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## The end of empire and the death of religion

### A reconsideration of Hume's later political thought

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Do we have reason to speak of a 'late' Hume? In other words, was there a late phase in David Hume's political philosophy, to be distinguished from an 'early' or a 'middle' phase? Scholars have long been reluctant to apply such labels to a philosopher whose thinking on a variety of subjects, including politics and religion, is often held to have grown more or less organically from his early efforts to provide a new foundation for philosophy in his *Treatise of human nature*. When applied to Hume's political thought, however, this kind of interpretation has always had to come to terms with the fact that the tone and—to a lesser extent—the content of his statements on political matters underwent a significant change about ten years prior to his death in 1776. In the course of this last decade of his life Hume grew increasingly concerned about the course of contemporary political affairs, which he commented on and analysed with a growing sense of urgency at times bordering on despair. This intense preoccupation with contemporary affairs is reflected in the unprecedented amount and intensity of the statements on politics to be found in his surviving letters as well as in numerous additions and amendments he made to successive editions of his published political and historical writings. In his correspondence the detached and tranquil tone of his earlier writings was at times dropped in favour of vehement expressions of an 'Indignation, which I cannot command and care not to conceal'.<sup>1</sup> The uncharacteristic urgency with which these statements are infused underscores Hume's firm conviction that political events since the late 1760s could be understood as symptoms of a wider

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<sup>1</sup> Hume added 'and yet to a Philosopher & Historian the Madness and Imbecillity & Wickedness of Mankind ought to appear ordinary Events' (Hume to William Robertson, 27 Nov. 1768, in *New letters of David Hume*, ed. R. Klibansky and E. C. Mossner (Oxford 1954), 186. Hereafter cited as *NHL*.)

political crisis that posed an imminent and severe threat to the survival of Britain's unique and uniquely fragile constitutional order.<sup>2</sup>

This was a reaction to a number of developments on the domestic and imperial political stage during the late 1760s and early 1770s, including the ministerial instability of the first ten years of the reign of George III, the increasing popular support for the radical reform movement that rallied around John Wilkes, and Britain's failure to come to terms with her new imperial role in the aftermath of her victory in the Seven Years War. The repeated outbursts we encounter in Hume's letters of this period occur at moments when several or all of these factors combined in such a way as to create what he regarded as highly explosive situations. While Hume considered such cumulative crises momentous enough to be 'worthy the Pen of the greatest Historian',<sup>3</sup> he was resolved not to continue his *History of England* (1752–61) beyond 1688, instead contenting himself with revising his existing political and historical writings. Whereas his views were rather cautiously expressed in these revisions, they were allowed to pour forth in all their vehemence and vituperation in the letters he sent to his friends.<sup>4</sup> It is these letters that have led a number of modern commentators to conclude that Hume had either made a conservative turn or else had given free rein to a conservative bias already latent in his earlier political philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Beginning with Duncan Forbes, scholars have more carefully re-examined Hume's later political statements and re-appraised the seriousness and complexity of his thinking on the political affairs of the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>6</sup> The picture of Hume's thought that has emerged from these examinations is that of an intense and growing preoccupation with a series of interlocking political, economic, and cultural developments which taken together seemed to him to pose an imminent threat to the survival of a political order he had spent much of his career analysing and defending.<sup>7</sup> The present essay seeks to contribute to this exploration of Hume's later political thought by investigating more closely two central concerns of his later thinking on contemporary affairs, namely the fate of the British

<sup>2</sup> This sense was shared by other contemporary commentators. Cf. Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, 13 Oct. 1769, quoted in *The letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford 1932), ii, 209 n. (Hereafter cited as *HL*.)

<sup>3</sup> Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 5 Feb. 1770: *HL*, ii, 214.

<sup>4</sup> The earliest of the vituperative letters were written in London, where he resided until 1769 following his last political appointment as Undersecretary of State for the Northern Department, but the bulk was written after Hume had retired to Edinburgh, from where he continued to correspond with his friends among the London Scots. On the 'North British' perspective of these letters, see J. G. A. Pocock, 'Hume and the American Revolution', in Pocock, *Virtue, commerce, and history* (Cambridge 1985), 125–41, esp. 127–8.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. David Miller, *Philosophy and ideology in Hume's political thought* (Oxford 1981), Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's philosophy of common life* (Chicago 1984), and Frederick G. Whelan, *Order and artifice in Hume's political philosophy* (Princeton 1985). Against this John B. Stewart argued that 'Hume is liberal, not conservative, in politics': *Opinion and reform in Hume's political philosophy* (Princeton 1992), 4.

<sup>6</sup> See Duncan Forbes, *Hume's philosophical politics* (Cambridge 1975), 125–92; Pocock, 'Hume and the American Revolution', 125–41; Istvan Hont, 'The rhapsody of public debt: David Hume and voluntary state bankruptcy', in Hont, *Jealousy of trade* (Cambridge, MA 2005), 325–53.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume* (London 1989).

Empire, particularly with regard to the American colonies, and the future of established religion.

Our understanding of the place occupied by the problems of empire and religion in Hume's later political thought could benefit from fresh light shed by a recently discovered holograph letter from 1775, addressed to a friend, Andrew Stuart of Torrance, a London Scot and Member of Parliament.<sup>8</sup> News had just reached Edinburgh of the first major military engagement in the War of American Independence, the Battle of Bunker Hill. Hume writes that

It is probably the Fore-runner of a more decisive Advantage, which, if prudently managed, may usher in a temporary Accomodation with the Americans. I believe, however, we should do full as well without any Connections with these factious Colonists. There are indeed four Events, which in my opinion will fully establish our Prosperity. First, that we do not possess a single foot of Land, that we can call our own, in America: Secondly, that, by a common Edict of all the Asiatic Powers, no Englishman under pain of Death, shall ever dare to pass the Cape of Good-Hope: Thirdly, that, if King, Lords and Commons were to offer their united Bond at twenty per cent for 1000 pounds they shall not be able to procure it: Fourthly, that all the Churches shall be converted into Riding Schools, Manufactories, Tennis Courts or Playhouses. Old as I am, I expect to see the three first Objects compleated, and the fourth much advanced.<sup>9</sup>

This passage features some of Hume's most incisive remarks on what he regarded as crucial problems of his time and provides a further significant instance of the pre-occupations that are reflected elsewhere in his extant correspondence of the last decade of his life.

The last sentence of the above-quoted passage echoes the whimsical tone of a number of similar remarks that we encounter in Hume's letters to his friends from the late 1760s onwards. There are parallels with two earlier statements about current affairs, in which he had already expressed his despair at the course taken by political affairs by calling for 'the total Revolt of America' and 'the Expulsion of the English from the East Indies'.<sup>10</sup> These are not concrete policy proposals that Hume actually expected to see fulfilled. They are better understood as thought experiments that allowed him to indulge his fancy by imagining how political affairs could be rearranged in such a way that the crisis he regarded as imminent might still be averted. We should not, however, assume that he did not take the political situation of his day seriously. On the contrary, his letters and published statements of this period reveal that during the last decade of his life he was reacting to events he regarded as intensely troubling. Reading Hume's statements in the new letter alongside those made in other letters as well as in his published writings should therefore allow us to determine how far these

<sup>8</sup> On Stuart see Tristram Clarke, 'Stuart, Andrew (1725–1801)', *ODNB*.

<sup>9</sup> Hume to Andrew Stuart, 1 Aug. 1775. See Appendix below. I am most grateful to Andrew Martin, who located this letter for me.

<sup>10</sup> Hume to William Strahan, 25 Oct. 1769: *HL*, ii. 210. Cf. Hume to Elliot, 22 July 1768: *HL*, ii. 184: 'O! how I long to see America and the East Indies revolted totally & finally.'

statements were meant in jest or in earnest. It should also enable us to shed some fresh light on Hume's attitude towards the war Britain fought to keep her American colonies within the Empire as well as to reconsider his attitude towards established religion. The letter thus provides a starting-point for a re-examination of Hume's later political thought by requiring us to consider anew two of its central preoccupations, the themes of empire and religion.

## I

The North American colonies and their place within the British Empire appear not to have played any special part in Hume's thinking on political matters prior to the early 1750s, when we get a first indication of what Hume thought about American affairs. To be sure, in an essay of 1741 he had established a 'universal axiom' in politics according to which republican governments treated their provinces worse than monarchies did theirs, yet he did not apply this general rule to the specific case of Britain's American colonies, probably due to the fact that these had been founded as settlements rather than acquired through conquest.<sup>11</sup> Hume's high opinion of Britain's settlements in America is clearly expressed in his *History of England*, which refers to 'those noble settlements'.<sup>12</sup> The most extended statement on the American colonies occurs in the volume on the early Stuarts:

What chiefly renders the reign of James [VI and I] memorable, is the commencement of the English colonies in America; colonies established on the noblest footing that has been known in any age or nation. ... The spirit of independency, which was reviving in England, here shone forth in its full lustre, and received new accession from the aspiring character of those, who, being discontented with the established church and monarchy, had sought for freedom amidst those savage deserts.<sup>13</sup> ... Speculative reasoners, during that age, raised many objections to the planting of those remote colonies; and foretold, that, after draining their mother-country of inhabitants, they would soon shake off her yoke, and erect an independent government in America: But time has shewn, that the views, entertained by those who encouraged such generous undertakings,

<sup>11</sup> In 1741 Hume had postulated as a universal axiom or maxim of political science that 'though free governments have been commonly the most happy for those who partake of their freedom; yet are they the most ruinous and oppressive to their provinces' ('That politics may be reduced to a science', in *Essays, moral, political, and literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (rev. edn., Indianapolis 1987), 18–19. Hereafter cited as *Essays*.)

<sup>12</sup> Hume, *The history of England from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the revolution in 1688*, ed. William B. Todd, 6 vols. (Indianapolis 1983), iv. 381. (Hereafter cited as *HE*.)

<sup>13</sup> *HE*, v. 147. Here followed a sentence that Hume omitted from later editions: 'The seeds of many a noble state have been sown in climates kept desolate by the wild manners of the ancient inhabitants; and an asylum secured in that solitary world for liberty and science, if ever the spreading of unlimited empire, or the inroad of barbarous nations, should again extinguish them in this turbulent and restless hemisphere.' This can be read in the context of Hume's concern about universal monarchy, which had been somewhat allayed by the 1760s. See John Robertson, 'Universal monarchy and the liberties of Europe', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Political discourse in modern Britain* (Cambridge 1993), 349–73.

were more just and solid. A mild government and great naval force have preserved, and may long preserve the dominion of England over her colonies.<sup>14</sup>

The 'spirit of independency' that had arisen in early seventeenth-century England and was soon to prove so fatal to the authority of the Stuart monarchy had thus been transplanted from the mother country to its colonies on the Atlantic seaboard of North America. Hume recognized that this had resulted in a peculiar political culture that needed to be respected and required Britain to exercise a 'mild government' over her colonies. When composing his *History of England* in the 1750s and early 1760s, he was therefore sanguine about Britain's ability to retain her hold over her American colonies by means of lenient colonial policies coupled with military, especially naval strength. As we will see, from the mid-1760s Hume was forced seriously to reconsider and ultimately to abandon this sanguine view of the fate of British America in the light of the steadily deteriorating relationship between Britain and her colonies.

Hume's engagement with American affairs began in earnest in 1766 when he moved to London following a two-and-a-half year sojourn in Paris. His return coincided with an important stage in the mounting crisis between Britain and her colonies, which had been sparked by protests against the Stamp Act, passed in 1765 and repealed the following year in response to sustained colonial opposition. In February 1767, Hume took up the position of Undersecretary of State for the Northern Department, which dealt with Britain's diplomatic relations with Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe as well as Russia.<sup>15</sup> American affairs fell into the sphere of responsibility of the Southern Department prior to the creation of a Colonial Department in 1768.<sup>16</sup> Hume held this position for eleven months and during that time was able to witness the unfolding events in Whitehall from a privileged vantage-point.<sup>17</sup> His presence at the centre of the British political world provided him with the opportunity of seeing at close hand the making of colonial policies and the origins of a crisis that was in time to lead to the outbreak of open war between Britain and her colonies. Hume's own views on that crisis were forged during this period of deteriorating colonial relations and intense parliamentary debate, although he is not known to have expressed these views in his

<sup>14</sup> *HE*, v. 148. Cf. *The history of Great Britain. Vol. I: Containing the reigns of James I and Charles I* (Edinburgh 1754), 133–5. Hume added: 'And such advantages have commerce and navigation reaped from these establishments, that more than a fourth of the English shipping is at present computed to be employed in carrying on the traffic with the American settlements.'

<sup>15</sup> In this position Hume worked under the Secretary of State, Major-General Henry Seymour Conway, under whose brother Lord Hertford he had served as secretary and later chargé d'affaires at the British Embassy in Paris before his return to Britain in 1766.

<sup>16</sup> D. B. Horn, *Great Britain and Europe in the eighteenth century* (Oxford 1967), 12–13.

<sup>17</sup> While there is facetiousness in his remark that this made him privy to 'all the Secrets of this Kingdom, and indeed of Europe, Asia, Africa and America' (Hume to Hugh Blair, 1 Apr. 1767: *HL*, ii. 133–4), Hume was certainly able to get insights into parliamentary politics and ministerial affairs during most of the Chatham administration of 1766–8. His patron, General Conway, held responsibility for both the Northern Department and Parliament, where he acted as leader of the Commons for the Chatham administration. It was under the Chatham administration (1766–8) that the Townshend duties were passed and Pitt's motion to nationalize the East India Company was defeated.

official capacity as Undersecretary, perhaps unsurprisingly so, given that his Department was not immediately concerned with American affairs.<sup>18</sup> We are afforded a glimpse of the opinions he held during this period, however, in the form of remarks he made in conversation and later recollected to his printer and friend William Strahan:

I remember, one day, at Lord Bathurst's, the Company, among whom was his Son, the present Chancellor, were speaking of American Affairs; and some of them mention'd former Acts of Authority exercis'd over the Colonies. I observ'd to them, that Nations, as well as Individuals, had their different Ages, which challeng'd a different Treatment. For Instance, My Lord, said I to the old Peer, you have sometimes, no doubt, given your Son a Whipping; and I doubt not, but it was well merited and did him much good: Yet you will not think proper at present to employ the Birch: The Colonies are no longer in their Infancy. But yet I say to you, they are still in their Nonage; and Dr Franklyn wishes to emancipate them too soon from their mother Country.<sup>19</sup>

Hume here modified the paternal argument used by those who regarded as absolute Britain's right to impose taxes on and pass legislation for her colonies. Whereas newly formed colonies were indeed subject to their mother country, with age they acquired a right to a more preferential treatment before eventually reaching the stage at which their autonomy could be contemplated. The implication was that the American colonies would at some point be emancipated by Britain, but that this point would not be reached as soon as had been claimed by Benjamin Franklin, who had for some time been a friend of Hume's.<sup>20</sup> This statement reveals a view of American affairs markedly at variance with the one put forth by those who sought to uphold full parliamentary sovereignty over the colonies. While the view that 'All colonies have their date of independence' had been voiced during the parliamentary debates over the repeal of the Stamp Act, however, few Members of Parliament were willing to contemplate such a prospect.<sup>21</sup>

Towards the end of the 1760s, colonial resistance, which had subsided somewhat following the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766, was once again running high. Parliament's latest attempt to impose a new set of taxes on the colonies in the form of the Townshend duties met with stiff opposition in the form of widespread protests as well as non-importation agreements between the colonies. Hume, now out of office

<sup>18</sup> Due to his first-hand knowledge of French diplomacy, Hume also had contacts to the Southern Department, then led by the Earl of Shelburne. Cf. E. C. Mossner, *The life of David Hume*, 2nd edn. (Oxford 1980), 538–9. (Hereafter cited as *Life*.)

<sup>19</sup> Hume to Strahan, 1 Mar. 1774: *HL*, ii. 287–8. That this conversation took place during Hume's residency in London (1766–8) is suggested by the reference to 'Lord Bathurst's'. Hume remarked to Elliot that 'I continue my parasitical Practices, that is, of dining at all the great Tables that remain in London' (Hume to Elliot, 22 July 1768: *HL*, ii. 184).

<sup>20</sup> For Hume's friendship with Franklin, see Mossner, *Life*, 394–5, 571–2.

<sup>21</sup> In a speech delivered in Parliament, Isaac Barré warned that 'All colonies have their date of independence. The wisdom or folly of our conduct may make it the sooner or later. If we act injudiciously, this point may be reached in the life of many of the members of this House.' (P. D. G. Thomas, *British politics and the Stamp Act crisis: The first phase of the American Revolution 1763–1767* (Oxford 1975), 198.) For Hume's friendly relations with Barré see Mossner, *Life*, 395.

following Conway's resignation in January 1768, could be even more outspoken about current political affairs. He reacted to this further escalation of the colonial crisis with an outburst occurring in a letter to another London Scot, his old friend Gilbert Elliot of Minto:

These are fine doings in America. O! how I long to see America and the East Indies revolted totally & finally, the Revenue reduc'd to half, public Credit fully discredited by Bankruptcy, the third of London in Ruins, and the rascally Mob subdu'd. I think I am not too old to despair of being Witness to all these Blessings.<sup>22</sup>

This is the first of a number of instances in which Hume gave free rein to his feelings of despair about what he regarded as the rapidly deteriorating situation on the political scene, and the earliest indication that he now expected to see the revolt and independence of the colonies in his lifetime. Hume greeted this prospect with mock satisfaction as a remedy for the dire political and economic dilemma facing Britain. The American crisis ranked high on the list of issues he wished to see redressed, a list that included the dramatic increase of the public debt in the aftermath of the Seven Years War and the widespread metropolitan support for the popular reform movement rallying around John Wilkes. Topics such as these were to become recurring and characteristic features of Hume's correspondence during the last decade of his life.

While Hume's views on political affairs in England do not appear to have changed substantially after his move to Edinburgh, where he spent nearly the entire period between 1769 and his death in 1776, he did become even more outspoken in voicing these views. Just as he had done during his earlier residence in France, Hume now dissociated himself in stronger terms from his fellow Britons south of the Tweed and began to refer to the English as 'Barbarians'.<sup>23</sup> The political scene looked just as bleak if not bleaker from Edinburgh than it had done during his residence in London as is evident from a long letter written to Strahan in October 1769, in which Hume laid out 'my Notion of public Affairs':

I think there are very dangerous Tempests brewing, and the Scene thickens every moment. ... Notwithstanding my Age, I hope to see a public Bankruptcy, the total Revolt of America, the Expulsion of the English from the East Indies, the Diminution of London to less than a half, and the Restoration of the Government to the King, Nobility, and Gentry of this Realm.<sup>24</sup>

This echoes the letter to Elliot Hume had written the previous year and contains several parallels with his newly found letter to Stuart, such as the device of speculating about the extent to which events Hume had predicted earlier are now expected to

<sup>22</sup> Hume to Elliot, 22 July 1768: *HL*, ii. 184.

<sup>23</sup> To Strahan, 25 Oct. 1769: *HL*, ii. 209 ('the most stupid and factious Barbarians in the World'). Cf. the same, 30 Jan. 1773: *HL*, ii. 269. For an earlier instance, in which 'Barbarians' refers to the lack of literary taste in England, see Hume to Blair, 26 Apr. 1764: *HL*, i. 436. Hume's Anglophobia is discussed by Pocock, 'Hume and the American Revolution', 127–9, and Livingston, *Philosophical melancholy*, 256–60.

<sup>24</sup> Hume to Strahan, 25 Oct. 1769: *HL*, ii. 209–10.

come to pass in his lifetime. In all three letters the loss of America and ‘the Expulsion of the English from the East Indies’ are mentioned as events Hume expects—and purportedly wishes—to see taking place. His pessimistic assessment of the prospects of Britain’s attempt to retain her hold over her American colonies found expression, though in a far more guarded manner, in a small but significant change Hume made to his *History of England* in the period between the edition of 1767 and that of 1770. Whereas he had earlier maintained that a ‘mild government and great naval force have preserved, and may long preserve the dominion of England over her colonies’, he now replaced the words ‘may long preserve’ with ‘may still preserve during some time’.<sup>25</sup> Taken together with the statements in his private correspondence, this change of a published statement reflects a revision on Hume’s part of his views on American affairs and testifies to his growing conviction that the loss of America was only a question of time, although this inevitable long-term outcome could perhaps be delayed for a while by an exercise of ‘mild government’ on the part of the mother country.

The years between the partial repeal of the Townshend duties in 1770 and the passage of the Tea Act of 1773 were years of relative quiet during which colonial protest subsided to a great degree.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore a little surprising to note that during that period, and indeed up to the spring of 1775, American affairs somewhat receded into the background of Hume’s correspondence as other urgent issues came to the fore.<sup>27</sup> The American problem never fully retreated, however, and came to preoccupy public debate and Hume’s private exchanges with his friends to a hitherto unprecedented degree after the outbreak of open war between Britain and her colonies in April 1775. Soon after news of the first hostilities fought at Lexington and Concord reached Britain, Hume told James Boswell that ‘it was all over in America; we *could* not subdue the colonists, and another gun should not be fired, were it not for decency’s sake; he meant in order to keep up an appearance of power’, adding that ‘we may do very well without America, and he was for withdrawing our troops altogether, and letting the Canadians fall upon our colonists’.<sup>28</sup> Hume elaborated further on this position in the newly found letter he wrote to Stuart upon receiving news of the Battle of Bunker Hill, as well as in a series of letters he wrote in the autumn and winter of 1775. It was at this time that he resumed his extended and intensive correspondence with Strahan,

<sup>25</sup> Compare *HE*, v. 148 with *The history of Great Britain. Vol. I*. This small but significant change appears not to have been noticed so far.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Jerome R. Reich, *British friends of the American Revolution* (Armonk, NY 1998), 30. These were the first years of the administration of Lord North, to whom Hume was initially favourably disposed. See Hume to Strahan, 11 Mar. 1771: *HL*, ii. 236.

<sup>27</sup> Giving his assessment of the condition of Britain in 1771, which Strahan had described as prosperous, Hume points out that ‘all depends on our Union with America, which, in the Nature of things, cannot long subsist’, adding that ‘all this is nothing in comparison of the continual Encrease of our Debts, in every idle War, into which, it seems, the Mob of London are to rush every Minister’ (Hume to Strahan, 11 Mar. 1771: *HL*, ii. 237).

<sup>28</sup> Boswell, 19 June 1775, quoted in *Letters of David Hume to William Strahan*, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill (Oxford 1888), 296.



who had in the meantime acquired a seat in Parliament and had thus ‘ceas’d to be a speculative Politician and became a practical one’.<sup>29</sup> Strahan’s pro-government stance provoked Hume into some of his strongest statements on Britain’s war with her rebellious colonies in a series of letters to the printer and politician, the first of which features his most extensive remarks on the subject:

We hear that some of the Ministers have propos’d in Council, that both Fleet and Army be withdrawn from America, and these Colonists be left entirely to themselves. I wish I had been a Member of His Majesty’s Cabinet Council, that I might have seconded this Opinion. I should have said, that this Measure only anticipates the necessary Course of Events a few Years; that a forced and every day more precarious Monopoly of about 6 or 700,000 Pounds a year of Manufactures, was not worth contending for; that we should preserve the greater part of this Trade even if the Ports of America were open to all Nations; that it was very likely, in our method of proceeding, that we should be disappointed in our Scheme of conquering the Colonies; and that we ought to think beforehand how we were to govern them, after they were conquer’d. . . . Let us, therefore, lay aside all Anger; shake hands, and part Friends. Or if we retain any anger, let it only be against ourselves for our past Folly; and against that wicked Madman, Pitt; who has reduc’d us to our present Condition. *Dixi*.<sup>30</sup>

Hume continued to point out that any attempt to re-conquer America would come at a forbidding moral and economic cost to Britain. The course of action he proposed to recommend to the government was therefore a display of magnanimity on Britain’s part.<sup>31</sup> Given the patriotic mood prevailing at Westminster in the autumn of 1775, it is unlikely that he would have managed to convince the members of the North administration of the prudence of adopting this particular proposal.

By the autumn of 1775 Hume had become completely disenchanted with the ministry and dismissive of Britain’s political and military leadership: ‘Lord North, tho in appearance a worthy Gentleman, has not a head for these great Operations, and that if fifty thousand Men, and twenty Millions of Money were entrusted to such a lukewarm Coward as Gage, they never could produce any Effect.’<sup>32</sup> The impression Hume had formed of the incompetence of those in charge of conducting the war was reinforced by the late embarkation of soldiers the following spring.<sup>33</sup> For once Strahan

<sup>29</sup> Hume to Strahan, 26 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 299.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 300–1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 301. This failed to convince Strahan, who replied a few days later indicating his complete disagreement with Hume’s position and stating that ‘I am entirely for coercive Methods with those obstinate madmen: and why should we despair of success? Why should we suffer the Empire to be so dismembered, without the utmost Exertions on our Part?’ (Strahan to Hume, 30 Oct. 1775, quoted in *HL*, ii. 301 n.)

<sup>32</sup> Hume to Baron Mure of Caldwell, 27 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 303.

<sup>33</sup> Here Hume was speaking from experience, having witnessed at first hand the failure of the projected naval-military invasion of Canada in 1746 due to delays in the embarkation of troops (Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 4 Oct. 1746: *HL*, i. 94–5). For the preparation of the Canadian expedition and its diversion to the French port town of L’Orient see Richard Harding, ‘The expedition to Lorient, 1746’, *The age of sail* 1 (2002), 34–54.

found occasion to agree with Hume, stating that ‘*Delay amounts to Defeat*’.<sup>34</sup> Hume’s worst assumptions about the ministry were confirmed when he discovered that Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty, had gone on a fishing holiday ‘at the time when the Fate of the British Empire is in dependence, and in dependence on him’. This for Hume was the height of irresponsibility and carelessness since all that was required was ‘this single Fact to decide the Fate of the Nation’.<sup>35</sup>

## II

Although Hume’s views on the American crisis stood in stark contrast to those of the majority of politicians and parliamentarians, it was not without parallel in the public debates over America. Among the leading publicists of the time, the one who came closest to and indeed anticipated some of Hume’s position was Josiah Tucker, Dean of Gloucester from 1758 and one of the leading economic writers of the period. The two had corresponded about economic subjects in the 1760s and Hume had facilitated Tucker’s reception among the French *economistes*.<sup>36</sup> Like Hume, Tucker had elaborate and enlightened views on political economy that he could bring to bear on his analysis of the American crisis.<sup>37</sup> The resulting subtlety of his discussion of the economic dimension of Britain’s deteriorating relations with her colonies was quite unmatched in the political commentary that poured forth in newspapers, pamphlets, and sermons in the 1760s and 1770s. Having written about the relationship between trade and empire in the aftermath of the Seven Years War, Tucker was prompted to intervene directly in the debates about America following the passing of the Stamp Act, which he denounced in a pamphlet entitled *A letter from a merchant* (1766). While he did not regard American claims as legitimate, he was one of the first on either side of the Atlantic to interpret early signs of colonial discontent with the exercise of parliamentary sovereignty as an indication of a desire on the part of the colonists to gain independence from Britain—indeed, Tucker added, to establish their own empire.<sup>38</sup> Given this state of affairs, he Tucker regarded a military confrontation as inevitable, leaving Britain with only three possible courses of action which he framed in the form of questions addressed to an imaginary American interlocutor:

<sup>34</sup> Strahan to Hume, 12 Apr. 1776, quoted in *HL*, ii. 314 n.

<sup>35</sup> Hume to Strahan, 10 May 1776: *HL*, ii. 319.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Hume to Lord Kames, 4 Mar. 1758: *HL*, i. 270–2; to Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, 16 June 1768: *HL*, ii. 179–81. See also Hont, *Jealousy of trade*, 70–2, 283–9, 294–6.

<sup>37</sup> For Tucker’s views on the American crisis see J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price: A study in the varieties of eighteenth-century conservatism’, in Pocock, *Virtue, commerce, and history*, 157–91, esp. 159–67, and Reich, *British friends of the American Revolution*, 10–15, 112–18, 164–5.

<sup>38</sup> Josiah Tucker, *A letter from a merchant in London to his nephew in North America* (London 1766), 42.

[S]hall we now compel you, by Force of Arms, to do your Duty?—Shall we procrastinate your Compulsion?—Or shall we entirely give you up; and have no other Connections with you, than if you had been so many Sovereign States, or Independent Kingdoms?<sup>39</sup>

Replying to these questions, Tucker delivered his opinion on the appropriate course of action:

I am not for having Recourse to Military Operations. For granting, that we shall be victorious, still it is proper to enquire, before we begin, How we are to be benefitted by our Victories? And what Fruits are to result from making you a conquered People?—Not an Increase of Trade; that is impossible: For a Shop-keeper will never get the more Custom by beating his Customers: And what is true of a Shop-keeper, is true of a Shop-keeping Nation.<sup>40</sup>

This was the first statement of a position Tucker was to reiterate and intensify throughout the course of the American crisis and the subsequent War of Independence.<sup>41</sup> He steadfastly held on to this position, rejecting all plans for conciliation with the colonies and all hopes set on Britain's victories in the early phases of the War. From the outset, Tucker's case for granting the American colonies independence—or rather, his case for Britain's voluntary separation from her colonies—did not rest entirely on economic foundations, however, since he regarded the American crisis as part of a wider crisis of the constitutional establishment, interwoven inextricably with domestic calls for electoral reform. Like Hume, he looked for the culprits for that crisis among politicians such as William Pitt, whom he accused of conspiring with the London radicals to subvert the established constitutional order. Since the crisis of an empire that had been acquired for the wrong reasons was threatening to bring the British constitution down, it was best to relinquish that empire.<sup>42</sup> American independence would not be detrimental to Britain, either politically or economically, but would, on the contrary, constitute a remedy for the political ills she was afflicted with by pulling the rug from under the feet of those who supported America's claims for independence out of a desire to alter the British constitution.<sup>43</sup>

A different but similarly radical solution to the American problem was advanced by Hume's close friend Adam Smith. From late 1775 onwards there was an expectation among Smith's acquaintances that the magnum opus on political economy he had been working on for nearly a decade was to include an intervention in ongoing debates

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>41</sup> In a pamphlet entitled *The true interest of Great Britain set forth in regard to the colonies*, published as part of a volume of *Four tracts, together with two sermons, on political and commercial subjects* (Gloucester 1774) which also included a reissue of the earlier *Letter from a merchant*.

<sup>42</sup> The colonies, as Tucker stressed later, were 'the Authors of our present Misfortunes; and they will involve us still greater, if we shall obstinately persist in retaining these remote, unmanageable Possessions', quoted in Reich, *British friends of the American Revolution*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 115.

about the American problem.<sup>44</sup> In the spring of 1776 Smith appears to have been even more preoccupied with this topic than Hume himself, who remarked that his friend was said to be ‘very zealous in American Affairs’.<sup>45</sup> This preoccupation found expression in numerous passages of the *Wealth of nations*, published in March 1776 at the height of the American crisis. Smith agreed with Tucker about the folly of acquiring ‘a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers’, even echoing the phrase ‘a Shop-keeping Nation’ coined by Tucker.<sup>46</sup> His comments on America permeate his arguments on trade and colonies in Book IV of the work, which presents a sustained and devastating critique of the British system of colonial trade that culminates in the stark assertion that ‘Under the present system of management, therefore, Great Britain derives nothing but loss from the dominion which she assumes over her colonies.’<sup>47</sup> Smith goes on to discuss proposals for radical solutions to the American problem of the kind that had been put forth repeatedly by Tucker in print and by Hume in private, namely that—in Hume’s words—the American colonists should be left ‘alone to govern or misgovern themselves as they think proper’ and ‘that we should preserve the greater part of this Trade even if the Ports of America were open to all Nations’.<sup>48</sup> Smith commented that

To propose that Great Britain should voluntarily give up all authority over her colonies, and leave them to elect their own magistrates, to enact their own laws, and to make peace and war as they might think proper, would be to propose such a measure as never was, and never will be adopted, by any nation in the world. ... The most visionary enthusiast would scarce be capable of proposing such a measure, with any serious hopes at least of its ever being adopted. If it was adopted, however, Great Britain would not only be immediately freed from the whole annual expence of the peace establishment of the colonies, but might settle with them such a treaty of commerce as would effectually secure to her a free trade, more advantageous to the great body of the people, though less so to the merchants, than the monopoly which she at present enjoys. By thus parting good friends, the natural affection of the colonies to the mother country, which, perhaps, our late dissentions have well nigh extinguished, would quickly revive. It might dispose them not only to respect, for whole centuries together, that treaty of commerce which they had concluded with us at parting, but to favour us in war as well as in trade, and, instead of turbulent and factious subjects, to become our most faithful, affectionate, and generous allies; and the same

<sup>44</sup> Cf. John Roebuck to Adam Smith, 1 Nov. 1775, in *The correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. E. C. Mossner and I. S. Ross, 2nd edn. (Oxford 1987), 184. (Hereafter cited as *Correspondence*.) Hume reproached his friend for the delay in publication. ‘If you wait till the Fate of America be decided, you may wait long’ (Hume to Smith, 8 Feb. 1776: *HL*, ii. 308).

<sup>45</sup> Hume to Smith, *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, 2 vols. (Oxford 1976), ii. 613–14; cf. 661.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 616.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Hume to Mure, 27 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 303; to Strahan, 26 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 300. Hume had restated the latter claim when writing to Smith a month before the publication of the *Wealth of nations*. ‘My Notion is, that the Matter is not so important as is commonly imagin’d. If I be mistaken, I shall probably correct my Error, when I see or read you. Our Navigation and general Commerce may suffer more than our Manufactures’ (Hume to Smith, 8 Feb. 1776: *HL*, ii. 308).

sort of parental affection on the one side, and filial respect on the other, might revive between Great Britain and her colonies, which used to subsist between those of ancient Greece and the mother city from which they descended.<sup>49</sup>

Smith agreed that following this course of action would not entail a significant decrease in Britain's transatlantic trade. His contention that by 'parting good friends, the natural affection of the colonies to the mother country, which, perhaps, our late dissensions have well nigh extinguished, would quickly revive' echoes Hume's appeal to 'lay aside all Anger; shake hands, and part Friends'.<sup>50</sup> In February 1778 Smith composed but did not publish a brief memorandum on the ongoing war, entitled 'Thoughts on the state of the contest with America', which spells out the radical implications inherent in his more cautious comments in the *Wealth of nations*.<sup>51</sup> In this piece he follows Tucker in outlining the 'possible ways in which the present unhappy war with our Colonies may be conceived to end'.<sup>52</sup> Smith's *Thoughts* therefore engage directly with the kind of proposal Tucker had put forth in his pamphlets since 1766 and at the same time echo Hume's demand, articulated in the newly discovered letter to Stuart, 'that we do not possess a single foot of Land, that we can call our own, in America'. Here Smith comes closest to the position advanced by Tucker in print and by Hume in private by openly contemplating the possibility of a 'complete emancipation of America from all dependency upon Great Britain'.<sup>53</sup>

While the economic and political proposals put forth by Hume, Tucker, and Smith stand out among the multitude of contemporary contributions to the debates sparked by the American crisis, these three writers were far from the only or even the most outspoken opponents of the government's policy on America. Outside Parliament the most vocal opponents included radicals like Wilkes, dissenting ministers like Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, as well as Old Whigs like the historian Catharine Macaulay. Moreover, the American cause resonated with the merchants and aldermen of the City of London and widespread popular support for the cause of America extended through all ranks of society and all parts of England and, to a lesser extent, Scotland.<sup>54</sup> Many of the groups and individuals that had supported 'Wilkes and Liberty' were now opposing the War with America. There were numerous commonalities as well as connections

<sup>49</sup> *Wealth of nations*, ii. 616–17.

<sup>50</sup> Hume to Strahan, 26 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 301. This poses the question of whether Smith's remarks should be read as a direct reply to Hume's. While it is intriguing to speculate that he could have been shown Hume's letters to Mure or Strahan when he was in London seeing the *Wealth of nations* through Strahan's press, we need to note that the work was already being printed in the autumn of 1775. Smith is therefore unlikely to have been able to make further amendments at this stage.

<sup>51</sup> This has been preserved in the form of a manuscript in the hand of Smith's friend, the moderate clergyman Alexander Wedderburn and is reprinted as 'Smith's thoughts on the state of the contest with America, February 1778', in *Correspondence*, Appendix B, 377–85. For the immediate context of this piece, see Ian Simpson Ross, *The life of Adam Smith* (Oxford 1995), 292–5.

<sup>52</sup> 'Thoughts on the state of the contest', 380.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. James E. Bradley, 'The British public and the American Revolution', in H. T. Dickinson (ed.), *Britain and the American Revolution* (New York 1998), 124–54.

between extra-parliamentary opposition in Britain and popular protest in America, due in large measure to the fact that the supporters of Wilkes and the opponents of colonial policies were both opposing what they considered unconstitutional attempts by Parliament to encroach on the liberties of the subjects and deny them proper representation. The two causes were regarded by many on both sides of the Atlantic as intimately related.<sup>55</sup> This raises the question of how Hume could show considerable sympathy with the American cause while at the same time castigating Wilkes and his supporters, in particular the London 'Mob', often in one and the same letter.<sup>56</sup> In other words, a considerable interpretative problem is posed by the fact that Hume in effect shifted the blame of responsibility for the multifaceted crisis that he saw as engulfing Britain on to precisely those groups that were the most vocal supporters of America. In order to account for this apparent contradiction that runs through Hume's statements on British political affairs in the 1760s and 1770s, we need to consider two central elements of his political science, his defence of the British political establishment and his opposition to the extension of the Empire.

### III

Hume's concern in the 1760s and 1770s lay, as it had done for the entire course of his intellectual and literary career following the publication of the *Treatise* in 1739–40, with explaining and defending the constitutional framework of modern Britain.<sup>57</sup> He had commenced this project in his *Essays, moral and political* (1741–8), which contained a sustained analysis of the British constitution and the party-political divisions that had grown out of it, and continued it with the *History of England* (1754–61). The latter work provided a narrative account of the process by which Britain's constitutional framework had emerged as the fortuitous outcome of the civil and religious upheavals of the Stuart era and had been fully established during the Revolution of 1688. While Hume maintained that a mixture of the two basic principles of authority and liberty could be found in all European governments, he deemed Britain's post-1688 establishment to be one of the most finely balanced and at the same time most fragile constitutional constructs of modern times. In the English constitution, which had been extended to Scotland with the Union of 1707, sovereignty was lodged in the King-in-Parliament and the balance between the executive and legislative functions of government was upheld by means of a constant struggle between opposing political parties as well as by an institutionalized system of 'corruption' in which the Court exerted influence on Parliament in order to curb the otherwise excessive power of the

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Livingston, *Philosophical melancholy*, 272.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Hume to Elliot, 22 July 1768: *HL*, ii. 184; to Strahan, 11 Mar. 1771: *HL*, ii. 237; to Mure, 27 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 303.

<sup>57</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, 'Propriety, property and prudence: David Hume and the defence of the revolution', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Political discourse in modern Britain* (Cambridge 1993), 302–20.

legislative assembly.<sup>58</sup> From the outset, Hume's writings on politics betrayed a sense that the crowning achievement of this government, the unprecedented extent of political liberty enshrined in it, was at the same time its greatest weakness and a potential cause of its demise. From the late 1760s onwards, Hume feared that the fine balance between authority and liberty that was at the heart of the British constitution was in imminent danger of being upset to the point where he might see his earlier predictions about the dire prospects of the British constitution come true in his own lifetime.<sup>59</sup>

In the aftermath of the controversial Middlesex election of 1768 popular support for Wilkes, who had been ousted from his seat in Parliament, had developed into an extra-parliamentary movement that rallied around the cry 'Wilkes and Liberty' and pressed for a variety of political reforms. The movement had a radical edge and cries for the abolition of the monarchy were intermittently heard, especially in London, one of its centres of support, where Wilkes was elected Lord Mayor in 1774. Hume's numerous references to the London 'Mob' indicate that he regarded the popular, extra-parliamentary influence on the conduct of government business with a disparagement at times bordering on despair.<sup>60</sup> He predicted that 'There must necessarily be a Struggle between the Mob and the Constitution' and hoped for 'the Restoration of the Government to the King, Nobility, and Gentry of this Realm'.<sup>61</sup> As a defender of a constitutional establishment that was essentially oligarchic in nature, Hume was strongly opposed to the radical and republican political demands that came to the fore in the 1760s and 1770s, writing to his nephew in 1775 that 'Such Fools are they, who perpetually cry out Liberty: [and think to] augment it, by shaking off the Monarchy.'<sup>62</sup> Read together, Hume's scattered statements on the major political development of the 1760s and 1770s indicate that he regarded the extra-parliamentary movement in London and colonial protests in America as related political phenomena. The link Hume saw between these two challenges to the authority of the King-in-Parliament is made explicit in his reply to his friend William Mure, another London Scot and Member of Parliament, who had asked him to draft a petition to the King for his constituency of Renfrewshire as an open avowal of its support for the government's

<sup>58</sup> Hume, 'Of the independency of Parliament' (1741), in *Essays*, 42–6.

<sup>59</sup> This is a recurring theme in Hume's letters. See, for instance, Hume to Strahan, 3 Mar. 1772: *HL*, ii. 260–1. Cf. Hume to Strahan, 13 Nov. 1775: *HL*, ii. 304–5: '[T]he English government is certainly happy, though probably not calculated for Duration, by reason of its excessive Liberty.'

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Hume to Mure, 18 Oct. 1768: *HL*, ii. 189 ('the late Mobs'); to Strahan, 21 Jan. 1771: *HL*, ii. 234 ('the despicable London Mob'); the same, 11 Mar. 1771: *HL*, ii. 237 ('the Mob of London'); 25 Mar. 1771: *HL*, ii. 241 ('the contemptible Populace of London'); 25 June 1771: *HL*, ii. 244 ('the London Mob'); to Mure, 27 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 303 ('those insolent Rascals in London and Middlesex'). Yet Duncan Forbes has pointed out that Hume's references to the English 'barbarians' are often directed at 'great men' rather than the mob; cf. *Hume's philosophical politics*, 189.

<sup>61</sup> Hume to Strahan, 13 Mar. 1770: *HL*, ii. 218; 25 Oct. 1769: *HL*, ii. 210.

<sup>62</sup> To David Hume the younger, 8 Dec. 1775: *HL*, ii. 306.

strong stance against the Americans. Hume declined this, instead sketching out an alternative petition:

If the Country of Renfrew think it indispensably necessary for them to interpose in public Matters, I wish they woud advise the King first to punish those insolent Rascals in London and Middlessex, who daily insult him and the whole Legislature, before he think of America. Ask him, how he can expect, that a form of Government will maintain an Authority at 3000 Miles distance when it cannot make itself be respected or even treated with common Decency at home.<sup>63</sup>

This statement indicates that Hume regarded the extra-parliamentary reform movement in England as a direct challenge to the authority of the British government, a challenge that was in its own way at least as serious as the colonial resistance that had escalated into the War of American Independence.

While the lack of domestic respect for the King-in-Parliament was worrying in itself, especially as it cast serious doubts over the prospects of Parliament's attempt to impose its authority on the American colonies, Hume was even more concerned about the domestic repercussions of the loss of the colonies. Writing to Strahan in November 1775, Hume suggested that

the worst Effect of the Loss of America, will not be the Detriment to our Manufactures, which will be a mere trifle, or to our Navigation, which will not be considerable; but to the Credit and Reputation of Government, which has already but too little Authority. You will probably see a Scene of Anarchy and Confusion open'd at home, the best Consequence of which is a settled Plan of arbitrary Power; the worst, total Ruin and Destruction.<sup>64</sup>

Due to the fragility of the British constitution the prospect of the eventual loss of the American colonies raised the spectre of the violent death of the British constitution, a death Hume had prognosticated, albeit as a theoretical possibility, as early as 1741.<sup>65</sup> Compared with this scenario, the loss of the colonies seemed the lesser of two evils. Even though 'the loss of an empire was a high price to pay for institutional stability',<sup>66</sup> it was one Hume would have paid only too gladly in order to safeguard that stability. Reacting to news of the Battle of Bunker Hill, the first major engagement of the War that had resulted in a pyrrhic victory for the British army over the Revolutionary forces at the Charlestown peninsula near Boston, Hume devised the whimsical thought experiment in his letter to Stuart, postulating 'four Events, which in my opinion will fully establish our Prosperity'. The first two of these are 'that we do not possess a single

<sup>63</sup> To Mure, 27 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 303.

<sup>64</sup> To Strahan, 13 Nov. 1775: *HL*, ii. 304–5.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. 'Whether the British Government inclines more to absolute monarchy or to a republic' (1741), in *Essays*, 47–53. The fine balance between liberty and authority as well as the violence of party meant that since there was a distinct possibility that the constitution might not endure; it was therefore possible to predict the most likely manner of its demise or destruction.

<sup>66</sup> The phrase is in Pocock's '1776: The revolution against Parliament', in Pocock, *Virtue, commerce, and history*, 73–88, esp. 86.



foot of Land, that we can call our own, in America' and 'that, by a common Edict of all the Asiatic Powers, no Englishman under pain of Death, shall ever dare to pass the Cape of Good-Hope', both of which echo similar remarks he had first made in the late 1760s.<sup>67</sup> Had Hume's whimsical demands been put into practice, the bulk of the first British Empire would have been eliminated with one stroke. This raises the question of the nature of Hume's views on the Empire and the extent to which these views can help to explain his reaction to the American crisis.

These views go back to Britain's involvement in an epic struggle with France during the Seven Years War (1756–63), a war Hume considered 'unnecessary' and later described to a French correspondent as 'that horrible, destructive, ruinous War; more pernicious to the Victors than to the Vanquished'.<sup>68</sup> This betrays Hume's acute awareness that Pitt's hugely successful military strategy during the Seven Years War had not only resulted in the acquisition of a large territorial empire, but had entailed a spectacular increase in the national debt.<sup>69</sup> In order to pay for the expenses of maintaining and defending that empire Parliament had devised successive ill-fated schemes to tax the colonies in order to make them share the considerable financial burden of their own defence.<sup>70</sup> Like Tucker, Hume thought that the worst Britain could do in this already dire political and financial situation was to try and re-conquer her colonies. The extent of military force and political oppression required for any such attempt to subdue the colonies was immense, as Hume pointed out to Strahan on 26 October 1775:

Arbitrary Power can extend its oppressive Arm to the Antipodes; but a limited Government can never long be upheld at a distance, even where no Disgusts have interven'd: Much less, where such violent Animosities have taken place. We must, therefore, annul all the Charters; abolish every democratical Power in every Colony; repeal the Habeas Corpus Act with regard to them; invest every Governor with full discretionary or arbitrary Powers; confiscate the Estates of all the chief Planters; and hang three fourths of their Clergy. To execute such Acts of destructive Violence twenty thousand Men will not be sufficient; nor thirty thousand to maintain them, in so wide and disjointed a Territory. And who are to pay so great an Army? The Colonists cannot at any time, much less after reducing them to such a State of Desolation: We ought not, and indeed cannot, in the over-loaded or rather over-whelm'd and totally ruin'd State of our Finances.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> See nn. 10, 22 above.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Hume to Strahan, 11 Mar. 1771: *HL*, ii. 237; to [Trudaine de Montigny], 25 May 1767: *NHL*, 235.

<sup>69</sup> The increase of national debt threatened another way in which Britain's constitution might come to an end. Cf. Hume to Strahan, 11 Mar. 1771: *HL*, ii. 237 ('I can foresee nothing but certain and speedy Ruin either to the Nation or to the public Creditors') and *HE*, iv. 373 note c ('[T]he endless increase of national debts is the direct road to national ruin'). For an in-depth discussion see Hont, *Jealousy of trade*, 325–53, esp. 340–1.

<sup>70</sup> According to Sir John Pringle, Hume regarded the British conquest of Canada during the War as a factor contributing to the disenchantment and eventual revolt of the colonies (Pringle to Hume, Mar. 1774, quoted in Livingston, *Philosophical melancholy*, 311).

<sup>71</sup> *HL*, ii. 300–1. Cf. Tucker's assessment, first made in 1766: 'Is this now a gainful Trade, and fit to be encouraged in a commercial Nation, so many Millions in Debt already?' (*Letter from a merchant*, 47).

This last statement indicates that Hume's acute concern about the American crisis and that the war was at least in part due to the dramatic increase of the national debt as a result of imperial expansion and defence. This poses the question whether Hume was actually supportive of American demands for self-government or whether the stance he took on the American crisis was motivated primarily or even exclusively by his concern for Britain's self-interest. In this context it is worth emphasizing that it would be misleading to understand Hume's often-quoted statement that 'I am an American in my Principles' as indicating a whole-hearted agreement with the political principles underpinning American resistance to British policies. That statement was immediately followed by the qualifying remark that Britain should 'let them alone to govern or misgovern themselves as they think proper'.<sup>72</sup> This does indicate that by at least 1775 Hume supported American claims for self-government.<sup>73</sup> We have seen that he had earlier recognized the great degree of liberty prevalent in Britain's American colonies and that he had been ambivalent about Britain's right to impose taxes on the colonies since the Stamp Act crisis of 1765–6. Yet the new letter to Stuart suggests that he was far from sympathetic to popular forms of resistance in the colonies, speaking of 'these factious Colonists' and, in a later letter to another correspondent, of 'these frenzies of the people'.<sup>74</sup> While Hume feared the spectre of factionalism and popular unrest on both sides of the Atlantic, its appearance in America was less troubling since it could in theory be dealt with by separation, while the extra-parliamentary reform movement in Britain posed an immediate threat to the oligarchic establishment. Hume's disparaging comments about the politics of the people, his sustained critique of the classical republican idiom, and his refutation of Lockean arguments about the contractual nature of government make it highly unlikely that he would have found much to agree with in either the Declaration of Independence or the notion that popular sovereignty underpinned the Federal Constitution. While Hume's own 'Idea of a perfect commonwealth', outlined in a 1752 essay of that title, appears to have had a profound impact on at least one of the American founders, the new constitutional order about to be created on the other side of the Atlantic went significantly beyond the political world Hume himself was prepared to envisage.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Hume to Mure, 27 Oct. 1775: *HL*, ii. 303.

<sup>73</sup> Hume furthermore assumed from at least the early 1770s that the colonies 'wanted only a pretext to shake off their subjection to their mother country' (Pringle to Hume, Mar. 1774; cf. the same, Jan. 1773, both quoted in Livingston, *Philosophical melancholy*, 311).

<sup>74</sup> Hume to John Home, 8 Feb. 1776: *NHL*, 210.

<sup>75</sup> For Hume's influence on James Madison see Douglass Adair, '“That politics may be reduced to a science”: David Hume, James Madison, and the tenth Federalist', *Huntington Library quarterly* 20 (1957), 343–60. A more nuanced assessment of Madison's use of Hume's writings is provided by Mark G. Spencer, 'Hume and Madison on faction', *William and Mary quarterly* 59 (2002), 869–96.

## IV

The newly found letter to Stuart is the only known letter from the last decade of Hume's life to include religion among the social, political, and economic ills he wished to see addressed in his lifetime. This raises the question what connection, if any, there is in Hume's thought between the issues of religion and empire, in particular in the context of the American crisis. Hume clearly regarded religion as one of the root causes of the American colonists' 'spirit of independency' and his views on how that spirit had been transplanted from the mother country to the colonies can be traced back to the interpretative framework of his earlier *Essays, moral and political* (1741–2) as well as his large-scale narrative account of Stuart history in the *History of Great Britain* (1754–6). In the latter work Hume had described how the Puritans' 'spirit of enthusiasm' had allied itself with and contributed to the increase in the 'spirit of liberty' in England with destructive consequences for the Stuart constitution and fortuitous if largely unintended ones for the establishment of a regular system of liberty in Britain. During the reigns of James VI and I and Charles I the 'puritans, restrained in England, shipped themselves off for America, and laid there the foundations of a government, which possessed all the liberty, both civil and religious, of which they found themselves bereaved in their native country', with the result that 'The spirit of independency, which was reviving in England, here shone forth in its full lustre.'<sup>76</sup> The Puritans had helped to transplant that spirit from the Old World to the New since their religious enthusiasm was a prime source of the 'spirit of independency' in the New England colonies just as it had been a prime cause of the rise of the 'spirit of liberty' in Stuart Britain. Hume's statement to Strahan that governing the rebellious colonies after they had been conquered by British forces would necessitate 'Acts of destructive Violence', such as having to 'hang three fourths of their Clergy', indicates his awareness of the intimate involvement of the dissenting clergy in colonial protest, resistance, and eventual rebellion against Britain.<sup>77</sup> Hume, like Edmund Burke, was acutely conscious of the religious dimension of the American Revolution.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> *HE*, v. 241, 262.

<sup>77</sup> For the relationship between dissenting Protestantism and colonial opposition, see Dickinson (ed.), *Britain and the American Revolution*, 93–4.

<sup>78</sup> This point was more famously made by Burke in his speech on conciliation with the colonies delivered before Parliament on 22 Mar. 1775: 'Religion, always a principle of energy, in this new people is no way worn out or impaired; and their mode of professing it is also one main cause of this free spirit. The people are protestants; and of that kind which is the most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion. This is a persuasion not only favourable to liberty, but built upon it. I do not think, Sir, that the reason of this averseness in the dissenting churches, from all that looks like absolute government, is so much to be sought in their religious tenets, as in their history. [T]he dissenting interests have sprung up in direct opposition to all the ordinary powers of the world; and could justify that opposition only on a strong claim to natural liberty. Their very existence depended on the powerful and unremitted assertion of that claim. All protestantism, even the most cold and passive, is a sort of dissent. But the religion most prevalent in our Northern Colonies is a refinement on the principle of resistance; it is the dissidence of dissent, and the protestantism of the protestant religion' (*The writings and speeches of Edmund Burke: Party, parliament, and the American war, 1774–1780*, ed. W. M. Elofson, John A. Woods, and William B. Todd (Oxford 1996), 121–2).

Yet Hume's statement in the new letter to Stuart hints at general views about established religion that are not confined to the immediate context of the American crisis considered so far. We therefore need to go beyond this particular context and consider the letter in the light of Hume's attitude towards the clergy and his position on church establishment. Hume concludes his list of 'four Events, which in my opinion will fully establish our Prosperity' by demanding that 'all the Churches shall be converted into Riding Schools, Manufactories, Tennis Courts or Playhouses', adding that he expects to see this process 'much advanced' during his own lifetime. This statement is very striking indeed, even if we take account of the fact that it was made in a private letter to a friend and allow for the possibility that it contains a modicum of jest or irony on Hume's part. It is one of Hume's strongest recorded statements on established religion and as such needs to be read in conjunction with remarks on the subject to be found in his published writings. These fall into two broad categories, those that offer a disparaging description of certain forms of religion as destabilizing to political order and those that seem to indicate some measure of support for other forms of established religion as an integral part of a well-ordered society. On the one hand Hume castigated most forms of established religion as either superstitious, such as Catholicism, or enthusiastic, like seventeenth-century Puritanism. His *Essays* and his *History of England* contain devastating analyses of the corrosive impact of religious fanaticism on public order. On the other hand Hume repeatedly stressed the importance of a religious establishment for the preservation of public morality in a well-ordered society. In the *History* he indicated that during certain periods of history several Christian churches had acted in a way that had helped to strengthen or even reform civil society. This had been true to some extent of the Catholic Church of medieval England, but it was also true of the Church of England of his own time, which represented an attenuated or mitigated form of superstition, a kind of middle way between the superstition of the Roman mother church and the enthusiasm of certain Calvinist strands of Protestantism. If there is one common theme in Hume's scattered remarks on this topic, it is that established religion ought to be subordinate to civil authority. It is in this sense that he claims in the *History* that 'there must be an ecclesiastical order, and a public establishment of religion in every civilized community'.<sup>79</sup>

There is a striking dissonance, however, between Hume's measured support for an established church in his published writings and the new evidence provided by the strong statement, however jocular, that Hume made in his letter to Stuart. This seeming discrepancy between public statements in the *Essays* and *History* and private

<sup>79</sup> *HE*, iii. 134–5. This is underscored by the fact that Hume did not exclude religion from the ideal republican government he outlined in his 1752 essay, 'Idea of a perfect commonwealth'. In his blueprint for a federal republic, clear provisions are made to ensure that the religious establishment is subordinate to civil government and episcopacy is eliminated in favour of a direct control of doctrinal issues by the magistrate. See *Essays*, 512–29, and the discussion in Marc M. Arkin, '“The intractable principle”: David Hume, James Madison, religion, and the tenth Federalist', *American journal of legal history* 39 (1995), 148–76, esp. 165–7.

remarks made in his letters to friends poses anew the question of Hume's actual convictions about the nature and function of established religion. One way of seeking to throw his opinions on this matter into greater relief is by comparing them with those expressed to others with whom he is known to have debated issues such as this in the latter half of his life. These include the Parisian literati around Baron d'Holbach, an intellectual circle that comprised most of the leading *philosophes*, whom Hume had ample occasion to meet during his two and a half year sojourn in Paris in 1763–6. Among them were some, who, like Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert, Denis Diderot, and Claude Adrien Helvétius, became his close friends and whose correspondence with him provides additional clues about the extent to which Hume agreed or disagreed with the *philosophes*. What is clear from the surviving evidence—some of it anecdotal—is that Hume was interacting with a group that shared his strong interest in religion. While the course of the animated debates about religion conducted at the Baron's dinner table cannot be reconstructed in great detail, sufficient evidence is provided in the form of reports and recollections by the participants in these debates to give us a broad idea of the topics discussed in these debates.

One fertile subject of discussion among the members of d'Holbach's coterie was provided by French and British attempts to convert American Indians to Christianity. Hume's humorous contribution to this discussion, recorded by Diderot, made clear that he did not believe such efforts to have had any lasting effect on the indigenous populations.<sup>80</sup> While the *philosophes* shared Hume's scepticism about such attempts to export Christianity to the civilizations of the New World, they also pondered its fate in the Old, especially in Britain, as Diderot reported to his mistress Sophie Volland:

La religion chrétienne est presque éteinte dans toute l'Angleterre. Les déists y sont sans nombre; il n'y a presque point d'athées; ceux qui le sont s'en cachent. Un athée et un scélérat sont presque des noms synonymes pour eux. La première fois que M. Hume se trouva à la table du baron, il étoit assis à côté de lui. Je ne sais à quel propos le philosophe anglois s'avisa de dire au baron qu'il ne croyoit pas aux athées, qu'il n'en avoit jamais vu. Le baron lui dit: 'Comptez combien nous

<sup>80</sup> 'Puisque j'en suis sur ce chapitre, encore un fait que je tiens de M. Hume, et qui vous apprendra ce qu'il faut penser de ces prétendues conversions cannibales ou huronnes. Vin ministre croyait avoir fait un petit chef-d'œuvre en ce genre: il eut la vanité de montrer son prosélyte; il l'amena donc à Londres. On interroge le petit Huron; il répond à merveille. On le conduit à la chapelle; on l'admet à la cène, ou communion qui, comme vous savez, se fait sous les deux espèces; après la cène, le ministre lui dit: 'Eh bien! mon fils, ne vous sentez-vous pas plus animé de l'amour de Dieu? La grâce du sacrement n'opère-t-elle pas en vous? Votre âme n'est-elle pas échauffée?—Oui, répondit le petit Huron, le vin fait fort bien; mais si l'on m'avait donné de l'eau-de-vie, je crois qu'elle aurait encore mieux fait.' ' (Diderot to Sophie Volland, 6 Oct. 1765, in Diderot, *Lettres à Sophie Volland*, ed. A. Babelon, 3 vols. (Paris 1930), ii. 297–8.) It is instructive to compare these disparaging remarks about the ineffectiveness of European missionary work in North America with contemporary attempts to provide a theological justification for the efforts of the Society for Propagating the Gospel and the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge. Cf. M. A. Stewart, 'Hume in the service of American deism', in Emilio Mazza and Emanuele Ronchetti (eds.), *New essays on David Hume* (Milan 2007), 309–43, esp. 326–32 and sources cited there.

sommes ici.' Nous étions dix-huit. Le baron ajouta: 'Il n'est pas malheureux de pouvoir vous en montrer quinze du premier coup: les trois autres ne savent qu'en penser.'<sup>81</sup>

Even though it is rather unlikely that Hume would have concurred with Diderot's contention that Christianity was nearly extinguished in England, it is intriguing to note that the decline of established religion and the purported rise of deism formed part of the topic for the dinner-table conversations Hume had with members of d'Holbach's circle. Their views on the imminent demise of Christianity in its European heartland—some members of the circle went so far as to maintain that Christianity would be abolished in Europe by the end of the eighteenth century—anticipate the views in Hume's newly found letter. It is worth noting that the addressee of Hume's newly discovered letter, Stuart, who was then in Paris on legal business, is known to have been present at d'Holbach's table and, according to anecdotal evidence, made 'a battle in favour of a future state'.<sup>82</sup> Hume's exchanges with the *philosophes* were not restricted to the future of Christianity, however, as a number of the members of d'Holbach's coterie urged Hume to take up the history of the Church as a subject worthy of his pen. Though Hume appears to have contemplated such a project for a while, in the end nothing came of it.<sup>83</sup>

Even if we take into consideration that similar comments were probably made at d'Holbach's dinner table, the statement Hume made to Stuart is nevertheless striking. It is not, however, the only such statement he is known to have made. In August 1776, almost exactly a year after writing to Stuart, Hume had his famous death-bed conversation with Smith.<sup>84</sup> By then his circumstances had changed markedly: Having suffered for nearly a year from an advanced illness, Hume fully acknowledged that he had only a short while to live, impressing his friends with the equanimity with which he confronted his certain demise. This forms the backdrop to his second-last conversation with Smith, which the latter reported when writing to a mutual friend less than a week later. According to this report, Hume said:

<sup>81</sup> Diderot adds: 'Un peuple qui croit que c'est la croyance d'un Dieu et non pas les bonnes lois qui font les honnêtes gens ne me paroît guère avancé' (To Volland, 6 Oct. 1765: *Lettres*. ii. 298). Diderot later related this story to Samuel Romilly and other versions told to Boswell and Samuel Rogers are also extant (Mossner, *Life*, 483 n.). Alan Kors makes a credible argument for not taking d'Holbach's reply at face value. He sees the significant issue as the remarkable freedom with which d'Holbach's guests conversed about religion. See Alan C. Kors, *D'Holbach's coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris* (Princeton 1976), 41–63, esp. 41–2.

<sup>82</sup> According to Alexander Carlyle, Hume 'said that the Club in Paris (Baron ...) to which he belong'd were of Opinion that Christianity would be abolished in Europe by the End of the 18th Century; and that they Laughed at Andrew Stuart for making a Battle in Favour of a Future State, and Call'd him L'ame immortelle' (Alexander Carlyle, *Anecdotes and characters of the times*, ed. James Kinsley (London 1973), 138).

<sup>83</sup> See Friedrich Melchior Grimm, quoted in translation by Mossner, *Life*, 485. From Hume's correspondence with his bookseller Andrew Millar it appears that he had initially thought of this project as merely a fanciful idea, but had subsequently done some actual preparatory reading for it. See Michael Morrisroe Jr., 'Hume's ecclesiastical history: A new letter', *English studies* 53 (1972), 431–3; cf. Hume to Millar, 15 Mar. 1762: *HL*, i. 352.

<sup>84</sup> Smith had been visiting Hume in Edinburgh, where this conversation—according to Smith 'the last, except one, that I ever had with him'—took place on 8 August 1776 (Smith to Strahan, 9 Nov. 1776: *Correspondence*, 219).

[W]hen I was lately reading the dialogues of Lucian in which he represents one Ghost as pleading for a short delay till he should marry a young daughter, another till he should finish a house he had begun, a third till he had provided a portion for two or three young Children, I began to think of what Excuse I could alledge to Charon in order to procure a short delay, and as I have now done everything that I ever intended to do, I acknowledge that for some time no tolerable one occurred to me; at last I thought I might say, Good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of people; have a little patience only till I have the pleasure of seeing the churches shut up, and the Clergy sent about their business; but Charon would reply, O you loitering rogue; that wont happen these two hundred years; do you fancy I will give you a lease for so long a time? Get into the boat this instant.<sup>85</sup>

Having obtained permission from Hume to attach a record of this conversation to the philosopher's brief autobiography, Smith composed an extended account of that conversation in the form of a purported letter to Strahan, which featured a more elaborate version of Hume's reply to Charon. Unlike the earlier letter, which was written while Hume was still alive, the version Strahan published after his death had been significantly amended by Smith who had toned down some of the remarks on religion.<sup>86</sup> Thus Hume's wish to 'have the pleasure of seeing the churches shut up, and the Clergy sent about their business' was replaced in the published version with the more general and less contentious phrase 'the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition'.<sup>87</sup>

As recorded by Smith in his initial letter, Hume's whimsical final remarks to Charon provide us with an illuminating point of comparison with the striking statement in the newly found letter to Stuart. A general similarity consists in the jocular tone of both statements, although we have no reason to doubt the earnestness of Hume's avowed goal 'to open the eyes of people'.<sup>88</sup> In both contexts we find Hume contemplating the decline of religion and ascertaining the extent to which it could be expected to take place in his own lifetime. While in 1775 Hume had demanded that 'all the Churches shall be converted into Riding Schools, Manufactories, Tennis Courts or Playhouses', a year later he was whimsically asking for a new lease of life in the form of 'a little patience' from Charon 'only till I have the pleasure of seeing the churches shut up, and the Clergy sent about their business'. On the latter occasion, the closing of the churches is presented as at least in part a direct outcome of Hume's endeavours 'to open the eyes of people'. While Hume earlier expected to see this goal much advanced in his own lifetime, Charon's reply that this 'wont happen these two hundred years' might suggest that he was now expecting this process to take place within a far more extensive

<sup>85</sup> Smith to Alex. Wedderburn, 14 Aug. 1776: *Correspondence*, 203–4.

<sup>86</sup> For the composition and publication of this piece see Ross, *Life of Smith*, 298–304.

<sup>87</sup> The printed version also omitted the following sentence: 'Poor David Hume is dying very fast, but with great cheerfulness and good humour and with more real resignation to the necessary course of things, than any Whining Christian ever dyed with pretended resignation to the will of God' (Smith to Wedderburn: *Correspondence*, 203). It furthermore included an additional reply Hume thought of giving to an increasingly irate Charon; see Smith to Strahan, 9 Nov. 1776: *Correspondence*, 219.

<sup>88</sup> Smith's later version changes this to 'the eyes of the Public' (*Correspondence*, 219).

timeframe. Commentators have long sought to reconstruct Hume's private views on established religion and some have recently come to regard these as unrecoverable, preferring instead to return to the more guarded and balanced remarks on religion to be found in his published writings.<sup>89</sup> While the new letter does not allow us to resolve the interpretative problems concerning the role of religion in Hume's later political thought, it does shed some fresh light on these problems and takes us a little closer towards uncovering Hume's privately held views on religion.

## V

In conjunction with other evidence from Hume's works and correspondence surveyed in the preceding pages, the new letter sheds light on an issue that has recently become once more the matter of debate among scholars of eighteenth-century thought, namely Hume's status as an Enlightenment thinker. In a major new survey and reassessment of the intellectual origins, socio-cultural context, and philosophical programme of the Enlightenment, Jonathan Israel has forcefully, if not altogether convincingly, argued that we should regard Hume as a proponent of what he has labelled the 'moderate mainstream' of the Enlightenment to be distinguished from the 'Radical Enlightenment', which he associates with 'modernity'.<sup>90</sup> From the pages of Israel's work Hume emerges as essentially a conservative thinker who 'diverges fundamentally from' and was 'on the whole more of an opponent than an ally of the Radical Enlightenment'. This categorization is based on a number of arguments, among which Hume's stance on empire and religion figures prominently. While Israel acknowledges Hume's expressed opposition to empire, he nevertheless argues that Hume's political philosophy 'effectively legitimized even the most oppressive institutions of empire' outside Europe. On the strength of what he regards as Hume's views on religion, Israel pronounces him to have been 'a "non-atheist" in a particular eighteenth-century sense', whose views on religion and morality stand in the starkest contrast to those of Diderot.<sup>91</sup> A similar interpretation had earlier been advanced by Donald Livingston, who champions Hume as a conservative political thinker and a defender of 'philosophical theism' and argues that his outlook on religion should be distinguished from that of Enlightenment critics of religion. Both interpretations evidently contain a considerable amount of overstatement and other scholars have sought to provide a

<sup>89</sup> A recent commentator has suggested that Hume would likely be 'shocked' at the apparent waning of established religion in its European heartland (Will R. Jordan, 'Religion in the public square: A reconsideration of David Hume and religious establishment', *Review of politics* 64 (2002), 687–713, esp. 712). The evidence provided by the new letter casts doubts on the validity of interpretations like this.

<sup>90</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment contested: Philosophy, modernity, and the emancipation of man, 1670–1752* (Oxford 2006), 37–8. According to Israel, the former 'type of enlightenment' comprised thinkers like Locke, Montesquieu, and Voltaire, whereas the 'Radical Enlightenment' featured the likes of Diderot, d'Alembert, and d'Holbach.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 693: 'No sharper contrast can be found in the mid eighteenth century than that between Hume's moral thought and Diderot's.'



more nuanced picture as well as to reaffirm Hume's place in the Enlightenment. Yet the fact that such fundamental questions can be posed anew in the recent literature indicates that a number of interpretative issues about the nature of Hume's thinking on politics and religion continue to be unresolved. It may therefore be worthwhile to conclude by asking how far the evidence for Hume's views in the 1760s and 1770s discussed in the present essay relates to wider questions about Hume's place in the Enlightenment.

Any attempt to locate Hume's place within the currents of eighteenth-century thought generally subsumed under the heading 'the Enlightenment' must confront the difficult question of how his philosophy relates to that of the quintessential exponents of Israel's 'Radical Enlightenment', the Parisian *philosophes*. Hume had met the likes of Diderot, d'Alembert, and Helvétius during his residence in Paris and had in some cases struck up friendships that were to last to the end of his life. While the conversations he had with Diderot and others at d'Holbach's dinner table cannot now be reconstructed other than from anecdotal and hence inherently unreliable evidence, Hume's correspondence with a number of the *philosophes* has survived and, taken together with his and their published writings, affords a number of interesting glimpses into the extent of the similarities or dissimilarities between his views on empire and religion and theirs. We have seen that Hume's letters reveal that his stance against Britain's war with her rebellious colonies was motivated less by his sympathy for the American cause than by his fears about the potential impact of that war on the already shaken foundations of Britain's established constitutional order. Evidence elsewhere in his letters nevertheless casts serious doubts on Israel's assertion that Hume's political philosophy 'effectively legitimized even the most oppressive institutions of empire' outside Europe.<sup>92</sup> Hume's strong opposition to British imperial expansion, for which the new letter provides further evidence, was coupled with a desire to see the introduction of a permanent remedy for 'the Oppression exercisd over the poor Natives' by the East India Company.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, while Hume's published writings might suggest that he saw an important role for established religion in society, we have seen that his privately expressed views, even if cast in the form of jocular remarks, reveal that he may not have regarded some form of established religion as indispensable to well-ordered society, as some commentators have claimed.<sup>94</sup> Even though Hume's attitudes towards the American crisis and established religion surveyed here cannot be taken to represent the entire range of his views on politics and religion, the material surveyed on the preceding pages nevertheless suggests a more complex picture than the ones presented by Livingston or Israel. The evidence of Hume's published and private

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 593.

<sup>93</sup> Hume to Strahan, 22 Feb. 1772: *HL*, ii. 260. The context of this remark is the setting up of a Select Committee of Inquiry into the affairs of the East India Company, which did not happen until April 1772. The letter to Strahan indicates that Hume hoped Stuart would become one of the supervisors of that committee, but in the end this fell through because of the king's opposition to Stuart's nomination.

<sup>94</sup> Israel, *Enlightenment contested*, 684. Cf. Jordan, 'Religion in the public square', 710–13.

statements on empire and religion indicates that the extent of Hume's disagreements with the *philosophes* should not be exaggerated unduly. It is simply misleading to consider Hume's views on empire and established religion as differing so fundamentally from those of the *philosophes* that one could speak of him as an opponent of the (Radical) Enlightenment. This kind of interpretation presupposes too narrow a view of either Hume or the Enlightenment. There is nothing in the views Hume held on empire and religion in the 1760s and 1770s to suggest that he was not a man of the Enlightenment.

## Appendix

### David Hume to Andrew Stuart of Torrance, 1 August 1775

Autograph letter signed, bound into the fifth volume of the manuscript 'Communications to the Society of Antiquaries', 1828–9, fos. 34–5, in the National Museum of Scotland Library. Permission to publish has kindly been given by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, through its Director, Dr Simon Gilmour.

Edinburgh 1 of August 1775

Dear Andrew

I remember a Story of Andrew Fletcher of Salton, that when an intimate Friend of his was made Secretary of State, and, very graciously, as he imagin'd, came up to him next day with all their wonted Familiarity, the Patriot turned his back upon him, and mutter'd that he wonder'd how any Secretary of State had the Impudence to speak to him. I promise you, that I shall never break with you till you be Secretary of State: Then indeed, you must resolve to keep your Distance: But I foretell, if the World be not much changed, that at that time you will meet with twenty better, that will offer you their Friendship.

I rejoice at Jemmy's Success;<sup>95</sup> and I find, that Fortune is like a Mistress who expects, that you are not to despair on the first Repulse. I approve also of your Precaution: You act like a certain great General, whom, because I have forgot his Name, we shall call Epaminondas, and who held, that no time requir'd greater Vigilance, than that which

<sup>95</sup> Andrew Stuart's younger brother James (d. 1793), an army officer who had just entered the East India Company as second-in-command on the Coromandel Coast, with the rank of colonel. Hume had interceded on his behalf the previous year by asking Strahan for 'your Vote and Interest in the India house for Coll. Stuart, Brother to our Friend, Andrew' (Hume to Strahan, 25 Jan. 1774: *HL*, ii. 283).

immediatly ensued after a Victory: Tho' we are sorry, that your Prudence will deprive us of your Company this Season.

A propos to Victory, we have heard of Gage's Advantage at Charles town; and by all concurring Accounts, he speaks modestly of it.<sup>96</sup> It is probably the Fore-runner of a more decisive Advantage, which, if prudently managed, may usher in a temporary Accomodation with the Americans. I believe, however, we should do full as well without any Connections with these factious Colonists. There are indeed four Events, which in my opinion will fully establish our Prosperity. First, that we do not possess a single foot of Land, that we can call our own, in America: Secondly, that, by a common Edict of all the Asiatic Powers, no Englishman under pain of Death, shall ever dare to pass the Cape of Good-Hope: Thirdly, that, if King, Lords and Commons were to offer their united Bond at twenty per cent for 1000 pounds they shall not be able to procure it: Fourthly, that all the Churches shall be converted into Riding Schools, Manufactories, Tennis Courts or Playhouses. Old as I am, I expect to see the three first Objects compleated, and the fourth much advanced. Amen, So be it.

We have heard of the Baron's famous Revoke at Whist;<sup>97</sup> and upon the Credit of it, are not afraid to encounter him with all his London Erudition. Plague on him, however. He won my Money last Night; but it proceeded from a most provoking Blunder of my Partner.

The Poker meets next Friday to feast on a Turtle, the present of Sir Robert Keith; when we shall not fail to drink your Health.<sup>98</sup>

We have had a very agreeable Summer; and a Macedonian, who has been here some Weeks, declares that the Weather has been too hot for him.

Please to send the enclos'd to the Post, not to Mr. Coutts's House in the Strand<sup>99</sup>

Yours

David Hume

<sup>96</sup> During the Battle of Bunker Hill, fought on 17 June 1775, British forces under Major-General Howe took the Charlestown peninsula near Boston. This British victory in the first significant battle of the War of American Independence was a pyrrhic one, as Howe's forces incurred heavy losses. General Gage, who had ordered the attack, was recalled as commander-in-chief of the British army in America as soon as news of the battle reached Britain. Hume's remark possibly alludes to Gage's famous description of the outcome of the battle as a 'dear bought victory, another such would have ruined us'.

<sup>97</sup> William Mure of Caldwell (1718–76), at one time Baron of the Scots exchequer, whom Hume called 'the oldest and best friend I had in the World' (Hume to John Home, 12 Apr. 1776: *HL*, ii. 314). Mure and Stuart shared Hume's passion for whist (Mure to Hume, 4 Sept. [1775]: *HL*, ii. 362–3).

<sup>98</sup> The Poker Club was founded in 1762 to help stir up support for a Scottish militia. Hume and Stuart were among its members. Sir Robert Murray Keith, another member, was at this date British Minister at Vienna.

<sup>99</sup> The brothers James and Thomas Coutts were bankers in the Strand who handled Hume's finances in London (Mossner, *Life*, 538). Coutts, the bank they founded, still operates from the Strand.