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Inheritance and Renewal of the Traditional Political Thought

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This article is to uncover David Hume's politics as a whole, mainly focusing on his own understanding of the history of political thought¹.

1 Hume as a Critic of the Traditional Political Thought?

Where is Hume's position in the history of political thought? He has long been located as a severe denunciator of social contract theory, which therefore means for some as one of the founders of modern conservatism, while for others as the prophet of 'spontaneous' liberalism. This interpretation has implicitly premised a perspective that lays heavy weight on the importance of social contract theory in the history of political thought, and this perspective closely connects with a conventional attitude that the history of political thought could and should be properly constructed by relying on the history of philosophy. Thus, *A Treatise on*

¹ This article is a summary of my doctoral thesis, which was submitted to the graduate school of law and politics, the University of Tokyo, in September 2002. A draft of this article was read at a workshop, at Oxford University on 21 July 2003. I should like to especially acknowledge Dr John Robertson who gave many useful comments, and the late Professor Fukuda Arihiro, my supervisor, who arranged this workshop.

*** I will cite Hume's texts from these editions; eds. Selby-Bigge, L. A. and Nidditch, P. H., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford, 1978; eds. Selby-Bigge, L. A. and Nidditch, P. H., *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Oxford, 1975; ed. Miller, Eugene F., *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, Indianapolis, 1987 (also 'My Own Life' from here); ed. Todd, William B., *The History of England, From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols., Indianapolis, 1983 (cited as HE); eds. Colver, A. W. and Price J. V., *The Natural History of Religion and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Oxford, 1976; ed. Greig, John Y. T., *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1932; Two manuscripts from Mossner, Ernest C., 'Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-40: The Complete Text', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, IX, 1948, and Mossner, Ernest C., 'David Hume's "An Historical Essay on Chivalry and Modern Honour"', *Modern Philology*, IX, 1947; and an article titled 'Of the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems' from eds. Green, Thomas H. and Grose, Thomas H., *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, Vol. 4, London, 1875.

Human Nature has been treated as a main, systematic text to be interpreted, even when we are talking about Hume's politics. Indeed, in Book 3 of *Treatise* which discussed morals and politics, Hume displayed his systematic criticism of social contract theory, which also appeared in some essays of *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*. However, it must be noted that Hume himself did not consider social contract theory as an important trend in the history of political thought. One of his points was that social contract theory was quite new, strange, and heterodoxical in politics. Though it has recently become 'the foundation of our fashionable system of politics' (*Human Nature*, 542), otherwise it is only found in Plato, which is paradoxically used for espousing passive obedience (*Essays*, 'Of the Original Contract', 460). So, for Hume himself, what were the traditions in the history of political thought? To answer this question will clarify Hume's position in the history of political thought.

When we begin to investigate this question, we encounter a contemporary scheme of interpretation as a barrier to our undertaking. It is a dualistic scheme that has been relied on, in interpreting 18th century British political thought; we can call it the dual 'wealth and virtue' scheme². Since the thread of republicanism in early modern political thought was rediscovered, the study of 18th century Britain has attracted many scholars and its image has drastically changed. It is now seen as an era when contemporary problems on the relationship between politics and the economy have just started. It is widely recognized that, in the history of political thought of 18th century Britain, there were two major threads ——— traditional republicanism and its 'modern' enemy (or so-called fathers of the science of economics) ——— that fought each other in a battle, in which the latter would eventually subdue the former. The dualistic interpretative framework of 'wealth and virtue' is as such. On one side, you can see wealth, modernity, commerce, money, updated science, and social man; On another side, virtue, ancient society, war, land, outdated belief, and independent man; Classical republicans are arguing that in order to

² This name is borrowed from the title of Hont and Ignatieff (1983).

maintain liberty there must be virtue or public spirit, which is now corrupted by commerce and luxury; Against them, a new wave of thought has just been formed which is creating the political economy suitable to the commercial new age. This is the story. In this scheme, Hume has usually been seen as a apologist for 'wealth' side³. Besides, because republicanism is supposed in this scheme to be the tradition of political thought, it is concluded that Hume, as one of initiators of the political economy, rejected the tradition of political thought, and created a new paradigm for new age, which signifies his position in the history of political thought.

It is certain the 'wealth and virtue' scheme has brought about new insights on 18th century British political thought. However, it is not all-purpose. For example, when being applied to Hume and treating him as a modernist, the scheme cannot answer the reason why Hume highly appreciated so-called republicans ——— Niccolo Machiavelli and James Harrington ——— and why he would inherit their politics. What's wrong with the scheme? One of the answers concerns how to understand 'the tradition' and the history of political thought. What is the tradition of politics at all, when we read Hume? It is quite unclear; for nothing promises that what someone today considers as the tradition is same as what Hume did. Thus, when we read Hume, we must at first pay attention to Hume's own history of political thought, his interpretation of political thought, and his own idea of what constitutes the traditions of political thought. Indeed, the 'wealth and virtue' dual scheme that depicts rivalry between republicanism and political economy, was neither Hume's own nor shared by him. Rather, its view of the history of political thought was far from Hume's. In Hume's own history of political thought, the main rivalry lay between moralistic politics and institutional politics, to one of which he devoted. He was not a founder of new political science who rejected traditional politics, but both a successor and an innovator of the tradition.

³ See Moore (1977) as a typical one, while Robertson (1983) sets Hume on the border of 'the civil tradition'. In Japan, where many economists have long been interested in Adam Smith and the formation of the economics, Hume has been more or less a 'wealth'-side thinker as well as Smith. As recent works, see Sakamoto (1995) and Sakamoto and Tanaka (2003).

We shall start with this point.

2 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth': the Moralistic Politics versus the Institutional Politics

Hume's 'Perfect Commonwealth' is fundamentally based on Harrington's Oceana commonwealth. As it is a plan of a commonwealth ——— a government without king ——— like Oceana, many scholars have had trouble in locating this plan within Hume's politics. Some interpreted it as an irony and a joke to show republicanism as nothing but absurd⁴, and others as a response to 'the civic tradition' and a plan of government suitable to modern commercial large society⁵.

However, is it proper to interpret Hume's plan within the 'wealth and virtue' scheme? In 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', Hume did not argue at all on commerce or the relation between politics and the economy⁶. Rather in the essay, he focused on the problem of factions and mixed constitution. Though it is certain Hume understood and appreciated the impact that the commercial development had brought into modern world, commerce did not cover and subdue all aspects of his political thinking. Indeed, his criticism against the ancient Graeco-Roman political societies, especially in Part 2 of *Essays*, is well known. However, it must be remembered that he condemned the ancient world not only because of its underdevelopment in commerce, but also because of the mode of its political competitions or conflicts ——— fierce factions and civil wars at domestic level, as well as frequent wars at inter-polis level ———, in which winners often killed losers (*Essays*: 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', 404-16; 'Of the Balance of Power', 331-5, 339). The problem of factions

⁴ Conniff (1976).

⁵ Robertson (1983).

⁶ In fact Hume discussed 'a council of trade', but his constellation of councils in the executive part of the government also derived from Harrington's. 'Perfect commonwealth' has six councils ——— of state, religion and learning, trade, laws, war, and admiralty ———, whereas Oceana has four of states, war, religion, and trade (*Essays*: 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', 518-9; ed. Pocock, J. G. A., *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics*, Cambridge, 1992, 122-3, 125-30).

is also one of his main topics, and it is James Harrington who focused on this problem. In 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', Hume didn't so much reject, as use and improve Harrington's thinking on factions and his best-ever plan of government, which made Hume boast of his own plan as one 'to which I cannot, in theory, discover any considerable objection' (*Essays: Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*, 516).

Although Harrington was an admirer of 'ancient prudence', he nevertheless had reservations. For him, the ancient Roman republic was an 'unequal' imperfect mixed government, full of factions that eventually collapsed the republic. He saw factions as absolute evils, which led him against Machiavelli, 'the prince of politicians', who concluded that the conflict between the senate and the people in Rome had brought the republic liberty and glory⁷. As factions make commonwealth frail, unstable, and mortal, they must be annihilated thoroughly, Harrington thought. Therefore, *Oceana* has factions-proof institutions. Harrington focused on institutional arrangements, which would prevent factions from even arising⁸.

Roman history taught Harrington to focus on arrangements of political institutions. His goal was not a new mode of human being or that of manners. Human beings are inevitably so selfish that it is useless to suppose they could always be unselfish; Everyone wants a bigger piece of a cake, which naturally begets conflict and factions. Harrington thinks factions must and can be avoided without reformation of manners. This 'is known even unto girls'. Look at girls separating who cuts a cake from who chooses, he claims. If a commonwealth is given a bicameral legislative in which one assembly debates while the other resolves, such an institutional arrangement will bring order and liberty together to the commonwealth⁹.

⁷ *Oceana*, 33, 37-8, 80, 149-63; trans. Mansfield, Harvey C. and Tarcov, Nathan, *Discourses on Livy*, Chicago, 1996, Book 1, chs. 2-8.

⁸ Fukuda (1997).

⁹ *Oceana*, 22-5, 38, 64-6. Harrington highly values the Venetian constitution though 'she consists of men that are not without sin' (*Oceana*, 218).

Harrington attributed fierce factions and civil wars in Rome to its ill-modelled political institutions. Hume has the same opinion as him. As Hume observed (*Morals*, 333; *Essays*: 'Of the Balance of Power', 335), the British people in the 18th century saw their country so similar to the ancient Roman republic that they often argued their own politics on the analogy to Rome's. The Roman republic was at that time an example, in which one could find lessons about contemporary political issues like mixed constitution, factions, or the relation between liberty and luxury¹⁰. Some argued that the ancient republic declined when its people had lost virtue. For example, Edward Montagu imputed the Roman fall to deformation of the manners that was brought about by luxuries from the east, which was a warning to contemporary 18C Britain¹¹. Indeed, it is the moralistic interpretation like this which laments losses of virtue, that Hume opposes to.

What has chiefly induced severe moralists to declaim against refinement in the arts, is the example of ancient ROME, which, joining, to its poverty and rusticity, virtue and public spirit, rose to such a surprising height of grandeur and liberty; but having learned from its conquered provinces the ASIATIC luxury, fell into every kind of corruption; whence arose sedition and civil wars, attended at last with the total loss of liberty. (*Essays*: 'Of Refinement in the Arts', 275)

Not the corrupt manners of the people, but 'an ill modelled government' is the real cause of the decline of Rome, Hume replies (276). Even if people have no virtues, a well-modelled political institution can make the people public-spirited and give the commonwealth order and liberty. Hume

¹⁰ On Roman history in 18th century British political thought, see Johnson (1958); (1967); Ward (1964); Weinbrot (1978); Erskine-Hill (1983); Gunn (1983), ch. 1; Turner (1986); Miller (1994), ch. 2; Ayres (1997). According to Hume, it was 'an unpardonable ignorance in persons of whatever sex or condition, not to be acquainted with the history of their own country, together with the histories of ancient GREECE and ROME' (*Essays*: 'Of the Study of History', 566).

¹¹ Montagu, Edward W., *Reflections on the Rise and Fall of the Ancient Republics, Adapted to the Present State of Great Britain*, London: A. Millar, 1760 (2nd edn.), 223. Similarly, Bolingbroke ascribed the decline of the Roman republic to loss of 'spirit of liberty' (*Remarks on the History of England*, London: T. Davies, c. 1770 [originally written in 1730-1], 20-7).

observes that it actually happened in the Roman republic during the Punic wars, when a due balance between the nobility and the people was maintained (*Essays*: 'That Politics may be reduced to a Science', 25)¹².

What is important in these Hume's arguments is that he calls the opponents not republicans but 'severe moralists'¹³. They emphasize the role of morals and attribute all political problems to deformation of morals. It is highly probable that Hume's criticism against 'moralists' politics was targeted mainly at the Anglican clergy, especially William Warburton and 'his Flatterers' ——— John Brown¹⁴, Richard Hurd, and so on (here we can include Edward Montagu¹⁵) ———, whom Hume called 'the Warburtonian School' and condemned so much that 'I shoud [sic] certainly be ashamed to engage with' (*Letters*, 1:250; *My Own Life*, xxxvii)¹⁶.

For the 'moralist' Montagu, the fixed maxim that the tradition of 'political philosophy' has established is that every flourished state would collapse from luxury¹⁷. Indeed, Hume has the same opinion, that moralistic politics have become a tradition of politics, but for Hume it is not the only tradition, rather it is a bad one that must be rejected. Criticizing moralist politics, Hume advocates institutional politics, which focus on arrangements of political institutions. In order to refute the moralistic tradition, Hume is relying on the institutional tradition of politics, among which Hume sees Harrington as one of the most important figures. It is misleading to interpret Hume's criticism against 'severe moralists' as a criticism against republicanism, relying on the dual 'wealth and virtue'

¹² It must be remembered that Polybius who was the first to interpret the Roman republic as a mixed government in Book 6 of his *History*, observed the republic just during the Punic wars. Many notes in *Essays* shows Hume read him.

¹³ See also *Morals*, 181.

¹⁴ John Brown condemned contemporary 'effeminized' manners in favour of 'virtuous manners' in his selling *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757) and *Thought on Civil Liberty* (1765).

¹⁵ Montagu cited Warburton as his support to argue against atheism in an additional note added to the 2nd edition of his *Reflections*.

¹⁶ Hume is silent in the texts about who 'severe moralists' are, but his silence is compatible with his decision not to engage with the Warburtonians. See also *Letters*, 1:186; 1:248-50; 1:265-6; 1:310; 1:313-4; 2:244; *My Own Life*, xxxvi-vii; Mossner (1980), 307-8. According to Manzer (1996), 347, Hume's target was not so much republicans as clergy.

¹⁷ *Reflections*, 221-2.

scheme, because it fails to help us understand the relation between Hume and Harrington. To see Harrington as an eminent advocate of republicanism is not Hume's point of view. Hume's own dual scheme was constituted, not of republicanism and its enemy, but of moralistic and institutional politics.

Now we have reached a point where we are able to understand Hume's 'Perfect Commonwealth', its aims and its position in the history of politics.

At the opening paragraphs of 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', Hume implicitly showed his own vision of the history of politics, in which two major traditions had been competing. One is the moralistic tradition whose concern is the management of individual moral quality. They 'suppose great reformation in the manners of mankind'. Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia* represent this tradition. For Hume it is 'plainly imaginary'. The other tradition is represented by *Oceana*. It 'is the only valuable model of a commonwealth' (*Essays*: 'Perfect Commonwealth', 514). However, the story is less straightforward. Just after his praise, Hume began to criticize some points of *Oceana*, which have perplexed Hume's scholars. In addition, Hume's criticisms are targeted at the ones Harrington emphasized ——— rotation, the agrarian law, and an arrangement of the bicameral legislative. It is Hume's ambivalence toward *Oceana*, which must be explained.

As to the third point of Hume's criticism, *Oceana* has two legislative assemblies, the senate to debate and the people to resolve. Hume took this functional division as not good for liberty, because the senate has in fact a veto before people's vote. Which law is submitted to the vote, it is determined by the senate's discretion, therefore, in *Oceana* 'the whole legislature may be said to rest in the senate' and the commonwealth is not properly balanced (515-6). However, it is not a bicameral legislative itself which Hume rejected. He accepted Harrington's observation that unicameral legislative will beget such factions and disorder that two assemblies are needed to prevent them.

All free governments must consist of two councils, a lesser and greater; or, in other words, of a senate and people. The people, as HARRINGTON observes, would want wisdom, without the senate: The senate, without the people, would want honesty. (522-3)

What Hume is seeking here is a people's assembly that not only resolves but also debates orderly.

A large assembly of 1000, for instance, to represent the people, if allowed to debate, would fall into disorder. If not allowed to debate, the senate has a negative upon them, and the worst kind of negative, that before resolution. Here therefore is an inconvenience, which no government has yet fully remedied, but which is the easiest to be remedied in the world. If the people debate, all is confusion: If they do not debate, they can only resolve; and then the senate carves for them. (523)

'Divide the people into many separate bodies; and then they may debate with safety, and every inconvenience seems to be prevented', he answered (523). Fifty county parliaments constitute 'the people' of the political institution, and exercise its function separately. In other words, Hume made use of confederative structure of the commonwealth in arranging the political institutions. Though Hume modified the arrangement of 'the people', he was resolute in inheriting Harrington's creed for bicameral legislative, and in setting it as the foundation of the mixed constitution like Harrington.

As to the other two critical points which Hume made of Oceana — — — firstly, its rotation ignores the difference of personal qualities, and secondly, its agrarian law is impracticable (*Essays: 'Perfect Commonwealth'*, 515) — — —, his disagreement is closely connected with his different opinion about factions.

Rotation and the agrarian law are 'fundamental laws' of the Oceana

Commonwealth, which secure equality of the citizens¹⁸. Because Harrington was keen to avoid factions, Oceana is 'an equal commonwealth' without factions and even without the causes of them. To keep citizens equal means, from Harrington's point of view, to keep the commonwealth free from factions. On the other hand, Hume rejects the idea itself that factions should and could be totally annihilated. Even if there are no reasons to oppose each other, 'whimsical and unaccountable' factions will arise, for human beings are naturally factious (*Essays*: 'Perfect Commonwealth', 529; 'Of Parties in general', 56-8).

Besides, 'to abolish all distinctions of party may not be practicable, perhaps not desirable, in a free government', i.e. in a government in which political power is divided into several persons or assemblies (*Essays*: 'Of Parties in general', 55-6, 59; 'Of the Coalition of Parties', 493)¹⁹. Therefore, the British government, 'our mixed government', has Country and Court parties just because of 'the very nature of our constitution' (*Essays*: 'Of the Parties of Great Britain', 65). Factions or parties are essential ingredients of 'a free government'. It is certain that parties 'oft threaten the total dissolution of the government', but they are 'real causes of its permanent life and vigour' (*HE*, 5:556). For Hume, factions have merits as well as demerits. It is no doubt that factions in 17th century England were 'much too violent', but

¹⁸ *Oceana*, 100.

¹⁹ In 'Of Parties in general', Hume said 'many philosophers' had had a opinion that it is no more possible 'to prevent such parties' as arise naturally in a mixed constitution, because of 'selfishness implanted in human nature', than to have a universal medicine or 'perpetual motion'. Here it must be remembered that Hume condemned Harrington as 'chimerical' (*Letters*, 2:306; *HE*, 6:153). For Hume, to abolish factions is chimerical as well as to make a commonwealth immortal.

Governments too steady and uniform, as they are seldom free, so are they, in the judgment of some, attended with another sensible inconvenience: They abate the active powers of men; depress courage, invention, and genius; and produce an universal lethargy in the people. (*HE*: 6.530-1)²⁰

The problem is not to overbear factions by compulsory equality, but to make them moderate and to use their vigour. To tame factions, Hume in this essay proposes an institutional arrangement. Factions must be institutionalized in the constitution; Canalize factions into the constitutional mechanism of competition, and then they will not destroy the constitution. This is the plan of 'the court of competitors', which consists of unsuccessful candidates (but only runner-ups) in senatorial election (*Essays*: 'Perfect Commonwealth', 519, 524, 525).

The chief support of the BRITISH government is the opposition of interests; but that, though in the main serviceable, breeds endless factions. In the foregoing plan, it does all the good without any of the harm. The competitors have no power of controlling the senate: They have only the power of accusing, and appealing to the people. (525)

In short, Hume rejected rotation and the agrarian law as institutional arrangements for the problem of factions, and replaced them with an assembly of the opposition to make factions moderate and controllable.

Modern politics should overcome the outdated ancient politics, and modern politics have just started with me ——— such a view on the history of politics Hume did not share. Rather he found a tradition of institutional politics in the history of political thought, in which he was eager in taking part. The plan of 'a Perfect Commonwealth' has no

²⁰ Who did Hume allude to, when he wrote 'in judgment of some'? It is possible Hume was here thinking about Machiavelli's interpretation of the Roman history in *Discourses on Livy*. Harrington criticized Machiavelli's this interpretation in condemning factions, which Hume could know. For Hume, Machiavelli's *Discourses* is 'a work surely of great judgment and genius' (*Essays*: 'Of the Balance of Power', 634).

discussion at all on virtues or manners, though it is a plan of a republic. Hume's concern is not morals, but the best arrangement of political institutions, in compliance with Harrington and the tradition of institutional politics²¹. Moreover, Hume is not only a successor of that tradition, but also an innovator of it. He brought new insights into the tradition, in framing a pluralistic constitution which involves institutionalized factions. In this way, Hume was one of the first to depict constitutional political competition with no logical connections to the division of social classes.

3 Hume's Politics in *The History of England*

After uncovering the plan of 'a Perfect Commonwealth', Hume proposed in the article a plan to make the British government 'the most perfect model of limited monarchy'. It was a plan to bring the British government as near to 'a perfect commonwealth' as possible. By making the House of Commons more equally representative and the House of Lords an assembly of quality, its government would have the bicameral legislative of the senate and the people, instead of the present two poles of the monarch and the House of Commons (*Essays*: 'Perfect Commonwealth', 526-7). From this it can be inferred that, for Hume, the scope of institutional politics is not limited to the republican form of government. It can be applied to the monarchical government too²². Thus, he was able to treat both forms of government in the same framework by focusing on institutional arrangements, whereas Montesquieu emphasized the difference between monarchy and republic by focusing on 'principle', the human passion which set each form of government in motion. However, it is certain that not all of

²¹ Compare with Montesquieu whose interest lies in 'principle', the spirit which moves each form of government. The difference between him and Hume might suggest that 'association of ideas' between republicanism and virtue, which seems to have strongly been cemented by Montesquieu's definition of republic, should be reconsidered. This 'association of ideas' has made us unable to understand full aspects of Harrington's thought and his influences to later ages.

²² But Hume recognizes republic can be better treated by the institutional approach than monarchy, because the former has no uncertainty in its institution ——— no monarch (*Essays*: 'That Politics may be reduced to a Science', 15-6; 'Of the Independency of Parliament', 46; 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', 526-7; 'Early Memoranda', 507). On this point, compare Pocock (1979), 131, with Robertson (1985), 71.

Hume's political insights were derived from institutional politics. We will be able to understand how Hume had incorporated institutional points of view into his whole system of politics, through surveying his *History of England* and his discussion on modern (i.e. post-Roman) European societies.

It is well known that the target of Hume's *History* was ancient constitution theory, which insisted that the English government had constantly been a mixed balanced government since time immemorial, and condemned the Stuart Dynasties in the 17th century and the Whig regime in the 18th as deviations. Hume denied there existed only one ancient constitution, insisting that England had been 'in a state of continual fluctuation' and had at least three different ancient constitutions (*HE*, 4:355). What story did Hume tell, in confuting the continuous story of the ancient constitution?

Hume's was a story of the development of the European civilization in England, answered Duncan Forbes. His *Hume's Philosophical Politics* was an epoch-making work as well as one of the earliest detailed pieces of research on the politics of Hume's *History*²³. It proved the importance of a 'civilized monarchy' concept in Hume's politics; In refuting 'vulgar' ancient constitutionalism, 'sceptical' Hume created the concept of 'civilized monarchy', insisting that absolute monarchy in Europe was also a bearer of the civilization. According to Forbes, Hume's civilization was primarily a legal, political concept²⁴. Hume observed civilizing processes under a monarchical government, which happened after it established a rule of law and secured lives and properties of the subjects. In Forbes' interpretation, discussion on rules of law and justice was regarded as central in Hume's politics, which meant that Hume's politics could be best seen as a successor of the natural law tradition that had been maintained by Hugo Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf, and Francis Hutcheson. Indeed, it is certain and

²³ Forbes (1975).

²⁴ Forbes (1970), 15; Forbes (1975), 296.

therefore well known that Hume relied on them, especially in Book 3 of *A Treatise of Human Nature* and its follow-up, *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Morals*. However, it is quite unclear how one can interpret, in this natural law perspective, Hume's discussion on mixed constitution, and especially on the British constitution after the Revolution. In other words, as to Hume's *History*, is it proper to read it as a narrative that depicts the one-dimensional development of the European civilization in England?

In *History* and *Essays*, Hume lists two ingredients of political society. The one is 'authority' (or 'government'), the other 'liberty'. 'Authority' is 'essential' to the existence of civil society, while 'liberty is the perfection of civil society' (*Essays*: 'Of the Origin of Government', 40-1; *HE*, 6:533)²⁵. Here, Hume is suggesting that there are two steps in the development of civil society. At first 'authority' as an essential is established, and after then 'liberty' as a perfection will be added. 'Authority' has priority over 'liberty' because the former is 'essential', if these two elements confront each other. What is important in this scheme is the meaning of 'liberty' set against 'authority', for Hume gave the concept various meanings. According to Forbes, the difference Hume saw between these two elements was not qualitative, but quantitative ——— 'liberty' means more quantity of 'a rule of law' than 'authority' ———, which makes Forbes' readings of *History* and of Hume's politics as a whole quite one-sided²⁶.

Indeed, the purpose of 'authority' is to secure justice in order to maintain peace and order, as Forbes insisted (*Essays*: 'Origin of Government', 38; *Human Nature*, Book 3, part 2, sections 7-10; *Morals*, section 4). Life and property are protected from invasions of fellow-citizens, by the existence of political 'government'. In other words, in a political society that has 'authority' as an essential, some kind of so-called liberty is secured. Nevertheless, this kind of liberty is not the same as 'liberty' as a perfection of civil society. In the last paragraph of the essay 'Of the Origin of

²⁵ The sentences in which Hume used these phrases in *History* (6:533) were added from the 1778 edition (Price (1966), 154). This implies that, 'Of the Origin of Government', which first appeared in the 1777 edition of *Essays* and had the same phrases, can be seen as a guideline to understand *History*. See also *HE*, 2:525; 5:356.

²⁶ Forbes (1963), esp. 119; (1970), 15, 20, 33, 39; (1975), esp. ch. 5; (1978), 58.

Government' in which Hume directly discussed on the relation between 'authority' and 'liberty', he defines a government that also has 'liberty', as 'that which admits of a partition of power among several members' (*Essays*: 'Origin of Government', 40-1). Here, 'liberty' means an institutionalized liberty in the arrangements of political power, and 'liberty' in this sense concerns about a mode of political power. Its holder is not so much the citizen as a constitution. A civil society that has 'liberty' has a mechanism in its political institution, which could prevent political power from being abused, i.e. it has a mixed form of government²⁷.

These two ingredients of civil society serve in *History* as indicators, whose existence signify in which stage a civil society is. A society develops to perfection gradually, climbing up two steps. In the first stage, it gets 'authority', through establishing an unrestricted political power and a rule of law, against social powers and their feuds²⁸. In the second stage, it gets 'liberty' through institutional restrictions of the political power itself, i.e. through establishing a mixed form of government. This is the scheme of *History*. Hume finds in English history two stages of its constitutional development. The first agenda was achieved by the Tudor monarchy, while the second by 'the Revolution'.

Gothic and feudal government were not mixed governments as have been claimed in ancient constitution theory, but no government at all in proper sense, claims Hume. Barons and the clergy ruled the kingdom quite

²⁷ Hume discusses this kind of 'liberty' in other works as 'civil liberty' or 'public liberty'. For example, he cites Shakespeare as a witness of the manners of Tudor England, arguing the writer did not mention at all of 'civil liberty', which means a good 'civil constitution' (*HE*, 4:368). In the essay which has just the title of 'Of Civil Liberty', Hume sets 'civil liberty' against absolute monarchy, then paraphrasing each into 'free government' and 'civilized monarch'. In *Human Nature*, 'public liberty' is replaced with 'a mix'd government' (*Human Nature*, 564; see also *HE*, 2:519-25). It is better here to point out that, for Hume, 'a free government' means a mixed one 'being compounded of parts' (*Essays*: 'Of the Original Contract', 485).

²⁸ This understanding of absolute monarchy makes Hume criticize John Locke who denied it can be a civil society (*Essays*: 'Of the Original Contract', 486-7). As we will see, what is established in the first stage is 'a civilized monarchy', apart from 'despotism'. Hume defines 'a civilized monarchy' as an absolute monarchy in point of the distribution of political power. 'In a civilized monarchy, the prince alone is unrestrained in the exercise of his authority, and possesses alone a power, which is not bounded by any thing but custom, example, and the sense of his own interest' (*Essays*: 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', 125).

separately by their jurisdiction and de facto force. England then had neither civil power nor 'regular privileges' both in theory and in practice. It was a pre-civil society. It lacked general unilateral political power and laws to maintain peace and order, whose absence had been substituted by 'the social confederacy', patron-client systems under social powers²⁹. In other words, aristocrats had made 'any regular system of civil government' impossible, and at best there was only an 'irregular government' (*HE*, 2:428, 2:533)³⁰.

Politicians in 18th century Britain who thought of themselves as successors to Harrington ——— now usually called neo-Harringtonians ———, did not in fact succeed Harrington's history of England. For Harrington, no feudal government was worthy of the name 'mixed constitution', nor the name 'civil society'³¹. Besides, Harrington did not use his property-balance theory in order to show the historical changes of the balance of mixed constitution, while successors did. They ignored Harrington's history of England and confused his theory of property with that of mixed constitution, in order that they could show that in England the ancient mixed constitution had been established since time immemorial. Hume's claim that the Gothic and feudal government were no more civil governments than mixed governments, is a criticism against these self-proclaimed Harringtonians, and it can be seen as a revival of Harrington's history of England³².

²⁹ See *HE*, 1:165-9; 1:174; 1:185; 1:254; 1:284-5; 1:361-2; 1:456-60; 1:464; 1:485; 2:20; 2:31; 2:73; 2:283-4; 2:434; 4:355.

³⁰ In Appendixes of *History*, Hume found 'the aristocracy' in Anglo-Saxon government and feudal government, but it was not the aristocracy as a form of government in which aristocrats have political power, but simply a de facto rule by the aristocracy. At that time 'the civil union being weak, many private engagements were contracted' under them (*HE*, 1:168; 1:456-60). Wexler (1979) and Miller (1990) did not see 'the aristocracy' as a non-political rule.

³¹ *Oceana*, 8-9, 53.

³² On Edward 3rd government which had been claimed as one of the best mixed constitutions by neo-Harringtonians (for example, Bolingbroke, *Remarks on the History of England*, 182), Hume regarded 'the true genius of that kind mixed government, which was then established' as 'at best, was only a barbarous monarchy' (*HE*, 2:283-4). He defines the form of government at these pre-civil ages as monarchy, if it needs classification. Although Hume sees the Magna Carta as an epoch which brought England a little more regularization of laws and rights, and established 'a more ancient constitution' which posited between 'still a more ancient constitution' and the Tudor monarchy as 'the ancient constitution' (4:355), he nonetheless denies the Charter changed a form of government. It did not 'innovate in the distribution of political power' (1:488).

It was the Tudor absolute monarchy which brought a rule of law into England. It had established the monolithic rule of law and the political power, though the monarchs used laws for the purpose of tyranny to suppress the nobility (*HE*, 3:48-9; 3:67; 3:115). The Tudor monarchy which had thus introduced the essential ingredient 'authority', was worthy of the name 'the ancient constitution' (*HE*, 4:355). Ancient constitution theory saw the reign of the Queen Elizabeth as one of the best³³, but according to Hume, neither subjects' liberty nor mixed government was established under this Queen. Instead the sovereign power was then at its best. The Tudor monarchy was an absolute monarchy that was not institutionally restricted, and therefore can be called tyranny. In fact, one of the main claims of *History* is that the Tudor monarchy was an absolute monarchy, as well as the first Stuart monarchy that succeeded it³⁴.

However, it didn't mean that the monarch could do anything he/she wanted. It was an absolute monarchy in which no one could restrict the monarch, but not despotism in which anyone but the monarch was a slave. It's true the parliament did not limit the monarch; the members of it were just humble supporters of tyranny (*HE*, 2:277; 3:264; 3:285; 3:320). Thus, in some respect the Tudor monarchy resembled Turkish government (4:360), but in the final pages of the Tudor volumes, Hume says,

The utmost that can be said in favour of the government of that age (and perhaps it may be said with truth) is, that the power of the prince, though really unlimited, was exercised after the European manner, and entered not into every part of the administration; that the instances of a high exerted prerogative were not so frequent as to render property sensibly insecure, or reduce the people to a total servitude; that the freedom from faction, the quickness of execution, and the promptitude of those measures, which could be taken for offence or defence, made some compensation for the want of a legal and determinate liberty; that as the prince commanded no

³³ See Gerrard (1994), ch. 6.

³⁴ Hume is proud that he is the first to insist 'the family of TUDOR possessed in general more authority than their immediate predecessors' (*Essays*: 'Of the Coalition of Parties', 644).

mercenary army, there was a tacit check on him, which maintained the government in that medium, to which the people had been accustomed; and that this situation of England, though seemingly it approached nearer, was in reality more remote from a despotic and eastern monarchy, than the present government of that kingdom, where the people, though guarded by multiplied laws, are totally naked, defenceless, and disarmed, and besides, are not secured by any middle power, or independant powerful nobility, interposed between them and the monarch. (*HE*, 4:370)

Tudor monarchy was an 'European' absolute monarchy, and in fact 'any established liberties of the people' was not infringed under it (4:355, 5:562). Hume's description was of a 'civilized monarchy' established in England, though in *History* he did not use this term for the Tudor government.

The second stage in English constitutional history was the 17th century. During both Stuart dynasties, trial and error for constitutional reform succeeded, and a mixed form of government was evolved, and finally established at the Revolution³⁵. However, the path from a civilized monarchy to a mixed one was not straight. There was no definite plan beforehand; Political innovations were attempted by enthusiasts who sought after the true religion; After the collapse of the ancient constitution, civil society itself was collapsed by religious enthusiasm and the military; Under the Restoration monarchy, religious conflicts again happened between the King and the House of Commons. However, under this monarchy, a dual governmental system in which the political power is shared by both the King and the House of Commons, and correspondingly, a dual party system of the Court and the Country were established³⁶; The idea of the constitution gradually and surely changed among the nation. At

³⁵ Hume sees Charles I's *Answers to the Nineteen Propositions* as the first document which treated the English government as a mixed one (*HE*, 5:572-3). Hume contrasts the mixed constitution which this document implied, with the feudal constitution that John Fortescue described (5:550). Cf. Weston (1965).

³⁶ See *HE*, 5:556-9. As we have shown before, according to Hume, the Court and the Country are parties which derived from the nature of the mixed constitution, while the party division between Whig and Tory has close connection with different views on the settlement of the crown (*Essays: 'Of the Parties of Great Britain'*, 67-9).

last, the Revolution made the English government 'if not the best system of government, at least the most entire system of liberty, that ever was known amongst mankind' (*HE*, 6:531).

Thus, Hume described his own history of England with two stages of its constitutional development. Moreover, this two stages scheme is important not only as a scheme of history, but because it is signifying a feature of Hume's politics. Hume has synthesized two traditions of politics from which he learned, into this two stages scheme. He stresses the first stage because he is a successor of the natural law tradition which focuses on the basic human needs such as peace, order, and security. Hume saw this tradition as one that treats civil power as a prerequisite for those basic needs, and his concept of 'civilization' relied on this insight of this tradition. In this point Forbes is right. However, Hume's *History* and his politics do not stop here. He set the second stage because he is a successor of institutional politics, which focuses on the arrangements of political power, especially on those of mixed form of government.

4 Modern European Political Societies

As we have observed in the previous section, Hume saw two types of government in modern Europe; civilized monarchies, and a mixed government that has mixed 'liberty' with 'authority'. The latter has been 'happily' achieved in Britain.

Hume's main concern about contemporary British mixed government, was a mechanism which maintained the balance of the mixed government between the monarch and the House of Commons. He made mention of the 'influence' of the monarch, as well as the 'jealousy' which the House of Commons had against the monarch (*Essays*: 'Of the Liberty of the Press'). Hume thinks, although the House of Commons has great share of power, monarch's patronages makes members of the parliament act in concert with the monarch, which keeps the balance of the constitution. It was because

the lack of this 'influence' that the Restoration mixed monarchy had not been stable (*HE*, 5:568-70; 6:532). Although it was common among contemporary discourses of the Court party to see the 'influence' as a balance-maker³⁷, Hume's argument is unique because he analyses the workings of the 'influence' with the institutional approach. How does the political institution treat particular interests, and does it canalize particular interests compatible with the public interest? ——— these are Hume's main interests in discussing the contemporary constitution, especially in discussing the 'influence'. In an essay 'Of the Independency of Parliament', he starts the discussion with describing the tradition of institutional politics.

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, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, co-operate to public good. Without this, say they, we shall in vain boast of the advantages of any constitution, and shall find, in the end, that we have no security for our liberties or possessions, except the good-will of our rulers; that is, we shall have no security at all. (*Essays: 'Of the Independency of Parliament'*, 42)

Moreover, he paraphrases the same point focusing on mixed government,

When there offers, therefore, to our censure and examination, any plan of government, real or imaginary, where the power is distributed among several courts, and several orders of men, we should always consider the separate interest of each court, and each order; and, if we find that, by the skilful division of power, this interest must necessarily, in its operation, concur with public, we may pronounce that government to be wise and happy. If, on the contrary, separate interest be not checked, and be not directed to the public, we ought to look for nothing but faction, disorder, and tyranny from such a government. In this opinion I am justified by experience, as

³⁷ Dickinson (1977), 154-6.

well as by the authority of all philosophers and politicians, both antient and modern.

(43)

Here again, Hume contrasts institutional politics which 'all philosophers and politicians, both antient and modern' have espoused, with moralistic politics. The moralistic approach has blamed the 'influence' as a poison to corrupt virtue and to break the balance of the constitution, but this approach is not proper to realize dynamic mechanisms of mixed political institutions, insisted Hume (44-6).

However, Britain is a 'singular' government because it has established 'liberty' (*HE*, 5:114; *Letters*, 2:260-1). For Hume, 'a civilized European monarchy' is the most typical form of government among modern European world. In order to specify Hume's understanding of it, it's useful to compare with Montesquieu's understanding of the modern monarchy, whose talent Hume admired (*Letters*, 1:138), for both wrote about and admired the modern moderate monarchy separately at almost same time. Both had the same opinion that the moderate monarchy was a masterpiece of modern Europe, and therefore, at first glance, they seem to have shared the same image of it.

Hume started his discussion on 'a civilized monarchy' from 1741 and 1742. He says that arts and science (as well as commerce) started to develop even under monarchical form of government, after it established a rule of law and became 'a government of Laws' (*Essays*: 'Of Civil Liberty', 94). Law didn't rise naturally in a monarchy, but it could be transplanted into that form of government, which would reform the monarchy into 'a civilized monarchy' (*Essays*: 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', 125). What is important in this discussion, is that Hume separated one-person-government into two kinds; Asian barbarous 'despotism' which doesn't have a rule of law, and European 'civilized monarchy' which has. This distinction brought about a trichotomy of government — — — 'despotism', 'civilized monarchy', and 'free government' (again it is similar

to Montesquieu's).

Although the distinction between Asian despotism and European monarchy was then quite common³⁸, it was chapter 4 of Machiavelli's *Prince* which Hume explicitly relied on when he argued this distinction. Though Hume started his discussion on the 'civilized monarchy' with criticizing Machiavelli's understanding of the monarchy (*Essays*: 'Civil Liberty', 87-8)³⁹, in an essay appeared in the same year Hume saw Machiavelli's observation on the difference between French and Turkish monarchy in chapter 4 of *The Prince*, as 'one of those eternal political truths, which no time nor accidents can vary'. Here Hume paraphrases Machiavelli's distinction into one which defines the difference between 'European' and 'eastern' monarchy⁴⁰. Machiavelli insisted, and Hume accepts, that it is the existence of the aristocratic social classes that characterize the European monarchy (*Essays*: 'Politics a Science', 21-3). Here again, this would remind us of Montesquieu's monarchy⁴¹.

However, the Harrington-like understanding of the feudal government separated Hume from Montesquieu. As we saw above, Hume regarded the feudal constitution as a pre-civil society, which was overcome by absolute 'civilized monarchy'. Feudal barons were mere impediments to the settlement of political society. On the contrary, Montesquieu, who saw modern monarchy as a successor to the Gothic and feudal government, praised the feudal warriors' valour, aristocratic pride and honour, which he defined as the 'principle' of the monarchy. Although Hume also thinks highly of these traits ('a sense of honour'), he strictly limits the scope of them. Aristocratic love of honour could be harmless and efficient, only if it is located within polite society, especially formed around noble ladies in

³⁸ Koebner (1951).

³⁹ In this essay Hume regards Machiavelli's understanding as too outdated to understand modern monarchy such as French. But in *History* Hume says 'Machiavel, in his *Dissertations on Livy*, says repeatedly, that France was the most legal and most popular monarchy then in Europe' (*HE*, 5:563).

⁴⁰ There is a possibility that Hume gave focus on chapter 4 of *The Prince* because Harrington did when he distinguished between absolute and limited monarchy (*Oceana*, 54).

⁴¹ See also *Essays*: 'Of Public Credit', 358, in which Hume regards the aristocratic class as 'a kind of independent magistracy' and 'the middle power' which could resist the deformation of the government into despotism.

court. It must be transformed there into an inclination to be 'agreeable' to other persons. Mere warriors' valour is now barbarous and useless, and has no relation with polished manners of modern Europe (*Essays*: 'Rise and Progress', 126-34)⁴². In short, what distinguishes Hume from Montesquieu is their different understanding of the feudal government.

When Hume argued European polished manners, he excluded not only the spirit of barons but also of Christianity. It focused on the glory in future life, and therefore ignored and destroyed the moral codes that the passion for fame in this world nourished among temporal civil societies⁴³. It is evident, as Hume himself cites explicitly, that in this political criticism of Christianity, he relies on the famous argument of Chapter 2, Book 2 of Machiavelli's *Discourses* (*Natural History of Religion*, sec. 10).

As a summary, we can say the following. Hume did not reject the tradition of politics, but inherited and innovated some of the traditions. It is proper to conclude he adjusted the traditions and added new insights compatible with the new age, rather than to conclude he created new political science for new commercial age.

Although James Harrington was not a blind admirer of the ancient world, as is evident from his criticism of the Roman government, his politics was fundamentally based on 'ancient prudence'; ancient political institutions and the political science of them. The same can be said as to Machiavelli whom Harrington admired, and Hume who learned a lot from these two. It is certain Hume unveiled barbarity of the ancient world, but his politics were still based on the traditions that had long interpreted and re-interpreted the ancient institutions, events, and politics. Hume was a

⁴² See also his discussion on chivalry as an origin of modern European manners (*HE*, Appendix 2; 'Authenticity of Ossian's Poem'; and 'Chivalry and Modern Honour'). He focuses solely on 'gallantry', while criticizing the practice of dueling. Besides, Hume dares to insist that chivalry had derived not from German but from Roman ('Chivalry and Modern Honour', 56-7).

⁴³ *Essays*: 'Of the Immortality of the Soul', 592-5. Especially on Catholicism, *Human Nature*, 599-600; *Morals*, 270; *Natural History of Religion*, sec. 10. On Protestantism, *HE*, 5:493-4. According to Hume, 'morality', or 'civil society' itself, can and should be maintained by 'the punishment by the civil magistrate, the infamy of the world, and secret remorse of conscience, which are the great motives that operate on mankind' (*HE*, 3:472).

politician before the break in the history of political thought, after which it has become unnecessary to read Polybius or Cicero in order to think about politics.

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