forward at the end of the *Dialogues* by Cleanthes against the impious irony of Philo mocking all established religions to be a form of superstition or enthusiasm:

> The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order and obedience; and as its operation is silent, and as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives. When it distinguishes itself, and acts as a separate principle over men, it has departed from its proper sphere, and has become only a cover of faction and ambition. (DNR, 12.12; 95)[25]

Might not Hume's attitude towards religion have changed over time, becoming more moderate at the time of writing the *History*? A lot of questions remain on this issue, without doubt.[26] However, I would defend that Hume's liberalism of enlargement does not require that religion totally disappear from the public scene and become a sort of highly personal option for the rare minds who are still in the grip of this useless convention. Banning religion to the private sphere, bringing it out of political control, might exactly instigate the zealous enthusiasm and religious faction formation that *does* concern Hume profoundly. No coincidence, he opts, in "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,"' for a civil religion controlled by the government and a centralised "highest ecclesiastical court" (520). This recommendation is in consonance with the understated positive remarks throughout the *History* on the advantages of a ceremonial religion that sustains political authority and alleviates the harmful features of a religious tendency that runs wild and threatens to become excessive.

4. Liberalism of Enlargement and the Threat of Barbarism

Sabl clearly wants to draw lessons from Hume's *History* for a contemporary theory of political value. I doubt, however, whether the lessons to be found there are the ones Sabl discerns. No doubt, Hume wanted his readers to be convinced of the advantages of a constitution based on the rule of law and the balance of power between king and parliament, yielding the "most perfect system of liberty ever to be seen in the world." For Sabl, Hume thus propagates a liberal-democratic type of political authority that makes him one of us. His "liberalism of enlargement" just foreshadows the political values underlying contemporary Western democracies and the prevalent views on political authority to be found among us. This sounds promising, but is this plea to be found in the *History*?

A liberalism of enlargement, as Sabl contends, implies not only that more and more citizens can actively identify with the constitution (thanks to freedom of the press, greater literacy, civilised manners, commerce), but also that the citizens do so on the basis of a sober weighing of their interests. Sabl strongly believes Hume "hoped for the triumph of instrumental rationality" in politics and civil life (25). Moreover, it should not be too un-Humean to enlarge this hope with a plea for egalitarian values and a non-perfectionist, pluralist liberalism. In one of his essays, Hume calls the art of politics to preserve a balance between liberty and authority: it looks as if for Sabl, it is mainly liberty that is the key value to cherish in a Humean political culture.

I doubt this is the message that stands out in the *History*. Hume's precautionary conservatism is, on the one hand, much more contextualised than Sabl would like it to be. On the other hand, it cuts, I would defend, much deeper than a "liberal enlargement" reading suggests. For Hume, the establishment of a reliable, stable constitution depends on a host of conditions, which can only partially be controlled through instrumental reasoning. For that very reason, Hume considered a sort of reverence and sense of awe for the established government a necessary ingredient of a legitimate constitution.[27] The development of civil duties and virtues in tune with this political piety is a huge task with which wise legislators should occupy themselves.[28]

I would therefore stress much more than Sabl a moment of asymmetry between governors and citizens: political authority always and unavoidably implies power and compulsion that curb liberty.[29] Sabl's contention that for Hume "government" and "people" are "not two separate things but two ways of looking at the same thing" (288) sounds overstated as an evaluative conclusion to be drawn from the *History*. It is too much Rousseau, too little Machiavelli. Hume's "realism" when it comes to political authority is not so much charming, but rather austere and without illusions.[30]

There is biographical evidence that supports this assessment of Hume's own stance towards contemporary political affairs at the time of writing and revising his *History*. Many a scholar have highlighted Hume's intentions of being impartial in his judgment of the British constitution, criticising both Tory and Whig ideologies of his days because of their strained views on political legitimacy. Hume's main preoccupation in the *History*, and increasingly so when revising it for new editions, was with the problem of political authority, less with the propagation of a largely democratic theory of political value.[31]

Hume certainly had good hopes that civil society in his days had overcome barbarism, but he showed at the same time signs of a mild despair lest a dangerous populism and the unpredictable march of political strife, both on a national and international level, would again prevail. In 1768, Hume wrote to Baron Turgot, upset with the Wilkite agitation:

> I know you are one of those, who entertain the agreeable and laudable, if not too sanguine hope, that human society is capable of perpetual progress towards perfection, that the Encrease of Knowledge will still prove favourable to good Government, and that since the Discovery of Printing we need no longer Dread the usual Returns of Barbarism and Ignorance. Pray, do not the late Events in this Country appear a little contrary to your System? Here is a people thrown into Disorders (not Dangerous ones, I hope) merely from the abuse of Liberty, chiefly the Liberty of the Press. (Hume to Turgot in *Letters* 2:180)[32]

In the same letter, Hume voices his worries about there being "too little Difference between the Governors and the governed," (*Letters* 2: 180) making the first the hostages of the last, and his even greater worries about "the Disturbances arising from foreign Wars," this "incurable Evil, which often springs from the greatest & most unexpected Absurdity, and discourages every Project for serving or improving human Society" (*Letters* 2: 181).

Political theory is a science of conflict, as Sabl reads Hume's *History*. The assessment is fair and illustrated with brilliance in Sabl's groundbreaking reconstructive reading. Hume wants us to see how "(a)ny given constitution of authority represents only one accidental and customary method, among many possible others, whereby the universal need for authority has come to be structured in a particular time and place" (236). The political theorist should be cautious and moderate. His task is, amongst others, to warn against the enthusiasm of an overly political rationalism *as well as* the superstitious adherence to "the tradition" when it comes to the legitimacy of political authority.

What the best political order is, under which shelter we should prefer to live, is an empirical matter, contingent in this sense. But it is also a normative matter,

insofar as every constitution hinges on the active identification of the citizens with their political regime, a loyalty that can take many forms but is, in the end, never merely based on reason. Sweden (or Belgium) may "still be a kingdom."[33] But this should not necessarily be a bad thing. I think, Hume (and Sabl) would agree—and I certainly do.

NOTES

1 References are to Sabl, *Hume's Politics*, hereafter cited as "Sabl", followed by page number or (after citation in the text) with page number only.

2 Perhaps he sees his own study on Hume more as the work of an anatomist than a painter, or of a painter of an anatomist breed.

3 Baier, *Death and Character*, chaps. 1–6; Baier, *Cautious Jealous Virtue*, especially Introduction and chap. 4.

4 Already in the *Treatise* Hume voices a substantial critique of the Whig account of political legitimacy in terms of a Lockean original contract. He observes: "I maintain, that tho' the duty of allegiance be at first grafted on the obligation of promises, and be for some time supported by that obligation, yet as soon as the advantages of government are fully known and acknowledg'd, it immediately takes root of itself, and has an original obligation and authority, independent of all contracts" (T 3.2.8.3; SBN 542). References to the *Treatise* are to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Norton and Norton, hereafter cited in the text as "T" followed by Book, part, section, and paragraph number, and to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, cited in the text as "SBN" followed by the page number. This critique of the Whig ideology returns in "Of the Original Contract" (EMPL, 465–87) and the Stuart volumes of the *History of England* (H, volumes 5 and 6). References to Hume's essays are to Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, revised edition, edited by Eugene F. Miller, hereafter cited in the text as EMPL, followed by essay title and page number. References to Hume's *History* are to Hume, *The History of England*, edited by William B. Todd, 6 vols., hereafter cited as "H" followed by volume and page.

5 "Nothing is more advantageous to society than such an invention; and this interest is sufficient to make us embrace it with ardour and alacrity; tho' we are oblig'd afterwards to regulate and direct our devotion to government by several considerations, which are not of the same importance, and to choose our magistrates without having in view any particular advantage of the choice" (T 3.2.10.3; SBN 556).

6 EMPL, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," 124. See also, "true or regular liberty . . . requires such improvement in knowledge and morals, as can only be the result of reflection and experience, and must grow to perfection during several ages of a settled and established government" (H 1:254, cited in Sabl, 71).

7 As Sabl says, a bridge "broad and solid enough to carry both those who felt like looking down and the majority who would rather look at one another (or else ahead),

over what they fully knew to be an abyss. Politics rested either on convention or on nothing.—fortunately, most of the time, the former" (247).

8 Sabl finds in Hume "a politics of convention" that is at the same time "a politics of invention": "If a regime is an arrangement for the common advantage, new discoveries in the political realm imply an ethical requirement to consider new conventions—and new possibilities for a dynamic transition from one to another" (239).

9 "Hume's observations on dynamic coordination, I submit, add up to a coherent theory and quite a profound one. But Hume did not draft them as a coherent theory" (Sabl, 11). Indeed, Hume's *History* collects "from dreary chronicles all the aberrations of human nature as there exhibited in 'wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions'" (Todd, xi).

10 Sabl quotes Goodin: "A 'coordination problem' is defined as existing whenever it is rational for all agents involved to prefer joint to independent decision-making" (24). See Goodin, *Politics of Rational Man*, 27.

11 "For Hume, the history of all hitherto existing societies is largely the history of elites' consumption patterns. It matters greatly not just how the great acquired their property but how they intended to spend it. Barons spent their wealth on private armies; gentlemen spend it on luxuries" (Sabl, 66).

12 Hume voices his praise for the peaceful "present transactions in England" at the end of the *History* eloquently: "By deciding many important questions in favour of liberty, and still more, by that great precedent of deposing one king, and establishing a new family, it gave such an ascendant to popular principles, as has put the nature of the English constitution beyond all controversy. And it may justly be affirmed, without any danger of exaggeration, that we, in this island, have ever since enjoyed, if not the best system of government, at least the most entire system of liberty, that ever was known amongst mankind (H 6:531).

13 Sabl considers the story of Monk as only one example among several similar ones, cf. 164n13.

14 Baier, *Death and Character*, chaps. 1–6; Baier, *Cautious Jealous Virtue*, especially Introduction and chap. 4.

15 Sabl does certainly not ignore this dimension, for example when treating of Hume's analysis of the admirable heroism of King Edward after the battle of Poitiers (Sabl, 83), the political skills and talents of Queen Elizabeth (Sabl, 167–73) or the extraordinary talents and skills of the parliamentarians under Charles I (Sabl, 180). Not surprisingly, he sees these deeds or personal qualities and characters in general as "focal points" that trigger possibly coordination schemes to emerge or to be consolidated.

16 Hume's *History* reveals that political science might be much less predictive than one would wish. Comparing Hume's political theory with Machiavelli's, Frederick Whelan remarks: "A sufficiently complete retrospective narrative may render a particular action or event comprehensible and perhaps yield rules of thumb for use in what seem to be similar circumstances, but such generalizations are irremediably tenuous. Hume's skeptical disclaimers about the scope of scientific knowledge of politics reflect his awareness of this problem" (127).

17 Sabl defines political theory as "a science of conflict": "Politics is a story of incessant, usually deliberate, disturbances in common life. And to study politics is to study the disturbances" (8).

18 For the definition as pseudo-convention, see Sabl, 34–35; for religion as negative convention, see Sabl, 45–47.

19 See T 3.2.5.13 (SBN 524) and EPM 3.38 (SBN 199): "But there is this material difference between superstition and justice, that the former is frivolous, useless, and burdensome; the latter is absolutely requisite to the well-being of mankind and existence of society." References to the second *Enquiry* are to Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Beauchamp, hereafter cited in the text as "EPM" followed by section and paragraph number, and to Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, hereafter cited in the text as "SBN" followed by page numbers.

20 "Hume's ultimate hope, though he thought it unlikely for the next couple of centuries, was to have "the churches shut up, the clergy sent about their business" (Sabl, 35). Sabl refers to Smith's Letter to Alexander Wedderburn (August 14, 1776), testifying about the conversation with Hume on his deathbed, reading Lucian. Sabl ignores Hume here being casually ironic, thus indirectly *mocking* an overzealous attempt to conquer superstition.

21 Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 12.25; 99, abbreviated "DNR" and cited by dialogue and paragraph number, as well as page number.

22 As Hume exclaims in the *Natural History of Religion*, 15.10: "Look out for a people, entirely destitute of religion: if you find them at all, be assured that they are but few degrees removed from brutes." Abbreviated "NHR" and cited by section and paragraph number.

23 "[T]he catholic religion, adapting itself to the sense, and enjoying observances, which enter into the common train of life, does at present lay a faster hold on the mind than the reformed" (H 4:14). Hume further remarks: "Had Elizabeth gratified her own inclinations, the exterior appearance, which is the chief circumstance with the people, would have been still more similar between the new and ancient form of worship. Her love of state and magnificence, which she affected in every thing, inspired her with an inclination towards the pomp of the catholic religion; and it was merely in compliance with the prejudices of her party, that she gave up either images or the addresses to the saints, or prayers for the dead" (H 4:14–15).

24 Also cited in Donald Siebert, *Moral Animus of David Hume*, 111.

25 It is no coincidence this quotation also figured in an earlier edition of the *History*, but was later cancelled by Hume.

26 Annette Baier sighs at the end of *Death and Character*: "But how we should characterize him [Hume], with respect to his ruling passion to have his literary works make a difference to the role of religion in the world, that still remains too hard for my understanding. Others, perhaps, or myself upon more mature reflection, may discover some hypothesis that reconciles all the things he wrote and said on that vexed question" (280).

27 Referring to the "ideological" Whig accounts of political legitimacy of Rapin-Thoyras, Locke, Sidney, and Hoadley, Hume says: "forgetting that a regard to liberty, though a laudable passion, ought commonly to be subordinate to a *reverence for established government*" (H 6:533). See also: Frits Van Holthoon, "Hume and the End of History," in Mark Spencer, *David Hume*, 143–62. Van Holthoon convincingly shows that Hume made revisions in the text of the Stuart volumes that bears testimony to a growing precautionary conservatism in political matters as he grew older.

28 Also in his *Treatise*, Hume sees for politics an (albeit indirect) educational task, and for parents and schools a political one: "Education, and the artifice of politicians, concur in bestowing a farther morality and loyalty, and branding all rebellion with a greater degree of guilt and infamy. Nor is it a wonder, that politicians shou'd be very industrious in inculcating such notions, where their interest is so particularly concerned" (T 3.2.8.7; SBN 546). In "Of Parties in general," we read: "As much as legislators and founders of states ought to be honoured and respected, as much ought the founders of sects and factions be detested and hated" (55).

29 Politics in Europe, for example, is not only about sharing equal opportunities and social justice, but also how to deal with nationalism and religious diversity, migration, bankers with a less than minimal morality and, in the end, with the way politicians deal with all these issues (and struggle with each other to be in a position to do so). In the United States, similar challenges face politics: politics is about Obamacare, but also about drones and how to keep the country safe and defend the citizens. Sabl himself refers to the political realism of Raymond Geuss (245).

30 There is another, more general sense, in which to speak of a Humean form of "political realism." Sabl contends Hume wants us to be cautious not "to pretend that political problems are more tractable than they are" (244). This is certainly an insight that stands out in the *History*, as in Hume's other writings on politics, but is not as such an invitation for a liberalism of enlargement.

31 Van Holthoon, "Hume and the End of History," 147, 158.

32 I owe this reference to the lecture by Roger Emerson at the Hume conference 2006 in Koblenz.

33 "Sweden is still a kingdom": Sabl illustrates with reference to the Swedish constitution that "there are many ways of arranging our conventions of talking to, living beside, doing business with, or marrying one another" (237). This could also have been illustrated with reference to the even more complex constitution of the kingdom of Belgium.

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