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14 Hume on Affective Leadership

Eric Schliesser

In this chapter I introduce David Hume's views on what I call, 'affective leadership.' By this I mean the political management of dispositions and emotions conducive to minimal union in the social-political sense. I present Hume's ideas on this by way of close scrutiny of his (and Spinoza's) extended treatment of the fall of the Dutch statesman, Johan de Witt. I do so in order to begin to articulate some distinctive features of a 'Humean' political theory in which the management of dispositions and emotions of a "spirit of union" play a central role. The strain of Humean political theory that I propose to develop is an addition to and is distinct from the more familiar Humean focus on institutional design (be it in a rational choice (Pettit 1996: 54–89) or public choice (Levy 2002: 131–42)) register, the solution of coordination problems (Sabl 2012), the promotion of market society (Brewer 1998: 78–98), and the virtues and practices associated with it (Berry 2013). I focus on Hume's views on the proper aims and some of the methods of political leadership of great states.¹

In particular, I'll assume without argument that for Hume political rule involves acting under conditions of uncertainty. I do so not because on my reading according to Hume the Hobbesian state of nature exists in international affairs, but because in addition to being a balance of power theorist (see Hume 1987a), Hume is committed to the idea that the rules of the international political order will and may be suspended at will:

All politicians will allow and most philosophers, that reasons of state may in particular emergencies dispense with the rules of justice, and invalidate any treaty or alliance, where the strict observance of it would be prejudicial, in a considerable degree, to either of the contracted parties.

(EPM 4.3)²

I explore the significance of affective leadership by focusing on a hitherto unstudied exemplar in Hume's oeuvre: the rise and fall of Johan de Witt. For De Witt is both praised for getting something truly right about the art of ruling, that is, to maintain the dispositions conducive to unity,

and also for getting something disastrously wrong, mistakenly assuming a species of rational behavior in others and thereby misunderstanding international politics, which is (also) governed by emotions. I show that social-political unity is possible for Hume as a consequence of the workings of Humean imitative sympathy. While the emphasis in this chapter is on the management of dispositions, affective leadership, the final section shows there is also an important role to play by a distinctive form of philosophical theorizing.

Along the way I argue briefly that Hume's account can be understood as extending Spinoza's treatment of De Witt's fall. I hope this inspires further research into Spinoza's influence on Hume's political philosophy.

Before I turn to Hume's (and Spinoza's) texts, I introduce some biographical details about Johan de Witt (1625–1672), who is not a familiar name now. De Witt was one of the leading mathematicians of his age; he was part of a talented generation of students of the Cartesian (Leiden) mathematician Van Schooten. Frans Van Schooten had translated Descartes's *La Géométrie* into Latin (1649), and wrote an important commentary on it (1661). Through the latter, Cartesian mathematics influenced many, including Newton's development (Guicciardini 2009: 5). This commentary included an appendix by Johan de Witt (*Elements of Linear Curves*) (Easton 1963: 632–5). Van Schooten also published a translation of Christiaan Huygens's work on probability as an appendix to one of his textbooks in 1657 (Hald 2003: 68). Building on Huygens's treatise, Huygens, De Witt, and, yet another student first published by Van Schooten, Johannes Hudde,³ explored foundations of probability⁴ and life insurance in subsequent decades (Ciecka 2008: 59; Hald 2003: 122–42). All three (Huygens, Hudde, and De Witt) were independent-minded Cartesians. In addition, Hudde and De Witt went on to have formidable political careers: De Witt ruled Holland as *Raadpensionaris* until he was massacred, together with his brother, by a mob in 1672—the year Dutch forces were overrun by a French army and facing English attack at sea.⁵

1. Magnanimous De Witt

In his *History*, Hume introduces Johan de Witt when he gets to the preparations of the (second) Anglo-Dutch war of 1665:

The Dutch saw, with the utmost regret, a war approaching, whence they might dread the most fatal consequences, but which afforded no prospect of advantage. They tried every art of negotiation, before they would come to extremities. Their measures were at that time directed by John de Wit, a minister equally eminent for greatness of mind, for capacity, and for integrity. Though moderate in his private deportment, he knew how to adopt in his public counsels that

magnanimity, which suits the minister of a great state. It was ever his maxim, that no independent government should yield to another any evident point of reason or equity; and that all such concessions, so far from preventing war, served to no other purpose than to provoke fresh claims and insults. By his management a spirit of union was preserved in all the provinces; great sums were levied; and a navy was equipped, composed of larger ships than the Dutch had ever built before, and able to cope with the fleet of England.

(Hume 1983: Vol. 6, 195–6)

I leave aside the veracity of Hume's account;⁶ I focus on his interpretation of De Witt. In the quoted passage—describing the year 1665 in the *History of England*—David Hume introduces Johan de Witt with superlative qualifications (“equally eminent for greatness of mind, for capacity, and for integrity”) as a magnanimous leader.⁷ When Hume describes William Temple's meeting with De Witt, he again evokes De Witt's magnanimity (“same generous and enlarged sentiments”).⁸ De Witt's generosity consists in sacrificing “all private considerations to the public service.” Arguably, of all the exemplary political leaders treated by Hume only Alfred the Great and perhaps, Edward I, receive a more generous evaluation from Hume.⁹ I have been unable to locate another analysis of Hume's treatment of De Witt.

Hume emphasizes that De Witt is willing to negotiate to prevent war; De Witt's greatness is not of the conquering, martial kind (e.g., Alexander the Great (T 3.3.2.12)). But while De Witt prefers to avoid war, he will not yield on matters of principle (“reason”) or justice (“equity”)—I return to this later on. The reasoning seems to be that concessions will not prevent war, but only lead to new demands that will eventually lead to war (or full surrender). De Witt's maxim is not a universal one; it is not appropriate to weak powers or protectorates. Hume intimates that to stand on principle or justice when one is not capable of or unwilling to sacrifice for independence is, while noble, an act of foolishness. Only a great state can enforce equity. To avoid confusion, such justice is also a matter of self-interest because by Hume's lights there is little difference between justice/equity and property (Pack and Schliesser 2006).

1.1 Spirit of Union

Among other qualities praised by Hume is De Witt's ability to preserve, even promote, a ‘spirit of union’ in a confederation (the Dutch Republic) that was notoriously incapable of such unity. In context, Hume does not explain what he means, but even so I treat this as a significant remark. Hume's use of ‘spirit’ clearly echoes Montesquieu.¹⁰ Here I am not interested in Hume's use of ‘spirit’ or ‘spirited’ to discuss certain character traits of individuals (e.g., the “audacious spirit of Cromwel” [sic])

(HE 6); when he does so, he is clearly echoing the Greek *thymos/θυμός*. But rather I am focusing on his application of ‘spirit’ to a whole society (or a significant subsection), that is, what I’ll call, ‘social spirit’; Hume deploys social spirit both as a cause as well as an effect repeatedly in the *History*. For example, he speaks of “true spirit of liberty” (HE 6.44); “the spirit of dutiful obedience and of steady enterprize” (i.e., the French under “Cardinal Mazarine”) (HE 6.76); the English “spirit of democratical equality” (HE 6.168); and, most importantly for present purposes, the “spirit of opposition,” which is a cause of dangerous “zeal,” even “violence” (HE 6.185). In all these cases the ‘spirit’ captures a *shared* disposition at a time and of a (part of) society.

Hume had explained the mechanism—relying on sympathy—of acquiring a shared (national) disposition in his essay, “Of National Characters”:

Where a number of men are united into one political body, the occasions of their intercourse must be so frequent, for defence, commerce, and government, that, together with the same speech or language, they must acquire a resemblance in their manners, and have a common or national character.

(EMPL 202–3)

In the very same paragraph Hume goes on to characterize this in terms of shared dispositions.

In fact, in the second *Enquiry*, Hume had called attention to the particular political significance of union,

in a confederated commonwealth, such as the Achaean republic of old, or the Swiss Cantons and United Provinces in modern times; as the league has here a peculiar utility, the conditions of union have a peculiar sacredness and authority, and a violation of them would be regarded as no less, or even as more criminal, than any private injury or injustice.

(EPM 4.4; see also EPM 9.22. Note the reference to the Dutch United Provinces.)

So, I take it that for Hume, ‘social spirit’ is a kind of glue, or cement, rooted in shared dispositions due to a shared history of political union or institutional arrangements, even where other sources of union—religion, nation, even language (see the Swiss)—may be absent.

In the *History*, Hume does not use the phrase, ‘spirit of union’ again, but in context it has a twofold significance. First, it prevents the internal dissolution of a state (which at its extreme leads to civil war [never far from Hume’s intentions in the Stuart volumes of the *History*]);¹¹ in the Dutch context, it means maintaining a shared purpose among the (federated or united) ‘provinces.’ And, second, it is, as revealed by the passage

about De Witt, a precondition to the successful preparedness against foreign enemies. Crucially, Hume sees a role for political leadership—“his management”—to maintain this spirit of union which manifests itself (among other things) in state capacity to raise taxes and war preparation.

Let me reinforce a point I have already made perhaps too tersely. By using the language of ‘spirit,’ and without tying it to particular beliefs and ontologies, Hume is signaling that he has something dispositional in mind. After all, according to Hume, what the “peculiar set of manners habitual to” any nation are can vary by location (EMPL 197).¹² That is, for Hume, political management means that a politician must be able to generate, or facilitate, opinions and habits of thought that allow individual citizens or constitutive orders of a polity to maintain a commitment to some national unity (of the sort that prevents civil war and makes it capable of maintaining sufficient national defense). A nice feature of this approach is that it does not require policing of beliefs; for a variety of dispositions are compatible with the same spirit. Hume’s position is, thus, a non-trivial improvement over Hobbes’s approach in which such political, albeit restrictive, unity is a natural by-product of the coming into being of the *Leviathan*.

1.2 *The Modern Philosopher-King and the State of Emergency*

Now, De Witt is as close to a philosopher-king as we have seen in the modern age (comparable to Marcus Aurelius in the Ancient world). Hume makes the point explicitly (with an allusion to Plato (1997: *Republic* 488e–489d)) a few lines below:

The genius of this man was of the most extensive nature. He quickly became as much master of naval affairs, as if he had from his infancy been educated in them; and he even made improvements in some parts of pilotage and sailing, beyond what men expert in those arts had ever been able to attain.

(HE 6.197)¹³

Not only is De Witt very smart (extensive genius), but pilotage is an exemplary mathematical (applied) practice. It is chart/map-based navigation based on calculating distances to fixed points using a compass, quadrant, and (eventually) clocks.¹⁴

Throughout his treatment of De Witt, Hume reminds the reader of his strength of mind under duress.¹⁵ There are two points buried in Hume’s account of De Witt, the first one of which is rather surprising. To see why the first one is surprising, we need to remind ourselves that Hume is known to be a defender of the impartial even stable rule of law.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, in peace-time this is Hume’s position. But sometimes he is willing to allow exceptions. (Recall also “that reasons of state may in

particular emergencies dispense with the rules of justice, and invalidate any treaty or alliance” (EPM 4.3.) For, when there is a threat to the security or survival of the state, Hume’s position is more flexible. For, he explicitly approves of De Witt’s willingness to break *Dutch* law in order to pass rapidly a treaty (The Triple League) deemed necessary for the public interests:

de Wit [sic] had the courage, for the public good, to break through the laws in so fundamental an article; and by his authority, he prevailed with the States General at once to sign and ratify the league: though they acknowledged, that, if that measure should displease their constituents, they risked their heads by this irregularity.

(HE 6.321)

Unfortunately, Hume’s lack of further explicit reflection on the nature of such “reasons of state” and—one might call with a nod to Benjamin and Schmitt—state of emergency suggests that he considers its presence ordinarily entirely up to the judgment of the ‘courageous’ political ruler. (I qualify this point a bit later when I remark on Hume’s own preferred constitutional arrangement.) By ‘state of emergency,’ I mean to refer to conditions where the rule of law is suspended, in principle, merely temporarily. As we will see, Hume recognizes that this suspension can be both (i) in accord with the law itself, that is, there may be procedures that govern the manner and time frame for the suspension, as well as (ii) a clear violation of the law.

That is, second, while law is rule-bound, a politician’s craft is not. A politician has to act under conditions of genuine uncertainty and while there are maxims that can be followed,¹⁷ there are circumstances when she is in uncharted waters. For the ‘public good’ one may even break the law.

One may think, then, that political, practical wisdom consists in a kind of un-theoretical know-how that is primarily constituted by a willingness, or courage, to make decisions that will determine one’s fate. This view is now often associated with Nietzsche and Carl Schmitt, and there are certainly important strains of Machiavelli in Hume’s claim that “fortune commonly favours the bold and enterprising” (T 3.3.2.8).¹⁸ But Hume helps us think an alternative thought.

To get at this alternative, I grant that one may well think that the previous paragraphs are based on rather slender evidence. But Hume emphasizes the significance of a state of emergency, in a more theoretical context in his ideal, constitutional structure, “Of a Perfect Commonwealth:” “The protector, the two secretaries, the council of state, with any five or more that the senate appoints, are possessed, on extraordinary emergencies, of dictatorial power for six months” (EMPL 521).

In Hume’s plan for a perfect commonwealth, foreign policy is insulated from democratic control. He lodges it in the “council of state” which

includes only three members: “The protector and two secretaries.” These three members are chosen by the senate, which has some kind of function in deliberating about foreign policy. (Hume is not entirely clear on this point.) It turns out that the three members of the council of state are the core membership (of eight) of a dictatorial junta appointed in “extraordinary emergencies.”¹⁹ That the council of state is always part of the dictatorial junta suggests that for Hume the emergencies arise, if they do, only in foreign affairs, especially in the context of war and conquest.

In one sense, Hume’s proposal is a nod to Livy’s famous account of the dictatorship of Cincinnatus in Republican Rome (Livy 1857).²⁰ But Hume is explicit that his commonwealth is an improvement of ancient republics because he thinks these as “oppressive” (EMPL 528; see also EMPL 18). Moreover, he has little fondness for Ancient Republicanism (which requires slavery, see EMPL 383). So, it would be a bit odd if he is really trying to make space for a modern Cincinnatus.

A better sense to understand Hume’s treatment is to take him at his word, and note, first the “resemblance that [the blueprint of a perfect commonwealth] bears to the commonwealth of the United Provinces, a wise and renowned government” (EMPL 526). One of his improvements over the constitution of the Dutch Republic is the removal of the veto power “which every province and town has upon the whole body of the DUTCH republic, with regard to alliances, peace and war, and the imposition of taxes, is here removed.” So, Hume’s perfect commonwealth is not a mere confederation but a state that can act as a true unity in foreign affairs and even in an emergency.

In fact, it is pretty clear that Hume modeled the dictatorial power on the particular episode that we have just discussed in the history of the Dutch Republic that he recounts in the *History*. For the passage in which Hume praises De Witt for his “courage” in breaking the law contains clear echoes of the material under discussion in ‘Of a Perfect Commonwealth’:

But the greatest difficulty still remained. By the constitution of the [Dutch] republic, all the towns in all the provinces must give their consent to every alliance; and besides that this formality could not be dispatched in less than two months, it was justly to be dreaded, that the influence of France would obstruct the passing of the treaty in some of the smaller cities. . . . To obviate this difficulty, de Wit had the courage.

(HE 6.221)

De Witt knowingly suspended the law.

So, Hume designs the blueprint for his own ideal state to make space for future leaders that can make public spirited decisions without too much constraint. But rather than trusting a single person [De Witt] with emergency powers, he assigns such authority to a small group; in

addition, he develops a procedure which requires the senate's judgment that there is, indeed, a state of emergency. It is an open question if Hume's approach does not lead to the "oppression" he dreads.

Be that as it may, states of emergency within a liberal framework are not a mere historical curiosity. France operated under emergency powers for nearly two years recently. In my judgment this was a mistake because France's survival was not at stake and the seeds for future division and hatred were sown on a daily basis.²¹

1.3 *The Fall of a Refined Politician*

Here I return to the passage, when Hume describes the meeting of Temple and De Witt: he writes about Temple that "This man, whom philosophy had taught to despise the world, without rendering him unfit for it, was frank, open, sincere, superior to the little tricks of vulgar politicians" (HE 6.221). Temple has contempt for the 'vulgar politician.' And the implied contrast here is with his attitude toward the refined politician. Hume agrees with Temple's criticism of the 'vulgar politician.' For according to Hume, the vulgar politicians "are apt . . . to have recourse to more hasty and more dangerous remedies" (HE 6.322). So, Hume warns that courageous decision-ism can be taken too far. In particular, in context Hume is saying that while one always must act under conditions of uncertainty, it does not follow that no (fallible) knowledge of the regular, albeit not exception-less, pattern of consequences that follow from a particular institutional design is possible. After all, Hume reports Temple as claiming "to remove things from their center, or proper element, required force and labour; but that of themselves they easily returned to it" (HE 6.223). But this presupposes knowledge of social causes—that is, Hume's 'science of man.'

The refined politician, who may know something about great tricks, can delay action, promote institutional reform, or muddle through depending on the ends she aims at. That is, a refined politician, who deserves our respect on the Humean view, legislates ends, constrained by principle and justice, and she acts cautiously, but decisively, on fallible causal social knowledge that she learns (with skeptical scrutiny) from (to speak anachronistically) the social scientist.

Hume is not uncritical of De Witt. And it is worth reflecting on this criticism because it shows that according to Hume one can be exemplary along one dimension (e.g., as affective leader), while being imperfect along another dimension (i.e., overconfident). We know that De Witt's rule (and life) will end badly. Hume introduces the fall as follows:

Though de Wit's intelligence in foreign courts was not equal to the vigilance of his domestic administration, he had, long before, received many surmises of this fatal confederacy; but he prepared not

for defence, so early or with such industry, as the danger required. A union of England with France was evidently, he saw, destructive to the interests of the former kingdom; and therefore, overlooking or ignorant of the humours and secret views of Charles, he *concluded it impossible*, that such pernicious projects could ever really be carried into execution. Secure in this fallacious reasoning, he allowed the republic to remain too long in that defenceless situation, into which many concurring accidents had conspired to throw her.

(HE 6.257–8; emphasis added)

De Witt's response to the threat posed by England and France is treated as an instance of *expertise-induced overconfidence*.²² De Witt treats his country's potential enemies as rational, calculating agents—ones that understand their national self-interests properly and that will act accordingly (in the context of a balance of power).²³ In the grip of a *model* of reality, De Witt treats something as impossible that he ought to prepare for.²⁴

De Witt is, thus, also an exemplar of an intellectual that mistakes his own view of the world for reality, or a species of expert overconfidence. I use the phrase 'expertise-induced overconfidence' in order to signal not just that De Witt was a very smart mathematician, but that he has genuine expertise in political statesmanship in at least two senses: first, he is capable of generating the 'spirit of union.' Second, he knows how to reason skillfully *about* the objective interests of other countries. It's just that he fails to recognize that his favored model of reality need not apply in every instance.²⁵

We can interpret De Witt's failure in light of recent cognitive science of expertise. Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber have developed an account of inference as a modular mechanism that is in certain respects in the spirit of Hume (which is why I appeal to it here).²⁶ A key feature of their approach is that knowing or anticipating that others will check our reasoning increases our skill at reasoning.²⁷ That is, the expression of one's expertise may well be context sensitive. Here the fact that De Witt was an oligarch reasoning in relative isolation may well have made his reasoning more fragile (Mercier and Sperber 2017: 317–27).

I use the language of 'model' here for two reasons: first, because Hume attributes De Witt's mistake in his evaluation of Charles not to a lack of access to relevant data (he "received many surmises"), but to a systematic way of misperceiving the world based on treating agents' objective interests from which actions can be inferred ("reasoning"). In fact, De Witt's political theory, centered on national interest and balance of power politics, was often associated with Pieter de la Court's *The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland*.²⁸ Second, the model governs what is taken to be possible or not.²⁹

Of course, as noted, De Witt's reasoning is not fallacious *within* the model-universe, but it is objectively fallacious. In particular, De Witt

failed to understand the character or physico-psychological make up the British king; Hume is explicit that De Witt lacks knowledge of human nature—he understands the true interest of King Charles II; but for all his skill in mathematics, De Witt is unprepared for the true political art,³⁰ which requires in addition to his exceptional skills, good judgment and knowledge of human nature in which the passions are properly managed.³¹ For, it is a core tenet of Hume’s theory of political science, as explained in “That Politics May be Reduced to a Science,” that in domestic affairs, in the aggregate, people become predictable (in the manner of, say, public choice theory) due to the (primarily) institutional incentives and constraints they face:

so great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them as any which the mathematical sciences afford.
(EMPL 16; note the significance of access to otherwise hidden humours which is echoed in the passage on De Witt’s fall that I quoted)

By contrast, international relations are less predictable because they are influenced by the individual whims and characters of rulers.³²

Before I conclude my analysis of the significance of Hume’s treatment of De Witt’s fall, I briefly digress and treat Spinoza’s interpretation of the same events. I do so, in part, because to the best of my knowledge, the fact that they treat of the same event seems to have gone unnoticed, and, in part, because the idea that in political science one can deduce consequences with the same certainty as mathematics from the hidden properties of human nature, has a powerful precedent in Spinoza’s writings. For the (posthumous and incomplete) *Political Treatise* starts with the following passage:

3. And, certainly, I am fully persuaded that experience has revealed all conceivable sorts of commonwealth, which are consistent *with men’s living in unity*, and likewise the means by which the multitude may be guided or kept within fixed bounds. . . . But general laws and public affairs are *ordained and managed by men of the utmost acuteness, or, if you like, of great cunning or craft*. And so it is hardly credible, that we should be able to conceive of anything serviceable to a general society, that occasion or chance has not offered, or that men, intent upon their common affairs, and seeking their own safety, have not seen for themselves.

4. Therefore, on applying my mind to politics, I have resolved to *demonstrate by a certain and undoubted course of argument, or to deduce from the very condition of human nature*, not what is new

and unheard of but only such things as agree best with practice. And that I might investigate the subject-matter of this science with the same freedom of spirit as we generally use in mathematics, I have laboured carefully, to understand human actions; and to this end I have looked upon passions, such as love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity, and the other perturbations of the mind, not in the light of vices of human nature, but as properties, just as pertinent to it, as are heat, cold, storm, thunder, and the like to the nature of the atmosphere, which phenomena, though inconvenient, are yet necessary, and have fixed causes, by means of which we endeavour to understand their nature.

(Spinoza 1883: 1.3–4; emphases added)

We see here that Spinoza emphasizes three key features as central to his approach that we have encountered in Hume: the significance of unity, the management by the crafty political statesman,³³ and the deduction of robust social consequences from human nature. Admittedly, there is no firm evidence that Hume read Spinoza's *Political Treatise*. But there is very good evidence that Hume would have been familiar with the discussions generated by the *Ethics* (1996), which was published jointly with the *Political Treatise*.³⁴ It's perfectly possible that any general commonalities are due to shared sources; Hume and Spinoza both owe a lot to Roman historians, Machiavelli, Bacon, and Hobbes.

2. Spinoza on the Fall of De Witt

One of the most famous anecdotes about Spinoza is that after the (1672) massacre of the De Witt brothers, he was inclined to place a sheet of chapter at the murder site with, "*Ultimi barbarorum*" (ultimate barbarian) (Della Rocca 2008: 27).³⁵ Leaving aside the veracity of the story and what it purports to reveal (Deleuze 1988: 13), it frames how many readers interpret Spinoza's earlier (1670) *Theological Political Treatise* (1862). This is, in addition to its other agendas, commonly taken to be a kind pro-De Witt (and anti-clerical and anti-Orangist) Republican intervention.

Regardless of Spinoza's feelings about the murder of the De Witt brothers, I'll show he thought an oligarchy inherently unstable. His reasons for thinking so help us understand something about the nature of 'affective leadership' that informs Hume's political theory.

Consider this passage from the *Political Treatise*:

In every council the secretaries and other officials of this kind, as they have not the right of voting, should be chosen from the commons. But as these, by their long practice of business, are the most conversant with the affairs to be transacted, it often arises that more

deference than right is shown to their advice, and that the state of the whole dominion depends chiefly on their guidance: which thing has been fatal to the Dutch.

(8.44)³⁶

Spinoza was unduly pessimistic about the fortunes of the Dutch. More important the quoted passage is a pretty clear analysis of De Witt's trajectory and downfall.³⁷ Spinoza here resists the urge of turning De Witt into some magnanimous soul; for Spinoza De Witt is no martyr nor the occasion for warning about the dangers of the mob.

Rather, Spinoza explicitly treats De Witt's power, and subsequent fall, as *evidence* for the bad institutional design of the Dutch (oligarchic) aristocracy of his age. De Witt was indeed the most capable of leading the Dutch state. This is the meritocratic element of an aristocracy. But by becoming dependent on the judgment of one, political decision making also becomes more fragile.³⁸

In fact, De Witt's fall is an instance of a more general claim by Spinoza. Throughout the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza treats war or internal strife (and lawlessness, criminality, etc.) as *de facto evidence* of bad institutional design/functioning.³⁹ That is, to put the point in terms of Hume's subsequent treatment, De Witt's fall reveals that the *appearance* of unity hid a more fundamental, structural lack of unity, including a lack a 'spirit of union.'

3. Hume's Analysis of the Failure of De Witt

Here I conclude my analysis of Hume's treatment of De Witt's fall. According to Hume, De Witt's failure of scientific imagination is exacerbated by the fact that "by a continued and successful application to commerce, the [Dutch] were become unwarlike, and confided entirely for their defence in that mercenary army, which they maintained" (HE 6.258). Here Hume echoes Machiavelli's injunction against reliance on mercenaries.⁴⁰ And taken out of context, one might also assume that Hume agrees with those republican authors of his day that declaimed against the vices of luxury and commerce.⁴¹

But the more fundamental problem that Hume diagnoses, and this brings him unexpectedly close to, and deepens, Spinoza's analysis, is that the Dutch were not a *true* unity and so, because of lack of mutual trust had fired the experienced officer corps of the Dutch army thought to be too loyal to the Orangist faction (and so were unprepared to do real battle). In addition, while De Witt had been careful to prevent corruption in naval matters, he had allowed a form of oligarchic crony-ism seep into the military affairs: "these new officers, relying on the credit of their friends and family, neglected their military duty; and some of them, it is said, were even allowed to serve by deputies, to whom they assigned a

small part of their pay” (Hume 1983: 258). While it is unclear if De Witt should have allowed an Orangist-friendly army to remain a mortal threat to his regime, it is pretty clear that Hume thinks that military affairs should be closely guarded against corruption.

Hume here deviates from Spinoza’s (briefer) analysis which explicitly treats De Witt’s power, and subsequent fall, as evidence for the bad institutional design of the Dutch (oligarchic) aristocracy of his age. (Hume is not against such explanations, as his treatment of the natural experiment involving Genoa very nicely exhibits in his essay, “That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science.”) Hume, by contrast, implies that *better* political leadership by De Witt could have saved the Dutch. So, while Hume recognizes the limits of a political science that treats the world as populated with rational agents acting in their own best interests, he thinks there is a true art of ruling.

I have already noted that according to Hume, this true art has to be informed by the Humean science of man. This art must aim to promote the spirit of union, constrained by justice and principle. But the art must also be informed by a systematic vision of society. For, when Hume reflects on the very idea of a perfect commonwealth, he insists not just that “[t]he subject is surely the most worthy curiosity of any the wit of man can possibly devise” (EMPL 513). But he explicitly rejects the thought it is merely a theoretical subject:

In all cases, it must be advantageous to know what is most perfect in the kind, that we may be able to bring any real constitution or form of government as near it as possible, by such gentle alterations and innovations as may not give too great disturbance to society.

(EMPL 513–14)

While some may criticize Hume’s gradualism,⁴² it is not unprincipled. It ought, in fact, to be informed by a systematic, comparative institutional vision of politics which, itself, helps animate social spirit.⁴³

4. Affective Leadership

In conclusion, inspired by Hume, we ought to treat *the political* as the task, when possible guided by the sciences and justice (Hume’s ‘reason and equity’), of generating or facilitating opinions and habits of thought that allow citizens to maintain commitment to sufficient unity despite the existence of competing values and interests.⁴⁴ I use ‘sufficient’ in recognition of two facts: first, that all true politics occurs in conditions of fundamental uncertainty;⁴⁵ second, that there may be other fundamental ends that need to be promoted (or at least not hindered). In practice, this entails, at least in part, the management of political emotions.

For the systematic management of political emotions to be possible requires a prior extensive, empirical study of the conditions, and institutional contexts, of which emotions are—inter alia—conducive to political union.⁴⁶ Such union need not involve agreement; all it requires is a set of dispositions that promote a willingness to set these aside in periods of genuine crisis and to serve a common interest.

For Hume this study of the ‘art of politics’ was an essentially historical enterprise. But we need not be so constrained and can draw on a wider range of social and life sciences. In addition, it requires a willingness to engage with the study of leadership.⁴⁷ Because ‘leadership’ tends to be treated like a dirty word (often associated with fascist thought),⁴⁸ and because of an understandable fondness for and focus on procedures, liberal thinkers have been disinclined to engage with the voluminous literature on leadership thrown up by business scholars, organizational psychologists, and political sociologists.⁴⁹

It follows, too, from the treatment of the political given here, that in societies like ours with advanced intellectual and commercial division of labor, it’s not just particular politicians that engage in politically significant behavior, but that paradigmatic activities associated with the media, educators, clergy, civic religion, bureaucracy, and parenting also intersect with the political. It can be asked of all of these offices (in the Ciceronian sense) if they facilitate a spirit of union.⁵⁰ So, as Sabl has argued, all such offices require dispositions that are apt to each individually.⁵¹ Each such office has, of course, a primary aim (of being treasurer, or being secretary, or pastoral care, etc.) or range of primary aims. But, in addition, on my interpretation of Hume, each office is also political in the sense that its occupant must also contribute to the maintenance of the ‘spirit of union,’ that is, help to facilitate the cultivation of dispositions that allow for minimal conditions of unity.

This is not the place to offer a theory which dispositions are required in order to maintain such unity. But it stands to reason these involve a willingness to tolerate disagreements, a willingness to offer some mutual aid (or solidarity), a sense of equity, mutual trust (etc.). To the best of my knowledge there has been very little study of what I have been calling ‘affective leadership,’ that is, how leaders can promote and shape these dispositions.⁵² Interesting enough, when social psychologists do explore issues in the vicinity of this topic, they tend to focus on more demanding conditions of social cohesion (Galanter 1981: 413–27; Bruhn 2009; Stanley 2003: 5–17).⁵³ A second problem is, as Sabl has noted, that until recently, psychologists in leadership studies have approached the study of leadership based on “rigid humanitarianism or civic democratic ideologies” (Sabl 2009: 119).

What makes for effective affective leadership will have to be informed by empirical research and is likely to be context dependent; in addition, one’s answer will depend on one’s judgments about the nature

of the union being promoted. Nobody said Humean political theory would be easy.⁵⁴

Notes

1. My study is greatly indebted to Whelan (1985), and I do not aim to distinguish my views from his. In addition, I must mention Bell (2008) which alerted me to themes discussed in this chapter.
2. In fact, Hume goes on to suggest that states could exist in conditions that come close to international state of nature: “they may even subsist, in some degree, under a general war” (see also van de Haar 2008: 231).
3. For an account of Hudde’s contribution, see Pedersen (1980).
4. See the classic study by Ian Hacking (2006).
5. On De Witt’s life, including his own political philosophy, see the biography by Rowen (2015).
6. We’ll see evidence that Hume is aware that despite De Witt’s integrity, De Witt’s reign was not corruption-free.
7. There is, by now, a significant literature on Hume’s account of magnanimity. See, for example, Solomon (2000), Hanley (2002), Schliesser (2003), Benardete (2013), and Corsa (2015).
8. “Sir William Temple . . . This man whom philosophy had taught to despise the world, without rendering him unfit for it, was frank, open, sincere, superior to the little tricks of vulgar politicians: And meeting in de Wit with a man of the same generous and enlarged sentiments, he immediately opened his master’s intentions, and pressed a speedy conclusion” (HE 6.220–1). De Witt’s magnanimity (and modesty) is stressed in a brief English biography, “But amongst all the great and truly amiable qualities with which the mind of this extraordinary person was adorned, his modesty and his magnanimity deserve particular notice. . . . As to his greatness of mind, I will not pretend to give any single instance of it, since every fact that will be taken notice of in these memoirs may be consider’d as a proof of it” (de la Court 1746).
9. See Whelan (2004: 139); Sabl (2012: 80). Alfred the Great and Edward I are both founders of constitutional orders. Sabl (2012: 164) correctly calls attention to the significance of Hume’s treatment of General Monk who “ended England’s civil war and restored the constitutional monarchy.” For more on this issue, see *Digressions&Impressions* (2017a).
10. For discussion of the significance of Montesquieu to Hume, see Wootton (1993: 293ff.).
11. One of the De Witt’s predecessors, the pensionary of the State of Holland Van Oldebarneveldt, had been executed in 1619 and, a generation later, the Dutch had narrowly averted civil war due to the sudden death of William II.
12. In fact, a spirit of union can be thinner than a national character. For the latter involves similar even identical dispositions and practices whereas a spirit of union may be grounded in differing beliefs and commitments.
13. In context it is unclear what Hume has in mind. But we can find a description in the “MEMOIRS OF Cornelius de Witt and John de Witt”:

It was the received doctrine of the seamen, that there were but ten points of the compass from which, if the wind blew, ships could go out, and that twenty-two were against them; but the pensionary de Witt, as he was a great mathematician, soon discovered the falsity of this notion, and that there were in reality no less than twenty eight points in their favour, and but four that could hinder them from going out, viz. W. NW.

by W. NW. NW. by N. The pilots however perceiving that he reckoned upon all the passages, declared positively that in the Spaniards-gat there was not above ten or twelve feet water, and that therefore it was . . . impossible to carry out large ships by that passage. Their assertion did not satisfy the pensionary, he went through it in a long-boat in person at low water, and without trusting the lead out of his hand, found it at least twenty foot deep every where, and free from those incumbrances which the pilots had hitherto talked of. The pensionary therefore engaged that himself and M. van Haaren would carry out the two greatest ships in the fleet through the Spaniards-gat with the wind at SSW, which he performed on the 16th of August 1665, and the greatest part of the fleet followed him without the least accident, since which that passage has been called, and very deservedly, Witts-diepc.

(de la Court 1746: l-li)

The anecdote is taken from (probably a French translation of) van der Hoeven (1705), which, in turn, cites De la Neuville's *History of Holland*. The author of the "MEMOIRS OF Cornelius de Witt and John de Witt," is probably John Campbell for reasons I have explained elsewhere (Digressions&Impressions 2017b).

14. I have consulted Chambers (1728: 814).
15. For an excellent treatment of Humean strength of mind, see McIntyre (2006). See especially 398, where strength of mind and the artifice of government have in common in being a "counter-force to our notorious preference for the near over the remote."
16. For a very careful analysis, see McArthur (2007).
17. See T 1.4.7.10; 2.1.6.9; 2.3.1.12.
18. See Whelan (2004: 133). For a good treatment of their shared interest in 'reason of state' reasoning, see, especially, pages 205–7. Whelan treats 'reason of state' reasoning primarily as a tool in foreign policy.
19. They seem to be appointed by the Senate, which entails—by Carl Schmitt's definition of sovereignty—that it is sovereign. See Schmitt (2006).
20. See III, §26.
21. President Macron claims he will have left the state of emergency by the end of this year. See Hartmann (2017). Another example of emergency power is the European Central Bank, which has been operating very close to the edge of its legal mandate for over half a decade now.
22. For an excellent introduction of expert overconfidence in practice that has influenced my present discussion, see Angner (2006: 1–24). For a full treatment of political expertise, Tetlock (2009).
23. It is possible, of course, that Charles II behavior was rational (as both Liam Kofi Bright and Gijs Schumacher pointed out to me). For Hume seems to think that Charles ought to have balanced power with the Dutch against the French. But, perhaps, Charles had perfectly sensible domestic reasons for allying with the French. For theoretical reflection, see Bueno De Mesquita (2005) (which draws generously from Hume). I thank Gijs Schumacher for the reference.
24. Hume is aware that De Witt had political reasons for allowing the army to be weakened (see more on this later in the chapter).
25. One may be inclined to treat this as a lack of particular kind expertise.
26. See Mercier and Sperber (2017: 53–4, 68). I like Mercier and Sperber's approach which points to the significance of social context.
27. It is not very common to treat Hume as a social epistemologist, but see Traiger (1994); Taylor (2015: ch. 2). See also Demeter (2017). For a neo-Humean social epistemology, see my Schliesser (2005).

28. This was translated by John Campbell in 1746 (London), which included the hagiographic biography of De Witt discussed earlier. For good introduction to De la Court's *The Interest*, see Weststeijn (2011).
29. One may well think that Hume is treating De Witt as a kind of reduction of the Hobbesian rational choice theorist (RCT) of the sort Hume is often taken to be (see, for example, Hardin (2007: 175ff.)). But as Liam Kofi Bright pointed out to me that kind of RCT could just claim that De Witt was mistaken about his enemies' preferences.
30. There is an important criticism of Cartesian science lurking here: it does not provide guidance for applying one's knowledge of the passions in political life. For Descartes takes political power as given; the first maxim of Descartes's *Discourse on Method* is "to obey the laws and customs of my country" (AT VI 22/CSM I 122).
31. Here's a nice example of Hume's criticism of British foreign policy: "In the first place, we seem to have been more possessed with the ancient GREEK spirit of jealous emulation, than actuated by the prudent views of modern politics. . . . Here then we see, that above half of our wars with FRANCE, and all our public debts, are owing more to our own imprudent vehemence, than to the ambition of our neighbours" (EMPL 339).

Rotwein is still an indispensable guide to the role of passions in Hume's account of social life. See his lengthy introduction to Hume (1955).

32. Hume's analysis is distinctive. (Later I compare it to Spinoza's.) For example, the English biography does not treat De Witt as in the grip of a model of reality. Rather according to the English biography, De Witt was simply mistaken about (because misled by) his enemies: "though he was not entirely blinded by the delusive representations of France and England, yet it is certain that it was a long time before he perceived in how great danger the republic stood" (de la Court 1746: lxiii). The source of De Witt's delusion is his mistaken reliance on his friendship with Temple: "The regard he had for Sir William Temple; and his confidence in the declarations made by him, kept this statesman long in suspense, and the great consideration he had for the French ambassador contributed not a little to the keeping him fixed in these sentiments, notwithstanding the strong appearance there was of foul dealing" (de la Court 1746: lxiii).
33. This idea Hume would have also encountered not just in Machiavelli but also in Mandeville. See Smith (2009: 9–28).
34. It used to be thought that Hume was only familiar with Spinoza through Bayle's famous entry on Spinoza in Bayle (1991). But Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology are also widely discussed in work by Clarke, Toland, Maclaurin all familiar to Hume. (See, for example, Schliesser (2012).) For the wide circulation of Spinoza's and Spinozist political views, see the work inspired by Israel (2002).
35. Rowen, who is quite skeptical of most tales surrounding Spinoza's and De Witt's relationship, allows that this story "has the stamp of truth" (because young Leibniz is the ultimate source). For a searching exploration of the episode, see Verdult.
36. In context Spinoza is describing the malfunctioning of an aristocracy (a version of oligarchy).
37. See Klever (1993: 370–88).
38. The quoted passage of *Political Treatise* 8.44 is, thus, an auxiliary to Spinoza's argument for the epistemic advantages of democracy. (He explicitly notes the lack of a right to vote for the commons.) (Steinberg 2010).
39. Spinoza did not invent the idea, which goes back to the Hebrew Bible: "The work of righteousness [רִצְדָּקָה] shall be peace and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in

a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Isaiah 17–18 [King James version]). Where justice rules, there is social peace and order. Conversely, the lack of quiet/peace is evidence for the defectiveness in $\eta\acute{\epsilon}\tau\eta\rho\eta$. Generating true harms is by definition then evidence of a lack of righteousness.

40. See Machiavelli (2003: ch. 12).
41. For excellent discussion, see Hont (2005).
42. See Israel (2002).
43. For a nice expression of this view, see Smith (1984), 6.2.1.18, p. 234.
44. This has some resonance with the Platonic (Islamic) political tradition, where truth-apt dispositions are treated as imaginative imitations of (truth-apt) philosophy. For excellent treatment, see Fraenkel (2012: 159ff.). It also has some resonance with Jason Stanley’s ideas that good propaganda amplifies the right sort of ideals by nonrational means and that such propaganda is also possible, even endemic, in liberal democracies (Stanley 2015: 49ff.).
45. I am presupposing here a distinction between engineering problems and political problems. For nice treatment, inspired by Latour, see Harman (2014).
46. These thoughts resonate with different intellectual approaches (although often Spinoza is lurking in the background), including Read (2014), Clough (2008), Wolfe (2014), as well as Nussbaum (2013) (but for a critical response to Nussbaum’s program, see also Srinivasan (2017)).
47. There is an increasingly sophisticated literature on how voters identify with particular leaders. See, for example, Caprara and Zimbardo (2004).
48. And, admittedly, the danger is real; even Hume’s analysis of De Witt ends up glorifying his embrace of the state of emergency.
49. As Chris Brooke reminded me, Max Weber’s lecture, “Politics as a Vocation,” does not fit my generalization, but the generally skeptical attitude toward Weber’s fondness for charismatic leadership also proves my point. For treatments of Hume’s account of leadership see Sabl (2012) and Whelan (2004: ch. 3). For a broadly Humean account of leadership, see Sabl (2009). Sabl is especially important for present purposes because he offers an important critique of the way social psychologists in leadership studies have approached the study of leadership; he shows convincingly that these tend to be based on “rigid humanitarianism or civic democratic ideologies” (2009: 119).
50. The issue gets discussed, obliquely, in the context of debates over (media felicitated) polarization. See, e.g., Fiorina and Abrams (2008) and Delia and Gelman (2008). See also, the role of campaigns in promoting ‘affective polarization,’ in Iyengar et al. (2012). If ‘affective polarization’ exists, then ‘affective leadership’ toward union should also be possible.
51. See Sabl (2009: 138, 299).
52. There is, of course, work on how effective leaders can manage other people’s emotions. See, for example, the influential work by George (2000). But in this field, the management of other people’s emotions is something thinner than the cultivations of dispositions; it has more to do with managing moods and generating excitement or caution (etc.). There seems to be quite a bit more research on the effects of emotional expression by leaders on the (workplace) team. See, for example, Gooty et al. (2010); Rajah et al. (2011); van Knippenberg et al. (2016). I thank Annel H.B. De Hoogh for helping me navigate this literature.
53. I have benefitted from reading Visser (2017).
54. The very Humean Sabl (2009) is an existence proof that it can be done.

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