

Introduction

Hume, Smith, and the Opinion of Mankind

DAVID HUME'S ESSAY "Of The First Principles of Government" opened with the following declaration:

Nothing appears more surprizing to those, who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye, than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we enquire by what means this wonder is effected, we shall find, that, as Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular. The soldan of Egypt, or the emperor of Rome, might drive his harmless subjects, like brute beasts, against their sentiments and inclination: But he must, at least, have led his *mamalukes*, or *praetorian bands*, like men, by their opinion.¹

However "surprizing" this realization might have been to those with "philosophical eyes," it was not for Hume, at least by the time he published his essay in 1741, a new one. On the contrary, he had by that point already articulated a powerful and original political theory which put at its center an analysis of the "easiness with which the many are governed by the few." This easiness was chiefly oriented around what his later essays referred to as the opinion of mankind, and which Hume declared "all human affairs" to be "entirely

1. David Hume, "Of the First Principles of Government," in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 32–33.

governed by.”² This political theory was located in the second and third books of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, published in 1739 and 1740. Yet the *Treatise* was not a success in Hume’s lifetime. In his own words, it “fell dead-born from the Press,” and Hume’s aim in many of his later essays, as well the 1748 *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and the 1751 *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, was to restate the philosophical arguments he had first published in the *Treatise* when still in his late twenties.³ Yet, a significant consequence of the work falling “dead-born” was the submergence and general loss from historical consciousness of Hume’s most sophisticated articulation of his political philosophy. For whereas the two *Enquiries* offered improved, as well as extended and sometimes new, articulations of Hume’s epistemological and moral views, with brief restatements of his theory of justice in the second *Enquiry*, his political essays—owing to their short and accessible formatting, and their often being focused on relatively immediate political issues of concern to mid-eighteenth-century readers—did not recapitulate, let alone extend and improve, the deep political theory articulated in the *Treatise*.⁴ Whilst Hume’s philosophies of understanding and of morals in both the *Essays* and the *Treatise* have subsequently been recognized as contributions of the highest order, the status of his political philosophical writings remains far more equivocal. John Rawls, for example, taught his students that Hume wrote merely as an “observing naturalist,” and that he was “not in general trying to answer the same questions” as Thomas Hobbes or John Locke had attempted before him, with the apparent implication that Hume’s questions were of a lower order of political analysis than those of the great theorists usually afforded pride of place in the canon of Western thought.⁵ This is unfortunate, if not—as I hope to show—entirely surprising. Hume was a political theorist of the first

2. David Hume, “Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic,” in *Essays*, 51.

3. David Hume, “My Own Life,” in *Essays*, xxxiv.

4. Regarding Hume’s development and improvement of his epistemological positions, see Peter Millican, “The Context, Aims and Structure of Hume’s First *Enquiry*,” in *Reading Hume on Human Understanding*, ed. P. Millican (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27–66, and also “Hume’s ‘Compleat Answer to Dr Reid,’” Hume Conference, University of Koblenz, Germany, (Oxford: Hertford College, last modified December 16, 2011), <http://www.davidhume.org/papers/millican/2006%20Hume's%20Answer%20to%20Reid.pdf>. On the second *Enquiry* as an improved version of Hume’s moral philosophy, see Jacqueline Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects: Passion, Sympathy and Society in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and “Hume’s Later Moral Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. D. F. Norton and J. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 311–40. That Hume also reworked and improved his theory of the passions found in bk. 2 of the *Treatise* in his later essays and the short *A Dissertation on the Passions*, see Amyas Merivale, “An Enquiry Concerning the Passions: A Critical Study of Hume’s Four Dissertations” (unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Leeds, 2014).

5. John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 165.

rank, but appreciating the depth of his political engagement, and the direct continuities between his thought and that of his more illustrious predecessors, requires us to first understand the wider context of debate in which he was embedded. Yet, more than that, it also requires us to recognize that the final power of his arguments depends upon a shift in our understanding of what political philosophy is and can hope to achieve. Until these things are done—and they have so far largely not been done—we will fail to appreciate the depth and originality of Hume as a political thinker. Enabling and promoting such an appreciation is one of the central endeavors of this book.

Hume's deep political theory in the *Treatise* did not, however, go entirely unnoticed by his contemporaries. In particular, his close friend and intellectual successor, Adam Smith, read and absorbed Hume's arguments, and adapted them to his own purposes in the construction of a political theory that would move beyond the *Treatise*. Unfortunately, Smith never completed this political project, and had the manuscript he had long been working on, but never finished, incinerated shortly before his death in 1790. Whilst much of that theory can now be recovered from the student notes of Smith's Glasgow lectures of the 1760s, when these materials surfaced in the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries Smith had been retrospectively anointed the founder of classical economics. The texts now known as the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* were for a long time read in that light, as well as part of the prehistory of a Marxist alternative to the mainstream. Similarly, whilst the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*—which contained some of Smith's most penetrating, albeit frequently submerged, political insights—sold well in his lifetime, its longevity did not much extend beyond the eighteenth century, and it is only relatively recently that it has again been recognized as a major work, although predominantly one of moral, not political, philosophy. The primary fate of the *Wealth of Nations*, by contrast, was to be retroactively decreed the urtext of modern economic theory. As a result, Smith, like Hume, largely passed into historical consciousness in virtue of intellectual achievements that lie predominantly outside of the realm of political thought.

Although we now have access to Smith's political theory, as well as to Hume's, the distinctive nature of their contributions remains obscured. At present, Hume is not widely regarded as a first-rate, or particularly important, political thinker in the Western tradition, periodic (often hostile) attention to his famous theory of justice as an artificial virtue notwithstanding. Certainly, whilst his stature as a major epistemological and moral philosopher is today in doubt by few, Hume's writings on politics are not typically ranked, even by his admirers, amongst the received major texts in the history of Western political thought, at least when compared with those of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and so forth. Indeed, and especially to his critics, Hume often figures as a mere sociologist of politics, a thinker who offers novel explanations of practical phenomena, but who fails to appreciate

the fundamental normative implications of proper political theory: at best a critic of weak and vulgarized versions of Locke's arguments, at worst a legitimizer of mid-eighteenth-century prejudice and complacency.⁶ Smith has fared slightly better in recent scholarship, with increasing attention paid to his political theory as recovered from the lecture notes, themselves understood as deeply connected to his powerfully articulated moral philosophy in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, with ever more widespread acknowledgement that the *Wealth of Nations* is also a deeply political book.⁷ Nonetheless, the nature of Smith's political contribution has not yet been properly appreciated, owing precisely to the fact that doing so first requires a proper recovery of Hume's political theory. In any case, and despite the favorable scholarly attention increasingly paid to Smith's political thought, he, like Hume, still stands largely outside of the usual pantheon of great political thinkers taken to have articulated the most important visions of politics available in the Western tradition.

Against the prevailing assessment, this book aims to show that when it comes to political theory, Hume and Smith have been underappreciated, even by their admirers.⁸ Furthermore, by recovering Hume's political theory, and seeing how Smith took over and extended it in turn, we are invited to ap-

6. See especially John Dunn, "From Applied Theology to Social Analysis: The Break between John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (Cambridge, 1983), 119–36; P. F. Brownsey, "Hume and the Social Contract," *Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1978), 132–48.

7. See most especially István Hont, "The Language of Sociability and Commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the Theoretical Foundations of the 'Four Stages' Theory," in *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 2005), 159–84; "Commercial Society and Political Theory in the Eighteenth Century: The Problem of Authority in David Hume and Adam Smith," in *Main Trends in Cultural History: Ten Essays*, ed. W. Melching and W. Velema (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 54–94; "Adam Smith's History of Law and Government as Political Theory," in *Political Judgment: Essays for John Dunn*, ed. R. Bourke and R. Geuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131–71; István Hont and Michael Ignatieff, "Needs and Justice in the *Wealth of Nations*," in Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 389–443; but also, for example, Samuel Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations": A Philosophical Companion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Charles L. Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chaps. 6–7; Craig Smith, *Adam Smith's Political Philosophy: The Invisible Hand and Spontaneous Order* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006); Ryan Patrick Hanley, "Commerce and Corruption: Rousseau's Diagnosis and Adam Smith's Cure," *European Journal of Political Theory* 7 (2008), 137–58.

8. With regard to Smith in particular, most assessments of his political writings focus on his warnings about unintended consequences and his skepticism about governmental interference in the workings of the economy. Although these are certainly features of Smith's thought—and important ones—what I will try to bring out below is the extent to which they are more or less surface manifestations of Smith's commitment to a much deeper form of political theorizing, taken over from Hume.

precipitate a mode of political theorizing that not only stands as a major historical achievement in and of itself, but presents possibilities for how we can think about politics today. In order to make this ambition clearer, it will be helpful to specify more explicitly some of my intellectual points of departure, thereby also supplying a rationalization for my focus on Hume and Smith that goes beyond their considerable intrinsic merits as individual thinkers, and which may even help to persuade readers who are initially skeptical of turning to them for insight. The rest of this introduction supplies that wider background.

The Theory of the State and the History of Political Thought

In recent decades, several of the most important frameworks for understanding the history of political thought in the early modern period, and in particular for understanding the origins and nature of the modern state, have assigned a central role to the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Quentin Skinner has argued that the idea of the modern state came into being when politics transitioned from the status of the person of the prince—especially in Italian Renaissance political thought, but also with regards to the monarchomach, or “king-killing,” Calvinist resistance theorists of the sixteenth century—to the state *as* a person, epitomized in the theory of representative sovereignty that Hobbes outlined in *Leviathan*. Skinner has urged us to recover Hobbes’s idea of state personhood as a way of making sense of present political predicaments, especially in relation to public debt, whilst also arguing that Hobbes is the source of a modern (albeit fallacious) understanding of liberty that underpins the contemporary liberal state form.⁹ John Dunn, by contrast, has long argued that Hobbes’s political theory represents an inadequate prudentialism that cannot supply sufficient reasons why the state can make legitimate claims regarding the obedience of subjects. Dunn sees John Locke as the only theorist to have fully grasped the inadequacy of Hobbes’s picture. But Locke’s own solution was theistic all the way down, and thus (Dunn thinks)

9. Quentin Skinner, “The State,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. T. Ball, J. Farr, and R. L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 90–131; “From the State of Princes to the Person of the State,” in *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2, *Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 368–413; “Hobbes on Persons, Authors, and Representatives,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, ed. P. Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 157–80; *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); “A Genealogy of the Modern State,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162 (2009), 325–70. On the long prehistory of the emergence of the modern state in Hobbes, see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). See also David Runciman, “What Kind of Person is Hobbes’s State? A Reply to Quentin Skinner,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2000), 268–78, but also Paul Sagar, “What is the Leviathan?” *Hobbes Studies* (forthcoming).

is not an option in our disenchanted world. Nobody, according to Dunn, has yet found a way of getting past Hobbes without Locke's unacceptably theistic grounding. Hobbes thus remains central, as both a rebuke to our incapacity to do better, and representing a positive proposal that we cannot honestly embrace if we are committed to the divided-sovereignty democratic politics of the modern world.¹⁰ Richard Tuck, by contrast, has argued that Hobbes's moral and political theory was an attempt to defuse earlier incarnations of ethical skepticism, particularly as put forward by Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Charron, and which was achieved by Hobbes's taking over Hugo Grotius's emphasis on the ineliminable natural right of self-preservation as the foundation of an antiskeptical theory, and which stands at the origin of the emergence of the modern state. Similarly, István Hont has argued that the modern state is a fusion of Hobbes's idea of representative sovereignty with an acceptance of commercial activity as a now unavoidable feature of politics. The "modern republic," or what we now call the liberal democratic state, is a trading entity predicated upon politics as organized through the matrix of representative sovereignty—which has its origin in Hobbes.¹¹

These four scholars, typically considered part of a "Cambridge school" in the history of political thought, certainly disagree about the precise nature of Hobbes's importance. Nonetheless, there is clear agreement amongst them that Hobbes *is* of central importance, and all articulate some version of a claim that his centrality rests upon the articulation of a vision of the modern state, one with which we must still reckon if we ourselves are to achieve an adequate grasp of that entity, and hence of modern politics. Yet, these "Cambridge" scholars are hardly unique in placing a heavy emphasis on Hobbes's importance to the development of Western political theory, and his enduring presence in making sense of our current situation. Leo Strauss, a very different kind of scholar, emphasized the centrality of Hobbes to the emergence of modern political theory, as have many of his students and followers.¹² John Rawls, a philosopher of a very different stripe again, taught his students that

10. John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the "Two Treatises on Government"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); "What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke?" in *Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays 1981–89* (Padstow, UK: Polity, 1990), 9–25; "The Politics of Imponderable and Potentially Lethal Judgment for Mortals: Hobbes's Legacy for the Understanding of Modern Politics," in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. I. Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 433–52.

11. István Hont, "Jealousy of Trade: An Introduction," and "The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind: 'Nation-State' and 'Nationalism' in Historical Perspective," in *Jealousy of Trade*, 1–156, 447–528.

12. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936); *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965).

Leviathan was the “greatest single work of political thought in the English language,” and placed it in a “social contract” tradition that his own political theory was in part an extension of.¹³ Raymond Geuss, perhaps Rawls’s most scathing critic in contemporary political theory, nonetheless similarly maintains that modern Western political theory begins with Hobbes.¹⁴ Others, such as Jeremy Waldron, see Hobbes’s political writings as an important foundation of contemporary liberal political theory, and of the form of justification for the use of coercive force that a specifically liberal politics mobilizes.¹⁵ More generally, and when it comes to the construction of traditions of thought that span multiple thinkers and across extended periods, libraries abound with volumes with titles like *The Social Contract from Hobbes to Rawls*.¹⁶ Yet what if a privileged emphasis on Hobbes is liable to generate mistaken, partial, and distorted appraisals of both the history of political thought and the forms that political theory may take? In particular, what if an overemphasis on Hobbes blinds us to theoretical alternatives in the historical record that stand in marked opposition to his manner of theorizing politics? And what if those alternatives should turn out to be superior? These are the possibilities taken seriously in this book, attempted primarily via a recovery of the idiom of political theory exemplified in the work of Hume and Smith, which I hope to convince the reader make for a finally more plausible and satisfying vision of politics than that which stays with Hobbes, or continues to work in Hobbesian vein.

Of course, work that starts with Hobbes—or at least takes Hobbes to be at the start of something important—need not necessarily stay with him, and

13. Rawls, *Lectures*, 23. It should be noted that Rawls did immediately qualify this statement by making clear that for him *Leviathan* didn’t come “the closest to being true,” nor did he think “that it is the most reasonable”—nonetheless, he still identified it as the greatest when taken on balance, and overall. This book aims to disrupt the coherence of such a judgment: that if we abandon Hobbesian ways of thinking, the sheer and undeniable intellectual power of Hobbes’s conceptual edifice may not be enough to support Rawls’s verdict. More generally, if Skinner is right that Rawls is a “gothic” theorist in explicitly Hobbesian mold, then Rawls’s own remark about the significance of *Leviathan* may be particularly telling: Skinner, “Machiavelli on *Virtù* and the Maintenance of Liberty,” in *Renaissance Virtues*, 161.

14. Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 21.

15. Jeremy Waldron, “Hobbes and the Principle of Publicity,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 82, no. 3–4 (2001), 447–74.

16. David Boucher and Paul Kelly, eds., *The Social Contract from Hobbes to Rawls* (London: Routledge, 1994). Other examples include Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Patrick Riley, *Will and Political Legitimacy: A Critical Exposition of Social Contract Theory in Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Jody S. Kraus, *The Limits of Hobbesian Contractarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Mark E. Button, *Contract, Culture and Citizenship: Transformative Liberalism from Hobbes to Rawls* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

important and interesting alternatives can and have been developed in that way.¹⁷ Indeed, this book ought itself to be read as an attempt at such a thing: the sheer level of attention and detail given over to Hobbes in what follows is proof enough that I too assign him a central place in the history of political thought. Nonetheless, I hope to show that much can be gained in an explicit attempt to get out from under Hobbes's shadow, even if we must first spend a considerable amount of time in the shade. Hobbes is, without doubt, important—but we should nonetheless aspire to leave him behind. Hume and Smith show how this might be done, and we stand to learn a great deal from them accordingly.

What follows is intended as a dual intervention—in both the history of political thought and contemporary political theory. That this should particularly be so with regard to the theory of the state is given by the fact that although the state remains the central unit of analysis in both domestic and international politics, its basis, nature, purpose, and normative authority are subjects of protracted disagreement and confusion. This is certainly so in the history of political thought, not least because of the competing accounts that scholars supply of the state's leading historical theorizers, but also because of the manner in which theory interacts with practice in the historical instantiation of institutional structures. By contrast, in the majority of contemporary anglophone political theory the *nature* of the state is frequently assumed as being relatively unproblematic from a conceptual point of view, and hence standardly taken as given or simply left unconsidered, with far more attention focused upon the normative ends to which the power of organized rule should be directed, particularly with regard to the realization of the values of liberty and equality.¹⁸ This, however, is an awkward state of affairs, insofar as the confusion generated by controversy in the history of political thought ought to impinge upon the confidence of contemporary normative theorizers. If we do not have a clear grasp of what the state is, including especially what its central functions and justifications are, then we cannot proceed with an adequate degree of confidence, let alone intellectual authority, when it comes to attempting to stipulate the normative constraints and goals that should govern its activities, either at home or abroad. In this sense, the history of political thought rightly acts as a *disruptive* influence on contemporary normative theorizing. By insisting that we do not have an adequate grasp of one of our most fundamental political concepts, it demands that we re-examine and make secure the foundations of our theoretical enterprises, before presuming to build upon them.

17. For a provocative and singular example, consider Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015).

18. For an indictment of this state of affairs, see Jeremy Waldron, "Political Political Theory: An Inaugural Lecture," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2013), 1–23.

An aim of this book is ultimately to offer a different way of thinking about whether there are “foundations” to be had in theorizing the modern state, and what follows from getting clear on that. To this end, it will be helpful to situate my argument as being an alternative to the framework for understanding the modern state articulated by István Hont, which may be summarized as follows: On Hont’s account, Hobbes is a paradoxical figure. Due to his lack of any theory of the economy, Hobbes stands as the last of the Renaissance, or pre-modern, theorists of politics. Nonetheless, it was a fusion of Hobbes’s idea of “union” as the foundation of the state through an act of artificial representation with the post-Hobbesian emergence of “commercial society” in the eighteenth century that together “created the modern representative republic, our current state form.”¹⁹ Hont identifies “the modern doctrine of sovereignty” as central to this process, something which “started with Bodin in France and reached its classic formulation in the work of Thomas Hobbes.” This “doctrine” claimed that “the survival and greatness of a political community required the creation of an ultimate decision-making agency whose task was to devise adequate responses to external challenges and stop infighting at home with an iron hand.”²⁰ Originally a response to the religious wars of early modern Europe, and a rejoinder to theories of divided sovereignty and monarchomach theory, this idea could only become functional for the eighteenth century (and after) when it was married to the acceptance of commerce as an ineliminable feature of advanced human societies, and hence of advanced human politics. Thus, whilst Hobbes can be credited with “the self-conscious theoretical invention” of the “modern republic,” his “invention” could become fully functional only after “late-eighteenth-century revisions.”²¹ Hont chiefly credits the achievement of such revisions to the French Revolutionary pamphleteer and constitutionalist Emmanuel Sieyès. For it was Sieyès, Hont claims, who inherited Hobbes’s ideas through Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s “appropriating” many aspects of the Englishman’s political theory, yet rejected Rousseau’s inbuilt fusion of representation and absolutism which the Genevan saw as “a vehicle for despotism.”²² Sieyès broke with Rousseau by allowing the permissible representation of sovereignty back into the theoretical framework, but also departed from Hobbes because he “explicitly anchored the modern representative republic in the economy.”²³ Whilst Hont’s view of Sieyès is ultimately equivocal (his thought is “not sufficiently original to warrant regarding him as the creator of democratic or civic nationalism in Europe,” for it is “Hobbes’s originality, mediated in part by Rousseau, which shines through Sieyès’s

19. Hont, “Introduction,” 21.

20. Hont, “Permanent Crisis,” 464.

21. Hont, “Introduction,” 128, 125.

22. *Ibid.*, 470.

23. *Ibid.*, 133.

thought”²⁴), he nonetheless states that “Sieyès’s Hobbesian constitutionalism effectively laid the foundations for the dominant state form of the contemporary era. Democracy today means a representative republic embedded in a commercial society.”²⁵

We might certainly question Hont’s use of the definite article when talking of “the modern doctrine of sovereignty.” But his framework serves as a useful critical foil for the present study. This is because even if we grant that such a thing as “the modern doctrine of sovereignty” exists—in the singular, and originating with Hobbes—Hume and Smith are best understood as operating outside of it. Once we see this, we are also in a position to better understand Hume and Smith’s place in the history of political thought more generally, as well as in contrast to how they have been placed by other important interpreters.

For example, recent work by Richard Tuck has claimed that one of the most central divisions within the history of modern political thought can be understood as being between thinkers who accepted the sixteenth-century French jurist Jean Bodin’s distinction between “sovereignty” and “government”—a group including especially Hobbes, Rousseau, and the Girondins of the French Revolution—and others who resisted or elided it, most notably Grotius, Samuel von Pufendorf, and Sieyès. Tuck sees Hobbes as crucial in articulating that idea of a sovereign power that is “sleeping,” an innovation picked up by Rousseau, who insisted in turn that whilst government should not be democratic, sovereignty—the more fundamental site of authority—must by necessity be so, upon pain of forfeiture. Tuck claims that Rousseau thereby made “modern” democracy possible: insofar as democracy was no longer considered a feature of government, feasibility constraints associated with direct popular rule in large-scale commercial states could be bypassed. A democratic sovereign could license a nondemocratic government to rule on its behalf, which is how Tuck believes contemporary national democratic arrangements now operate (at least approximately). However, entirely neglected in Tuck’s account—despite an entire chapter on “The Eighteenth Century”—is the alternative suggested in particular by Hume and Smith, and explored in detail by this book: that lying behind “government” there is no final, philosophically identifiable, and stable foundation of “sovereign” authority, but only the constant and contested changing swirl of opinion. As with Hont’s “modern doctrine of sovereignty,” so with Tuck’s suggestion that modern democracy rests upon a sovereignty-government distinction: even if these claims about the grand trajectory of the history of political thought in (especially) the eighteenth century are true, Hume and Smith must be under-

24. *Ibid.*, 134.

25. Hont, “Permanent Crisis,” 486. The ambiguity of Hont’s claim here is itself rather problematic.

stood as standing outside of this line of development, insofar as they eschew the theory of sovereignty in favor of that of opinion.²⁶

By operating outside of the language and conceptualizations of sovereignty theory, in particular as traceable to Hobbes, Hume and Smith forged a way of thinking about politics that was distinctively their own. To appreciate this, however, we must first get to grips with their alternative vision of how and why human beings could live in large and lasting societies over time. In the period under analysis in this book, questions of human sociability and the analysis of the modern state were understood as being inextricably intertwined: one could not hope to understand the latter without taking a detailed position on the former. Hume and Smith took importantly different positions from Hobbes (and also from Bernard Mandeville, Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant) on the question of human sociability, and doing so enabled them to clear a conceptual space upon which to build a different theory of the state. Accordingly, this book excavates rival accounts of human sociability in considerable detail, because doing so is the only way to properly understand and appreciate the theories of politics that supervened upon this conceptually prior debate. Showing how Hume and Smith, in particular, innovated in these regards in turn enables us to understand their thought at a deeper, more integrated, and more far-reaching level than has typically been managed thus far.

What I take to be the consequent originality—and, in turn, power—of Hume and Smith’s political thought has likewise generally been underappreciated in existing scholarship. This has largely been because of a tendency to excessively reduce the distinctive nature of their interventions, usually by interpreting them as more or less direct products of established predecessor discourses, rather than as new and relatively independent insights in their own right.²⁷ I

26. Again, see Tuck, *Sleeping Sovereign*. For doubts as to whether Tuck’s account *is* true, see Robin Douglass, “Tuck, Rousseau, and the Sovereignty of the People,” *History of European Ideas* (forthcoming); Paul Sagar, “Of the People, for the People,” *Times Literary Supplement*, June 17, 2016, 12.

27. Examples of presenting Hume and Smith as primarily innovators within established approaches, rather than forgers of new ones, include J.G.A. Pocock’s claim that they were “commercial humanists,” e.g. “Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought,” in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 37–50. Duncan Forbes and Knud Haakonssen opposed the view that Hume and Smith were primarily modifiers of the seventeenth-century natural-law tradition, e.g. Duncan Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), chaps. 1–2; “Natural Law and the Scottish Enlightenment,” in *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982); Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); “What Might Properly be Called Natural Jurisprudence?,” in Campbell and Skinner, *Scottish Enlightenment; Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); “Natural Jurisprudence

aim instead to show that Hume and Smith were major and original innovators in the history of political thought, best understood as forging their own theoretical approach, rather than primarily taking over and adapting (even if in important and novel ways) pre-existing theories or discourses.

Accordingly, much of my argument is dedicated to showing how and why the political thought of Hume and Smith must be taken on its own terms, in order to properly understand the nature and sophistication of their interventions. But in the process another sort of question is raised. Namely, that if Hume and Smith were indeed working within a new idiom forged largely without precedent, were they *right* to do so? Did they succeed in getting further than relevant alternatives, or simply end up confused and travelling down a stagnant backwater? The majority of this book attempts the relatively less ambitious task of showing that Hume and Smith were operating in an original, in particular non-Hobbesian, idiom of political theory. I also believe, however, that they were right to do so. For the most part I do not argue directly for this latter claim: my hope is to present Hume's and then Smith's arguments in such a way that their power and merits stand out of their own accord, leaving

and the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain: New Case Studies*, ed. R. Savage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For the wider architectonic of Pocock's thought and his seminal statement of it, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); for an extended working-out of Smith's thought as influenced by Pocock, see John Robertson, "The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition," in Hont and Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue*, 137–78, and "Scottish Political Economy Beyond the Civic Tradition: Government and Economic Development in the *Wealth of Nations*," *History of Political Thought* 4, no. 3 (1983), 451–82. Against the civic humanist reading of Hume in particular, see especially James Moore, "Hume's Political Science and the Classical Republican Tradition," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 4 (1977), 809–39. Against the natural-law reading, see James Moore, "Hume's Theory of Justice and Property," *Political Studies* 24, no. 2 (1976), 103–19; "Natural Law and the Pyrrhonian Controversy," in *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. P. Jones (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), 6–19; and Pauline C. Westerman, "Hume and the Natural Lawyers: A Change of Landscape," in *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, ed. M. A. Stewart and J. P. Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 83–104. More generally, the civic-humanist and natural-jurisprudence readings of Hume and Smith have been displaced by the more recent literature's emphasis on an "epicurean" nature of Hume's thought (in particular) and his indebtedness to the controversy between Mandeville and Francis Hutcheson in moral theory, as well as growing interest in Smith's relationship to Rousseau (in the case of the younger thinker). Details of these debates are provided where relevant in what follows. Although neither the civic-humanist nor natural-law reading of Hume and Smith is widely held at present, the tendency to present Hume as merely innovating within established approaches continues: Hume's most recent intellectual biographer ultimately presents his moral and political thought as little more than a synthesis of the prior ideas of Mandeville on the one hand, and Shaftesbury and Hutcheson on the other (see James Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 35–77, 121–42).

readers to decide for themselves who has the best of things. The exception is the concluding chapter, where I offer support for some of what I see as the most important—but also the most likely to be misunderstood, or unfairly received—aspects of Hume’s and Smith’s thought.

With these preliminaries in place, two final preparatory matters must be covered before the analysis proper begins. First, the place that I myself must assign to Hobbes. Second, the question of the historiographical approach that I have adopted in what follows.

Hobbes’s Proper Place

Despite urging that we ultimately move away from an emphasis on Hobbes and his ways of thinking in our attempts to understand the modern state, and in turn the predicaments and possibilities wrestled with by political theory, it is nonetheless necessary to devote considerable attention to Hobbes’s work in what follows. This is because in order to fully appreciate Hume’s, and in turn Smith’s, alternatives, we must have a clear picture of the Hobbesian structure to which both were in large part providing an alternative. Once we recognize Hobbes as important for understanding Hume’s and Smith’s distinctive contributions, then we will be in a position to follow them out of his theoretical shadow.

In the introduction to the *Treatise*, Hume famously proposed that in order to achieve “success in our philosophical researches,” we must “march up directly to the capital or center” of all the sciences, “to human nature itself.” By concentrating on Hume’s insistence upon the priority of a “science of man,” we can begin to better bring into focus the fundamental nature of his political project. After establishing a central science of man, Hume tells us, we may in turn “extend our conquests over all those sciences, which more intimately concern human life. . . . In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.”²⁸ Hume continues:

And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation. ’Tis no astonishing reflection to consider, that the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects shou’d come after that to natural at the distance of above a whole century; since we find, in fact, that there was about the same interval betwixt the origins of these sciences; and that reckoning from

28. David Hume, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume: A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), T.I.6, SBN xvi.

THALES to SOCRATES, the space of time is nearly equal to that betwixt my LORD BACON and some late philosophers in *England*, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engag'd the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public. So true it is, that however other nations may rival us in poetry, and excel us in some other agreeable arts, the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and liberty.²⁹

The “late philosophers in *England*” are given in a footnote as “Mr. *Locke*, my Lord *Shaftesbury*, Dr. *Mandeville*, Mr. *Hutcheson*, Dr. *Butler*, &c.”—and at least two things here are puzzling.

First, that despite Hume’s insistence (repeated in the “Abstract” of the *Treatise*) that these five authors have “begun to put the science of man on a new footing,” they in fact share no common approach to philosophical matters, and certainly not any “experimental method” of “experience and observation.”³⁰ Second, that although it is perhaps unsurprising that attention has typically been focused upon what a “science of man” founded on “experience and observation” might consist of, this distracts from Hume’s claim that the five authors have begun to put it on a *new* footing. Why, after all, should they be putting it on a new footing, rather than simply establishing it afresh? Who had presented a science of man before the five authors?

It may be that Hume’s wording is simply loose, his appeal to the five authors shallow. There is a heavy hint of national chauvinism in these passages; not just the elevating of Francis Bacon to the status of founder of modern science, but the panegyrics to the final superiority of a land of “toleration and liberty.” Having recently returned from France, Hume was well aware of the accomplishments of European thinkers, recommending René Descartes, Nicolas Malebranche, George Berkeley, and Pierre Bayle to his friend Michael Ramsay as preparation for an attempt at the *Treatise*.³¹ Accordingly, his public pronouncements of the superiority of English learning can probably be treated

29. Hume, *Treatise*, T.I.7, SBN xvi–ii.

30. In the “Abstract,” Hume writes that the five authors “tho’ they differ in many points among themselves, seem all to agree in founding their accurate disquisitions of human nature entirely upon experience”: *Treatise*, T.A.2, SBN 646. This is simply not true of Shaftesbury’s neo-Stoic deist teleology, nor of Shaftesbury’s great admirers Joseph Butler and Hutcheson, with their extensive appeals to providence and design. Much the same could be said of Locke, who although he does proceed largely by “experience and observation,” also makes extensive appeals to the role of God. As for Mandeville, as we shall see below, much of Hume’s criticism of this predecessor amounts to his not having paid *enough* proper regard to experience and observation, being overreliant on a lopsided Augustinian view of human nature.

31. Hume to Michael Ramsay, August 31, 1737, in Tadeusz Kozanecki, “Dawida Hume’a nieznanne listy w zbiorach muzeum Czartoryskich (polska),” *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej*, 9 (1963), 133–34; cf. John P. Wright, *Hume’s “A Treatise of Human Nature”: an Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27.

as less than entirely ingenuous. Hume may have listed the five authors simply as an attempt to tie his difficult, dense, and long book to established and well-known English debates on morals and politics—the only areas of philosophy all five authors could be said to have contributed to by 1739—in what he fruitlessly hoped would be a successful commercial, as well as philosophical, publication.

Be that as it may, the reference to the five authors and the attempt to find a new footing for the science of man offers an important clue for bringing into focus central aspects of Hume’s enterprise that otherwise remain obscured. Specifically, that there might have been *another* late English author, one with whom each of the five named philosophers was certainly familiar, and in response to whom a new footing was required. In this regard there is indeed an outstanding candidate: a thinker who offered not a science of man, but a science of politics based on a deeply provocative theory of human nature, for whom geometry rather than observation and experience was the scientific archetype. That thinker was Thomas Hobbes.³²

Chapters 1 and 2 of this book advance the case for understanding Hume’s science of man as yielding a science of human sociability, placing Hume’s writings in opposition to Hobbes’s theory of human nature and his supervening science of politics. This is not an exclusive claim: Hume’s attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects was a wide-ranging enterprise, with significant application to many areas of philosophy beyond the question of human sociability.³³ Nonetheless, reading Hume this way allows us to place his writings in a long-standing political idiom revolving around the centrality of individual recognition and the possibilities for group cooperation amongst self-interested agents. Even if Hume was less immediately preoccupied by Hobbes’s challenge than earlier generations—the intermediate figure

32. On Hobbes’s self-assessment as the founder of the first political science modeled on the a priori method of geometry, see Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*, ed. B. Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991) 42–43; *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan*, ed. N. Malcolm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), vol. 2, 56. For an overview of Hobbes’s conception of science and of a science of politics, Noel Malcolm, “Hobbes’s Science of Politics and his Theory of Science,” in *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), chaps. 3–4.

33. Particularly interesting is the suggestion by Peter Millican that Hume’s science of man centers on his theory of causation, which would indicate that the observed regularities of human moral and political practice can be reduced to a science in the same way as any other observed regularities. This would help account both for Hume’s insistence that the theory of causation is the “chief argument” of the *Treatise*, and his intention to offer a science of logic, morals, criticism, and politics based on the experience and observation of human nature: Peter Millican, “Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science,” *Mind* 118 (2009), 647–712, §§ 8–9.

of Bernard Mandeville certainly commanded his attention more directly—he was nonetheless deeply invested in an ongoing debate over human sociability, the parameters of which were set by Hobbes’s epochal intervention.³⁴

In essence, I argue for a two-step intellectual genealogy in understanding the relationship of Hume to Hobbes. Although there is plentiful evidence that Hume read Hobbes, that evidence also points to his not having read him very closely, or having thought him of particular importance.³⁵ Hume’s characterization of Hobbes’s position on sociability frequently bears more resemblance to a (still persistent) popularized caricature than to what Hobbes actually claimed regarding people’s capacities for society. Hume does not mention Hobbes in what survives of his correspondence, or in the so-called “Early Memoranda,” his reading notes dating from (probably) the late 1730s.³⁶ Furthermore, the sheer speed with which Hume penned the *Treatise*, and at such an early age, suggests

34. My argument is different, however, to the claim of Paul Russell’s that Hume’s *Treatise* is fundamentally a “Hobbist” work, one modeled specifically on *The Elements of Law*. The general plausibility of Russell’s interpretative claim regarding Hume’s affinity with Hobbes has already been called into question by James Harris, but in what follows I seek to show that Hume’s moral and political thought cannot be accurately construed as Hobbesian when we appreciate his alternative theory of human nature, even though gaining that proper appreciation requires the acknowledgment of Hobbes as a crucial background figure in the debates Hume was entering. See Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume’s “Treatise”: Skepticism, Naturalism and Irreligion* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008); James Harris, “Of Hobbes and Hume,” *Philosophical Books* 50 (2009), 38–46. Nonetheless, Russell is right to call attention to Hume’s *irreligious* aims more widely, and his suggestion that we tie Hume to a tradition including Hobbes (and also Baruch Spinoza) is valuable insofar as it encourages us to see the unstated conclusions of Hume’s work that would have been seen immediately by contemporaries (virtually all of whom would have been sincere believers in some version of Christian faith), but are much less obvious to modern readers. Something similar might be said of sociability, a central category of political analysis in Hume’s intellectual context that needs to be excavated for modern eyes, but would have been much more obvious to the original audience.

35. Hume mentions Hobbes explicitly at two points in the *Treatise*: T.1.3.3.4, SBN 80, and T.2.3.1.10, SBN 402—once with regard to causation, the other with regard to human psychology and the capacity to form society. Hobbes’s view is alluded to at several points in bk. 3; see especially T.3.2.2.7, SBN 487–88, and T.3.2.8.1, SBN 540–41, although Hume’s characterization is rather loose and general. Hobbes is also mentioned in the second *Enquiry*, as an exponent of the “selfish system” of morals: David Hume, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Hume: An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91. Dugald Stewart thought that Hobbes’s psychological theory was known to Hume, and was the only part of the earlier philosopher’s corpus that Hume took seriously. See Dugald Stewart, *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart, Esq., F.R.S.S.*, 11 vols., ed. W. Hamilton, (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable, 1854–60), vol. 1, 63–97; cf. Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics*, 10.

36. Harris, “Hobbes and Hume,” 40. More recently it has been suggested that the “Early Memoranda” date from the 1740s and relate to the development of Hume’s political economy: Tatsuya Sakamoto, “Hume’s ‘Early Memoranda’ and the Making of his Political Economy,” *Hume Studies* 37 (2011), 131–64.

that his predominant mode of engagement in that work was to identify the fundamental structure of other thinkers' arguments, and react to that, rather than spending much time on the details of any particular position. Nonetheless, Hobbes was *the* crucial figure for British thinkers in "the controversy, which of late years has so much excited the curiosity of the public," which Hume presented his own intervention as bearing upon.³⁷ Hume may not, for the most part, have been responding directly to Hobbes—but the five authors were. Even if Hume named these authors only to indicate the set of problems his work addressed, rather than any close engagement beyond a basic familiarity with the underlying structures of their positions, the point is that he nonetheless *accurately* indicated which problems he was addressing. Specifically, problems generated by the claim that humans are not by nature sociable, wrestled with by all of the five authors, and bequeathed to them by Hobbes.³⁸

In emphasizing the centrality of human sociability to understanding eighteenth-century political thought, I am indebted to Hont's path-breaking work in this regard. According to Hont, Hume was a proponent of "commercial sociability," a conceptual middle route between the thoroughgoing natural unsociability account of Hobbes, and alternative (fundamentally Christian) attempts to secure sociability through mutual benevolence.³⁹ For Hume, sociability is most fundamentally a product of the coordinated seeking of self-interest. Pride—the central item in Hobbes's and Mandeville's accounts of natural unsociability—is relegated to the margins, whilst benevolence is presented

37. Hume, *Treatise*, T.2.1.7.2, SBN 295. Hume claims to "reserve" his own intervention until bk. 3, though as we shall see the psychological theory of bk. 2 in fact grounds the moral and political account of the final parts of the *Treatise*.

38. The suggestion that the five authors, and a shared preoccupation with human sociability, could provide the context for understanding Hume's moral and political philosophy was in fact made by James Moore in "The Social Background of Hume's Science of Human Nature," in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. D. F. Norton, N. Capaldi, and W. L. Robinson (San Diego: Austin Hills, 1979), 23–41. However, Moore has never pursued this possibility, opting instead to place Hume in an "epicurean" framework that exhibits important continuities with Hobbes's (and Mandeville's) approach. My interpretation in what follows seeks to show that the epicurean framework obscures as much as it illuminates, and that we are better off not using it to understand Hume's thought. Moore's principle articulations of the epicurean interpretation can be found in "Hume and Hutcheson," in Stewart and Wright, *Hume and Hume's Connexions*; "The Eclectic Stoic, the Mitigated Sceptic," in *New Essays on David Hume*, ed. E. Mazza and E. Ronchetti (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007), 133–70; "Utility and Humanity: The Quest for the *Honestum* in Cicero, Hutcheson and Hume," *Utilitas* 14 (2002), 365–86. Moore's interpretation has been taken up by John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 6; Luigi Turco, "Hutcheson and Hume in a Recent Polemic," in Mazza and Ronchetti, *New Essays*, 171–98; and Wright, *Hume's "A Treatise"*, chaps. 1 and 9.

39. Hont, "Commercial Society," and "Introduction," 40–41, 101–11, 160–63, 364–68, 476–77.

as inadequate to the task. Nonetheless, Hont's account of Hume's theory of sociability was deployed only highly schematically, and in the form he left it to us too much remains unaccounted for. In particular, there is Hume's apparent insistence in book 2 of the *Treatise* that humans are the most naturally sociable creature in the entire universe thanks to their capacity for sympathy. There is also book 3's suggestion that it is human imagination and the operations of opinion, and not the direct seeking of utility, that fundamentally ensures that modern, large-scale societies are generally cohesive and stable over time. In order to provide proper substantiation for reading Hume as a "commercial sociability" theorist, it is necessary to fully excavate Hume's theory of sociability, which chapter 1 demonstrates to be tripartite in nature: sympathy and imagination must undergird and then supplement utility, even if utility remains the central factor. Chapter 2 extends this account to understand the role of history and the family in debates over human sociability and the foundations of politics, exploring how Hume was able to revolutionize the use of state-of-nature conjectures in order to elucidate the emergence of institutional structures and related moral values. Chapter 3 builds on this to examine Hume's fully fledged political theory as an outgrowth of his commitment to commercial sociability. By basing his analysis on a different understanding of the human capacity to form society, Hume developed a thoroughly anti-Hobbesian theory of politics, culminating in a theory of the state without sovereignty.⁴⁰

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the issues of sociability and the theory of the state with regard to two thinkers who came after Hume, and represent respectively the continuation of a Hobbesian approach and its repudiation in favor of Hume's opinion-of-mankind idiom. Chapter 4 examines the case of Rousseau, and argues that despite his attempting to start from a different place in the theory of sociability, and then offer a purposefully counter-Hobbesian theory of sovereignty, he ultimately could not get past Hobbes, and ended up returning to the latter's positions, and in turn largely considering his own political project a failure. Chapter 5, by contrast, presents Smith as taking up Hume's alternative theoretic idiom. Like Hume, Smith displays a complicated but important intellectual relationship to Hobbes. Employed for much of his working life as a university professor (which Hume never was), Smith inherited a teaching syllabus at Glasgow that emphasized the centrality of Pufendorf, a thinker whom he identified in his lectures as having set out purposefully to

40. However, what we will see is that Hume's adoption of a commercial-sociability framework ultimately took him outside of Hont's "modern doctrine of sovereignty" rooted in Hobbes. When fully worked out, therefore, Hont's insistence on recognizing the importance of commercial sociability as a competitor idiom to Hobbesian natural unsociability subverts his own "modern doctrine of sovereignty" thesis, because what emerges from Hume's theory of commercial sociability is a theory of the state entirely outside the Hobbesian mold.

“confute Hobbes.”⁴¹ Smith names Hobbes on several occasions, and alludes to his positions on still more, and in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* shows a working knowledge of Hobbes’s arguments and their implications.⁴² With regard to the theory of sociability in particular, Hobbes’s position—the possibility of constructing society through fear—would have been known to Smith as the unmentioned third alternative in addition to his suggestions of securing society through the ties of benevolence or utility (not least because his teacher, Francis Hutcheson, had earlier assimilated the utility approach of Pufendorf to his *bêtes noires*, Hobbes and Mandeville).⁴³ Chapter 5 shows how Smith’s development of Hume’s alternative theoretic framework of opinion led him to construct a theory of regime forms that was deeply historically inflected, but Smith also ultimately professed the incapacity of philosophy to finally resolve the tensions and predicaments generated by purely secular politics.⁴⁴ Chapter 6 considers the implications of this, and assesses the viability of thinking about the state, and political theory more generally, from Hume and Smith’s perspective.

Matters of Method

Before finally proceeding to the substance of analysis it may be helpful for me to say something regarding the “method” I have adopted in what follows. Readers who are allergic to this sort of discussion, or who would rather just let the argument do the talking, can simply skip forward. And as in all such cases

41. Adam Smith, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith: Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and P. G. Stein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), LJ(B).3. Hont has suggested that Smith’s own theory of commercial sociability, a rejection of Hobbes’s natural-unsociability thesis, is itself derived from Pufendorf: see Hont, “Language of Sociability.” However, and as the following chapters seek to show, Smith could have—and I believe, probably did—get all of the conceptual materials needed for resisting Hobbes in terms of a utility-based theory of sociability from Hume’s *Treatise*, which he read as a student at Oxford long before he was contracted to teach at Glasgow, rather than from Pufendorf’s *De Iure Naturae et Gentium*.

42. Adam Smith, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith: The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), VII.iii.1–2 especially.

43. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, II.ii.3.1–3; Francis Hutcheson, “On the Natural Sociability of Mankind,” in *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, ed. J. Moore and M. Silverthorne (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), 191–216; cf. Hont, “Introduction,” 39–40. This point is developed further in chapter 2.

44. Smith thus stands with Hume outside of the Hobbesian “modern doctrine of sovereignty,” and it is therefore a mistake to try to present the thought of Sieyès as an amalgam of Rousseau’s and Smith’s political theories, as Hont suggests: István Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Adam Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. B. Kapossy and M. Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 24.

of preemptive apologetics, the proof of the pudding will ultimately be only in the eating: perusal of this author's cookbook will be of real use retrospectively, upon condition that the dish is palatable. Nonetheless, it may perhaps be of some help if I attempt to offer an orientation from the outset as to what I take myself to be doing.

What follows should be understood as an attempt to put into a particular—and, inevitably, idiosyncratic—sort of practice Bernard Williams's underdeveloped, but illuminating, distinction between “the history of philosophy” and “the history of ideas.” According to Williams the latter is “history before it is philosophy,” whereas the former is the other way around.⁴⁵ This distinction is a refined one. It takes as given something like John Dunn's insistence that meaningful examination of past thinkers must be philosophically sensitive, whilst also being attentive to the fact that any philosophy we recover from the past is not a free-floating intellectual phenomenon, but the product of real human agents' attempts to wrestle with complex questions in thick intellectual and practical contexts.⁴⁶ Any serious and nonfallacious engagement with past philosophy must involve itself in the practice of both philosophy *and* history. Yet, as Williams remarked, whilst “in any worthwhile work of either sort, both concerns are likely to be represented,” nonetheless “there is a genuine distinction” between “the history of philosophy” and “the history of ideas.”⁴⁷ This, however, requires more explicit working out than Williams supplied.

The “genuine distinction” that I take to be most fruitful consists of the following. When dealing with major philosophical thinkers of the past, in doing “the history of philosophy,” what takes priority is the insistence that philosophical arguments be understood primarily *as philosophical arguments*; i.e., as a specific form of intellectual contribution with its own (at least in aspiration, if not always practice) independence, unity, and coherence. By contrast “the history of ideas” concerns itself primarily with tracking, understanding, and explaining the movement and development of ideas and arguments across thinkers, times, and places. It necessarily pays attention to philosophical detail, but with the primary aim not of reconstructing that detail for its own sake so as to understand a philosophical position simply as such, but of understanding

45. Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, rev. ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), xiii. For an insightful discussion of Williams's distinction, which compellingly urges us to abandon Williams's correlate analogy between reading past philosophy and listening to past music, see Michael Rosen, “The History of Ideas as Philosophy and History,” *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 4, 691–720, 693–96 especially.

46. John Dunn, “The Identity of the History of Ideas,” in *Political Obligation in Its Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 13–28. Quentin Skinner's insistence that there are no “unit ideas” in the history of philosophy, but only arguments made by living agents in real debates, is also of direct relevance, and likewise correct. See Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 60, 62, 83–85.

47. Williams, *Descartes*, xiii.

the transmission, evolution, and success or failure of intellectual projects as primarily historical, not philosophical, phenomena. Clearly, both approaches need to engage philosophy and history if they are to be done well. But one is precisely philosophy “before” it is history, and the other vice versa.

Yet, properly practicing “the history of philosophy” requires that we recover and reconstruct not just particular passages—or even entire works—from past authors, but also the underlying philosophical worldview that both informs, and ultimately promises (if sometimes unsuccessfully) to make coherent and integrated any of the particular arguments offered by individual thinkers. This is because philosophical arguments are embedded not just in an external discursive context constituted by philosophical opponents and allies, but in an internal context determined by the myriad positions and beliefs any given thinker is simultaneously committed to. Whilst it is true that no philosopher argues or thinks in isolation, it is also true that no idea worth bothering to contemplate or recover exists without reference to a great many others, with such ideas being themselves dynamically interrelated: a change in one will frequently generate repercussions for the rest. Any adequate recovery thus demands a serious attempt to grasp the totality of a philosopher’s arguments as adding up to something more than the sum of individual positions or points, and this is true even if our aim is only to understand those individual positions or points.

We must, however, proceed carefully. We cannot hope to reconstruct a philosopher’s worldview simply by earnestly reading his or her texts very closely; by just looking at their pages over and over again until the “true” meaning emerges. Skinner is right to have insisted that the meaning of an argument depends to a significant extent upon what its author thought he or she was doing in making it, and that in turn depends upon the wider context of communicative intention and reception an agent was embedded in, required for that argument to possess coherent and intelligible content for both its author and its audience.⁴⁸ If that context has changed we will misread past authors to varying degrees, ending up with more or less sophisticated forms of anachronism. That may or may not make for good philosophy as conducted purely in the here and now. But it will certainly make for bad readings of Hume,

48. As Williams put it elsewhere: “About what a genuine historical understanding of a text is, understanding of what it *meant*, I agree with Quentin Skinner that if it is recoverable at all, it must be in the kind of terms which he has detailed, of those contemporary expectations in terms of which a communicative intention could be realized”: Bernard Williams, “Political Philosophy and the Analytical Tradition,” in *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, ed. A. W. Moore (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 165. Skinner’s point about meaning may need to be supplemented with the observation that sometimes recovery of authorial intention is insufficient, for example in cases of “false consciousness” or misapprehension on the part of the author. But this is a refinement, not a refutation. See, for example, Ian Shapiro, “The Difference that Realism Makes: Social Science and the Politics of Consent,” in *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–18.

Smith, Hobbes, Rousseau, or anybody else not from the here and now, and the poor quality of such readings will be as much philosophical as historical, in the first instance because they won't be readings of *Hume* (or whoever) at all, but of some more or less accurate effigy.⁴⁹ Historical sensitivity is essential, and we must always be on guard against exporting what is peculiar to us back into the past. Nonetheless, we will likewise run the risk of getting figures like Hume, Hobbes, Smith, Rousseau, and so on badly wrong, albeit in a different way, if we neglect to make primary the fact that they were, at least when they wrote on politics in the modes I will be examining, *philosophers*, and what is more, philosophers who clearly advanced their arguments in a manner conceived of as contributions to pan-European discourses in which some of the key interlocutors were already dead. Hume's philosophy in particular may well have been (and, as I hope to show, in certain ways was) deeply contextually conditioned. But it must be recovered first and foremost as a philosophy that in many ways aspired to, and often succeeded in, presenting ideas and arguments that could transcend Hume's particular local context, and hold true in many others. The same is the case for Smith.⁵⁰ Recovering Hume's and Smith's work in this way means not just viewing their writings as sustained attempts to give an account of how things are in terms of arguments built in the form of premises and conclusions, but also as accounts held together by a wider picture of how the world is, and what makes it that way. This is the case not only with regard to particular details, but also to how all those details fit together to add up to an account that at least aspires to be coherent on the question of how everything is, in light of the fact that if not everything, then certainly a great many things, are connected. We will only properly understand Hume's arguments, and in turn Smith's, if we understand both of them as in the fullest sense philosophers—i.e., *not* simply as depositories of arguments grouped under the same heading because they happened to be proposed by the same historical figures.

We must, however, be alert to a further complicating factor. Philosophers are always committed (implicitly or explicitly, in the best cases consciously, but in many cases revealingly unconsciously) to conceptions about what philosophy itself is, and what it can therefore hope to achieve. Hume and Smith are particularly unusual in this regard, because in many ways their vision of the

49. Dunn, "Identity," 21–23.

50. In this regard I am sympathetic to Jeremy Waldron's point that an over insistence on thick contextualization is liable to distort our readings of past political philosophers, in particular by insisting that those thinkers must have been involved in close engagements with immediate political concerns against those thinkers' own manifest insistence that they *are* speaking—and contributing—to an established cross-generational canon of Western thought: Jeremy Waldron, "What Plato Would Allow," in *Theory and Practice: Nomos XXXVII*, ed. I. Shapiro and J. Wagner (New York: New York University Press, 1995) 143–47.

nature and role of philosophy is severely deflationary. As Hume put it in his essay “The Sceptic,” “the empire of philosophy extends over a few; and with regards to these too, her authority is very weak and limited.”⁵¹ Various aspects of this study—but particularly chapters 3, 5, and 6—examine what it means to recognize that Hume’s worldview comprises a reevaluation not just of how the world is, but of how philosophy within that world can and should be, and what it can and cannot hope to achieve.

It matters also that both Hume and Smith were *first-rate* philosophers. If they fell into incoherencies or contradictions, these are never obvious, and always require significant effort on our behalf to be sure of and to adequately account for. This is made especially difficult by the fact that Hume in particular sought to reorient many prevalent beliefs and expectations about the nature and role of philosophy, most of which persist today. Hence, when we have found a putative incoherence or mistake in his work we must be alert to the possibility that the fault is at our end; that we are exhibiting pathologies of thought that Hume’s approach recommends we get beyond. The same is not true for all past thinkers, especially those whose ability was lower than that of a Hume or a Smith. Nonetheless, I maintain that even in these cases we will likewise get further in understanding what past philosophers were trying to do, as well as understanding why they disagreed as well as what they collectively achieved, if we attempt to consider not just their arguments, but their philosophies in the broader sense. One result of this is that at times I opt to speak of one thinker agreeing or disagreeing (and equivalent locutions) with another, without necessarily intending to make a strict historical claim about the latter theorist consciously and specifically replying to the earlier one (whom indeed they may not even have read, at least on any precise point at issue). The aim rather is to draw out how patterns of argument match up, complement each other, come into conflict, evolve, die, and so on—as we shall see that they do, across both time and different thinkers. When individual authors are consciously responding to the specific points identifiably raised by predecessors, I try to note this, but I do not restrict myself to such cases alone, for we gain a deeper and more textured understanding of the philosophical arguments and positions in play if we compare conceptual alternatives, and not just individuated and discrete historical responses.

51. David Hume, “The Sceptic,” in *Essays*, 168. There is some debate as to whether “The Sceptic” is an essay *in propria persona*: see especially Robert Fogelin, *Hume’s Skepticism in the “Treatise of Human Nature”* (London: Routledge, 1985); M. A. Stewart, “The Stoic Legacy in the Early Scottish Enlightenment,” in *Atoms, Pneuma and Tranquility: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in Enlightenment Thought*, ed. M. J. Osler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 273–96; James Harris, “Hume’s Four Essays on Happiness and Their Place in the Move from Morals to Politics,” in Mazza and Ronchetti, *New Essays*, 223–35. Yet even if the entire essay is not intended to expound Hume’s views exactly, the remark about the empire of philosophy well captures Hume’s own attitude.

Here, however, the question of history becomes pertinent once more. For it is not just that historical sensitivity is essential for avoiding anachronism and error when reconstructing philosophical worldviews. The relationship also runs the other way. Once we are in possession not just of appropriately reconstructed arguments, but of wider philosophies and their underpinning worldviews, we can offer a form of history that is driven by the development of such philosophical accounts in their entirety, in particular when they complement or clash with each other, changing, surviving, stagnating, or expiring. The outcome, as well as the method, is thus philosophy before it is history. But the resulting historical story is nonetheless a genuine contribution, albeit one that could only be achieved by taking a particular kind of path through the material.

When we take this approach, we end up with the potential for disagreement with Skinner regarding the point and purpose of the study of past philosophies. Perhaps Skinner's most famous remark on the subject of methodological practice is that there are "no perennial problems in philosophy. There are only individual answers to individual questions, and potentially as many different questions as there are questioners."⁵² At a certain level this is doubtless true: questions cannot exist outside the heads of questioners. Yet there are good reasons to be skeptical of Skinner's correlate insistence that "the classic texts are concerned with their own questions and not with ours."⁵³ This may often turn out to be true—and perhaps especially so the further back one goes—but it is also the case that unsolved questions are typically passed on to subsequent generations, albeit with varying degrees of success and hardiness. It is certainly, as Skinner says, wrongheaded to think that one can straightforwardly turn to the history of ideas for ready-made "lessons" applicable to the here and now. Nonetheless, the questions of past thinkers may turn out to be our questions, for two reasons in particular. First, because we may have inherited them from past thinkers, rather than inventing them ourselves. Second, because we may find that the relevant context separating past thinkers from ourselves has changed only superficially, whilst the more fundamental issues that prompted and shaped the emergence of past questions and answers remain extant today. This does not mean that there are "perennial questions" after all, but rather that

52. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 88. It is worth noting that Skinner's own work in practice displays a much more complex and ambiguous relationship to such a statement than might be assumed (and of which he is often accused). John Dunn's review of Skinner's first major monograph, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, captures the point well. As Dunn puts it, the excitement of Skinner's work is generated by the promise of the extreme historicity implied in the "no perennial questions" remark, but the depth and subtlety of Skinner's engagements tend to preclude any straightforward or polemical historicity from being attributable to his arguments: John Dunn, "The Cage of Politics," *Listener*, March 15, 1979, 389–90.

53. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 88.

whether there are or not is largely beside the point. If some questions do endure, and we can identify which ones, then the uses of intellectual history extend beyond the making of comparisons with alien ways of doing things so as to better illuminate our local practices. In particular, they may extend to the possibility that we can legitimately study the answers volunteered in the past to better understand the predicaments of the present, precisely because these predicaments are not new and neither are many of our attempted solutions to them.

Certainly we cannot know this to be the case a priori. Skinner is right about how to proceed in practice: we must check that past philosophers can possibly have meant what we claim they mean, or we will hear simply our own voices echoed back to us, learning only about ourselves, and even then not very much. But if we take appropriate caution, what is frequently revealed is that in many respects the same questions that we struggle to answer in political theory at the start of the twenty-first century were already being wrestled with by the best thinkers of the eighteenth. One thing this book seeks to illuminate is the *persistence* of some philosophical questions. We simply have not succeeded in getting past a great deal of eighteenth-century thought: their questions are in many ways still ours. I therefore put myself closer to the position of Dunn than of Skinner, the former of whom has maintained a view much more like the one I have just outlined than that of the latter, their usual reduction to a unitary “Cambridge school” notwithstanding. As Dunn emphasizes, given that better minds have already attempted to answer many of our questions, we should neither neglect such thinkers, nor turn them into mere mirrors for our own edification. Ultimately, what “lessons” there are to be drawn from the history of political thought depend more upon our own informed and careful judgment, than upon the dictates of any particular “methodology.”⁵⁴

I believe, and hope to show in what follows, that one of the most illuminating contexts for understanding Hume’s, and then Rousseau’s and Smith’s, political philosophies is the competing theories their contributions were an alternative to, rather than the material political circumstances of their day, or the structural similarities their thought may exhibit with that of relevant others with regard to particular pieces of argumentation as identified through overarching traditions of thought. As a result, I have steered clear of using the categories of revived Hellenistic philosophies (in particular Epicureanism and Stoicism, and, more vaguely, skepticism) to cross-classify thinkers in order to make historical or conceptual claims, as has been increasingly popular in

54. For the earliest and most forthright statements of Dunn’s view, see Dunn, “Identity,” and “Cage of Politics,” but also *The History of Political Theory and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For Dunn’s method as demonstrated in his work, *Political Thought*; “What Is Living”; “Judgment for Mortals.”

recent scholarship of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁵ With regard to particular arguments within a philosopher's worldview, labeling an item of thought as "Stoic," or "Epicurean," and so forth may sometimes illuminate, as is the case with, for example, Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's deployment of specifically and self-consciously Stoic moral and metaphysical ideas. But doing so across and between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers' positions threatens to obscure as much as it reveals.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, I have no ambitions in the direction of methodological imperialism. It would be foolish and false to claim that "the history of philosophy" is the only valid enterprise, with no room for "the history of ideas" (where the emphasis on Hellenistic traditions of thought has recently enjoyed prominence), or, for that matter, more conventional philosophy and political theory that proceed largely ahistorically. Quite the contrary: we require a division of labor not only to make progress in the detail of historically located philosophical arguments, but in enabling wider conceptualizations of what was going on in any given period. Mine is not the only perspective, and does not aspire to be. The multiple levels of both historical and philosophical analysis required to grapple with topics as large and complex as theories of sociability and of the nature of state, in the eighteenth century and beyond, are so extensive as to make it impossible for one perspective, let alone one person, to achieve all that is required. Be that as it may, by adopting the particular perspective outlined above I hope to offer some new answers, or at least new ways of seeing older problems, whilst recognizing that it is only through an appropriate division of labor—both within and between historical approaches to past philosophies—that we will collectively make meaningful progress.

55. See, for example, and in addition to the work of Robertson, Moore, and Turco noted above, Jean Lafond, "Augustinisme et épicurisme au xvii siècle," in *L'homme et son image: morales et littérature de Montaigne à Mandeville* (Paris: H. Champion, 1996), 345–68; Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Catharine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Michael Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes: An Eighteenth Century Emblem in the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), chap. 3; and the essays collected in Osler, *Atoms, Pneuma and Tranquility*.

56. I examine the question of how to think about revived traditions of Hellenistic thought more extensively in Paul Sagar, "Sociability, Luxury and Sympathy: The Case of Archibald Campbell," *History of European Ideas* 39 (2013), 806–14. See also Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*, 15–16, 31–32.