Lecture Note 04: Hume's Skepticism and Moral Sentiments and Montesquieu's Political Liberalism (5503 words)

With this lecture we enter into the discussion of a central epistemological question as to whether rationalism or empiricism is the effective approach to discovering scientific truth. The approaches of Hume and Montesquieu to the study of human sciences demonstrate the simplicity and profundity of the Enlightenment's wisdom at its best.

The epistemological difficulties encountered in adopting a scientific approach to discovering truth by philosophers like Descartes, Locke, Newton and Berkeley was taken up by Hume and applied to the study of liberal politics by Montesquieu. It would lay the foundations for how British philosophers prefer to approach the unknown with common sense.

David Hume

David Hume (1711-1776), one of the most prominent members of the Scottish Enlightenment, was a multifaceted thinker who took empiricism to the extreme of radical skepticism. David Hume is one of the most important and one of the most attractive figures in the Western philosophical tradition. He was, in fact, a man of great wit, affability, and charm, who was a very popular figure both in Parisian salon society as well as in his native Edinburgh.

David Hume and English skepticism

- As a nonbeliever, he wrote without any use of God or the transcendent in his philosophical work. On this matter, he departed fundamentally from Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Spinoza and Leibniz. The human mind is constituted, for Hume, by nature, and human history is

contingent, replete with accidents, not the progressive revelation of a divine theme or developing toward an ideal conclusion.

- Hume argued that suppose all knowledge and ideas derive from experience then there must be two kinds of knowledge. Knowledge of matters of fact and knowledge into relations between ideas.

- First, knowledge of matters of fact (aside from immediate and present sense experience) is based on cause and effect. Cause and effect derives from our experience of constant conjunctions. They relate ideas from prior experience to new experience. This gives us real knowledge but provides no certainty or necessity since future experience may not be the same. So there is always an element of chance or randomness.

- Second, the relations of ideas, which relate ideas from prior experience to each other. This gives us certainty and necessity but only about idea, for they are truths of definition (e.g., "All bachelors are unmarried"). Knowledge of the relations between ideas is either intuitively certain or demonstrable. In either case, it is tautological and lacks existential implication.

- Given that all our knowledge of matters of fact is based on cause and effect and that cause and effect is, in turn, based on experience, what warrants our belief in experience? Reason cannot warrant our belief in experience, for it is logically possible that the future will not resemble the present. Causation cannot warrant this belief in experience, for it depends on experience. Such an argument would be circular. For Hume, scientific statements merely summarize past experience; they need not predict the future.

- Likewise, there can be no rational argument for the existence of substance, either material or mental, or God. Hume used his skeptical empirical reasoning to undermine several critical metaphysical disputes or dogmas. Hume attacked the metaphysical doctrines of "power, force, and necessary connection." These cannot be matters of fact, because they do not arise from sense impressions. There is no logical doctrine of necessary connections in the world, because logical proofs have no existential implications.

- Hume also tried to silence the metaphysical controversy over freedom and determinacy, claiming that disputes on the subject were purely verbal. Are human beings agents of free will or victims of determinacy? Necessity and causation, the essence of determinism, are simply the experience of constant conjunctions and the expectation that the future will resemble the past.

- If our choices were truly uncaused, they would be unpredictable and, therefore, impossible to morally evaluate. Everyday life is based on the assumption that we can predict and, therefore, depend on the actions and choices of others. Liberty becomes merely the absence of external restraint. It is perfectly consistent with a causally determined universe.

- Hume's answer to "power, force, and necessary connection" is psychological disposition and instinct—custom or habit. Our beliefs on these matters are simply the results of custom or habit, not reason. Necessary connection is, thus, merely a powerful psychological

condition, arising from the constancy of certain conjunctions. Experience is warranted by a kind of natural instinct, what is a very skeptical philosophical position.

- The premises of Hume's empiricism were conventional, but the thrust of his conclusions was decidedly skeptical concerning our claims to knowledge of the external world. Like all empiricists, Hume argues that our ideas are copies of our sense impressions, because the ideas generally succeed the impressions. These representations are distinguished by their relative phenomenal vivacity. Hume claimed there were only three principles of association between ideas: resemblance, spatial-temporal contiguity, and cause and effect.

- Hume brought the empiricism to its logical conclusion. In his hands, empiricism became a tool for the skeptical critique of traditional metaphysics and a vindication of common sense. Although Hume shows that skepticism is philosophically unimpeachable, he argues that it can be refuted by practical life.

- The point of Hume's skepticism is to vindicate our commonsense knowledge on pragmatic grounds and teach us to eschew the dogmatism and intolerance of "scholastic" and Christian orthodoxy.

Hume on Morality

- Hume's moral theory in *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* represents a transition between the moral sense doctrines of the Scottish school of common sense philosophy and the consequentialism of the great utilitarian thinkers of the 19th century. Hume offers a scientific theory about morality, not a prescriptive code of ethical conduct.

- Hume treats morality as an already existent realm of human judgment and action and asks how we ever came to make such judgments. Hume is primarily interested in describing the cause of moral evaluation among the human species and in showing what such judgments consist of. He does not prescribe a foundational moral theory.

- Hume argues that our moral judgments have their origins in a sentiment of approbation (讚許). Hume notes that all our moral judgments are constantly conjoined by a sentiment of approbation that precedes such judgments. Moral judgment cannot be based on rational deliberation, because simpletons and children are capable of moral judgment and virtuous action. We have no evidence that the most rational and intellectually advanced people are more disposed toward moral insight or virtuous behavior, an opinion Thomas Jefferson would later espouse.

- Hume asserts, "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (THN p 415). In the practical sense reason alone cannot give rise to moral motivation; it is altogether dependent on pre-existing desires that furnish motivational force. For Hume, this is not a fact we should lament (as moralists do) but a basic fact about our psychology.

- He vehemently opposes the view, held by philosophers before him (and after him), that to act morally is to have a rational grasp of moral truths. For him the role of reason is only to find out what means helps achieve a given goal. Reason (or the intellect) plays no part in determining the goals. Our goals are set exclusively by what Hume calls the sentiments and

what moral psychologists today study and call intuition. Sentiments cannot be evaluated as true or false or as reasonable or unreasonable - they are "original existences" in our mind and arise from unknown natural causes. We cannot be criticized rationally for our sentiments. As Hume remarks, it is "not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" (THN p 416).

- Hume attempts scientifically to answer the question of what makes us approve of some actions and disapprove of others. He makes this attempt by examining the various virtues that are universally accorded to moral rectitude and by searching for a common element that might prompt our instinctual or sentimental approbation. He discovers that the common element is utility. Benevolence is universally acknowledged to be a virtue, and its most distinctive characteristic is that it tends to promote the public good. The only basis of our sentimental approval of the virtue of justice is its obvious utility for society.

- Justice is not needed in societies of superabundance or super-scarcity or in societies of selfless people or thieves. In such places, justice is abjured as useless. For us, justice is a middle point between all these extremes. If we could imagine interaction with creatures that were every bit as rational as we are but entirely weak and unable to resist our force, we would probably suspend our operation of justice toward them, because it has no utility for us. Such was the case, Hume argues, with the treatment of American Indians and women. Hume argues that moral progress consists in including more and more people in our sense of community and, thus, extending our moral sentiments over a larger domain. For Hume, treating strangers in the same manner we treat our relatives and friends represents moral progress.

- All government or political society has its basis in utility. If all people were naturally just, we would have no need for government. Laws of nations arise only after trade has established their utility. Only then do both parties find it useful to be just. When countries are at war, the laws of nations are not useful and are, therefore, suspended.

- Hume argues that the reason utility excites our sentiments of approval is an inherent psychological or instinctual disposition. Utility, and thus virtuous action, have a "natural beauty" that moves us like a calm passion. Virtue is its own reward. Why does man possess such moral sentiments? Hume believes that it is in our instinctive nature, and we have it because it is good for society, or imparts utility.

- Utilitarianism is a kind of social Epicureanism (享樂主義). Virtue is not the result of either narrow self-interest or Spartan self-sacrifice, but rather is the consequence of a well-rounded and pleasant life. In a sense, then, philosophy began with Plato's attempt to rescue morality from the poets. Hume brings that tradition to a close and inverts it—moral education is not to be found in philosophy books but in fiction and poetry.

Hume and Natural Religion

- In the 17th and 18th centuries, there appeared a growing belief and confidence in the culture that one could see through nature to nature's God, that one could learn about the wisdom and providence and designs of God through the study of nature.

- The first half of the 18th century was the high point of confident and optimistic natural philosophy and natural religion. This confidence was built on the belief that the natural faculties linked our minds to manifest natural truth; this optimism was built on the belief that the truth included knowledge of the beneficent and providential designs God has for us. One of the most dramatic and thorough criticisms of this optimism came from Hume, in his posthumously published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

- Hume challenges the fundamental premise of natural religion—that we must logically infer from the data of nature a wise, intelligent, good, omnipotent, and providential God. In particular, he argues that the evidence of evil, pain, and suffering does not support such an inference. Hume argues one might choose to believe in God, but that belief would not be the product of natural inference in a manner consistent with the new sciences. This skepticism about natural religious truth is wholly consistent with Hume's philosophy.

- With Hume, we see a growing skepticism about the relationship of natural philosophy and religious belief, a skepticism that explains in part the increasing tendency of intellectuals to turn away from problems of theology to problems of secular society. The first skepticism is the belief that man's natural faculties allowed them to see through nature to nature's author and his designs. The second skepticism is the belief that nature and man interact to the benefit of man, through the providential designs of God.

- Hume challenged the fundamental premise of natural religion. Empirical natural theology, basing religion on inference from experience had four general fatal flaws. First, it left religion at best uncertain because knowledge from experience was not logically necessary but determined by ongoing experience. Dissimilarities between the universe and the works of men were far more striking than any similarities. In all scientific questions, in all matters of inference from natural phenomena, negative evidence counts even more than positive evidence in testing a hypothesis. To cite order is not enough, because we also have evidence of disorder, and both require explanation by the cause one assigns.

- Second, perfection cannot exist, because the world has so many flaws. Our world might be a botched and rejected work by some child deity that couldn't do it right, and we find ourselves living in the midst of his failure.

- Third, unity cannot exist, because of the diversity of effects in the world. From the size and diversity of the universe we would infer that many deities must have created the world.

- Finally, we would never infer supreme wisdom because human beings improve on the design of nature all the time, not the least in medicine, in our care of the young and elderly, in agriculture, in countless improvements and rearrangements of things.

- If nature proves the infinite goodness of its cause, then why does all our literature talk about the miseries, pains, and uncertainties of life? We have only four logical possibilities to be weighed in light of the evidence: the world could only be as we observe if the cause of things was, as the natural religionists claim, infinitely good; or if it was infinitely evil; or if it was composed of warring opposites of good and evil; or if it was neither good nor evil. This leaves only the last explanation, that the cause of the universe was indifferent to good or evil.

Hume's skepticism was directed at debunking many dogmatic metaphysical and religious positions in favor of a healthy appeal to empirical common sense while retaining an open mind about the future. In this respect he was probably the most important of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers—that stood for a reasoned, pragmatic, and utility Enlightenment world view rather than dogmatic adherence to abstract principles.

For Hume skepticism urged one to be open minded, but it would be twisted into the most close minded and dogmatic idealist arguments by German Counter Enlightenment thinkers that would reverse the relationship between idealism and materialism, subjectivism and objectivism into an extremist, radical philosophical position about mind and matter—and develop into a deontological moral theory (道義論) centered entirely on man's intrinsic rights, without any regard for consequences.

Modern scientific research in moral psychology have shown that Hume's theory of moral sentiments provides a far better account of how moral judgments are made than reason, and their findings show that reason is more often a rationalization of our intuitions and sentiments rather than the cause of our moral instincts and judgments.

Montesquieu

Next, we enter the most revolutionary period of the most revolutionary century, when philosophical ideas had a major impact on the founding of new republics in America and France. The French philosopher Montesquieu (1689–1755) is a central figure in the foundation of the notion of a science of human society. His notion of the separation of powers was crucial for the American Founders.

Montesquieu's massive *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) on the separation of powers influenced all political thought in the second half of the 18th century.

Montesquieu's extraordinary contribution to Enlightenment political thought was his effort to systematize our understanding, through natural inquiry, of both the order and the instabilities

of human political and social forms. For some, this makes him, above all, a foundational thinker in the development of political science and sociology. For others, it makes him a particularly subtle and nuanced observer of the human condition.

Europe's encounter with foreign and "exotic" peoples, the effect of which was multiplied by the growth of printing and the reading public, produced a curiosity about, and astonishment over, differences among cultures, an awareness by which Europeans seemed as strange to others as others did to them. Such cultural divergences included: (1) differences in treatment of women and the elderly, (2) diversity of religions, moral codes, and beliefs, and (3) the very fact of flourishing non-Christian cultures.

The idea that men were not the same everywhere, did make a sort of dent in the Enlightenment picture of a Universalist creed, though not a very deep one. The proposition that there were eternal truths, eternal institutions, eternal values, suitable for everyone, everywhere had to be modified. You had to be more flexible. You had to say: Well, not eternal perhaps, not everywhere; most people, in most places, with due adjustment made for time and place. But if you did that you could still preserve the foundations of the views of the Enlightenment.

His *Persian Letters* (1721), a satire representing society as seen through the eyes of two imaginary Persian visitors to Paris and Europe, cleverly criticizing the absurdities of contemporary French society, alerted Montesquieu to adopt a more sensitive and tempered view of the universality of human sciences. He was more attentive to the need to search for particularistic qualifications to the general rule. But he did not abandon the search for the generalities—a hallmark of the Enlightenment era.

Montesquieu's works posed two central questions: What is relative to time and place? What is natural and universal? Human beings may live and believe in a startling variety of ways, but a reality principle of objective natural causes and consequences exists that allows us to understand the course of human phenomena and sets limits to our malleability and our ephemeral human systems. Montesquieu was thus sensitive to the relativity of human institutions, but always in search of order.

Montesquieu sought to reconcile nature's order of and the variety of human forms of association. His central view is that science is a unifying truth amid the relativity of perspective. The laws of natural philosophy are demonstrable across cultural boundaries. We can discern the regularity of human nature from the variety of circumstance. The task is to recognize the common forms at work beneath the surface differences of human affairs. And to distinguish between what is malleable and what is common to all human experience.

The Spirit of the Laws (1748) presented a largely dispassionate analysis of types of government. He classified the essential varieties of government according to the spirit that animates them. Two claims he made were crucial to the revolutionaries of 1776.

- First, Montesquieu divided government into three types, each of which operates through a characteristic principle: republics, which can take aristocratic or democratic forms; monarchies; and despotisms.

    - The two types of republics, aristocratic and democratic, along with monarchies, correspond to Aristotle's three kinds of virtuous government, and despotism signifies his

vicious types of government. The principle (or spirit in his terminology) by which a despot rules is fear. The principle required for monarchy is honor.

- Republics, however, need virtue. In the case of aristocratic republics, ruled by an election from among a noble class, moderation is the key virtue. For democratic republics, in which all share in rule and one learns to obey and command equals, a public-spirited love of the republic must be inculcated through education.

- Second, Montesquieu admired England as the most politically free and advanced nation in Europe. He particularly emphasized a structural feature of the English constitutional system: mixed government with a separation of powers.

  - Montesquieu advocated the separation of executive, judicial, and legislative powers and a bicameral legislature. He suggested that the executive should be able to veto legislation but not establish it and the legislature should review executive power but not disarm it.

  - The result is four agencies—the executive, judiciary, House of Lords, and House of Commons—all acting as "checks" on one another.

  - Montesquieu was the most famous promoter of the notion that the liberty of the citizens requires a government with internal political limits whose parts are in competition. He also suggested that in republics, size corrupts, meaning that they must not be too large, unless they take the form of a federal republic, meaning a federation of small republics, which curbs the drawbacks of size.

  For Montesquieu, despotism is the subjection of one person's life to the whim and caprice of another's will. When the despot is unable to exercise terror, freedom reasserts itself against the arbitrary will of an individual man. Only terror makes despotism seem stable and permanent. Can one overcome despotism? The society must have rights without anarchy. The society must also have a separation of powers, both acting as a check and balance on the other.

  We learn, among other things, that we ignore objective conditions of justice and survival at our peril and that despotism, so prevalent in human affairs, is both objectively against nature and inherently unstable. Like Machiavelli, Montesquieu seeks to understand in wholly natural terms the contingencies of time and place in politics, but he makes his moral agenda explicit.

  Montesquieu sees the problem of human history is that it carries a scientific and tragic lesson. Morally the most desirable political form, given a variety of alternatives, is a democratic republic, but it also happens to be one of the least stable forms of human association. But historical experiences of instability shows democratic republics cannot survive unless they solve the problem of linking the individual to the broader society—problems of security, of equity, of justice. Such success, however, given human nature, will not be permanent.

  Montesquieu rejects the view that the universal human passions or self-interests are sufficient to sustain the free and moderate political institutions of a democratic republic. He believed that the spirit of the laws—an essential prerequisite for a democratic republic to thrive—must underpin democratic republics. Cultural changes must therefore precede political change.

Montesquieu sees the advance of a durable liberty in the world owes its existence to accidents of history rather than a rationalist design. Like Hume, he is more pragmatic than dogmatic. His liberalism thus avoids the tendencies of the radical Enlightenment's blind pursuit of a Universalist politics and a naïve penchant for a Universalist positive law.

Montesquieu and the American Founding

Montesquieu's influence on the American Revolution was considerable. The American founders thought it their purpose to learn from nature, not the past. They understood the necessity of mutual restraints on centers of power. They knew that, absent public virtue, nothing wrought on paper would be stable.

The American Founders were in brilliant conflict with one another. Jefferson declared independence based on natural law and natural rights and supported active, decentralized self-government. Hamilton argued against Jefferson for an economically active, centralized state. Madison expanded Montesquieu's separation of powers with federalism. The complexities of the American Constitution and system of government are a product of these disagreements.

Ferment in North America

- In the lead-up to the American Revolution, wars between Europeans for control of North America produced ferment. The English claimed the East Coast to the Appalachian Mountains; the French, a huge area from northeast Canada through the Great Lakes down to Louisiana; and the Spanish, Florida.

- The Seven Years' War broke out in 1754 between the French and the English. After its conclusion in 1763, the English Parliament began imposing direct taxes on the colonies. Of course, this led to the Boston Tea Party, the formation of local ruling committees of correspondence, and eventually, the First Continental Congress. Fighting between the British and the colonists began in 1775, culminating in the expulsion of British forces and the declaration of American independence on July 4, 1776.

- The Continental Congress met on and off from 1774 to 1789. It first produced the *Articles of Confederation* (1781), stipulating a loose confederation of the 13 states. It then proposed a new federal Constitution in 1787, which was ratified in 1789. It was the fight over ratification that staked out the divisions among the Founders.

Thomas Jefferson

- Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) is most well known for the *Declaration of Independence*. The preamble is perhaps the most famous political writing of the modern age and clearly invokes natural rights.

- The *Declaration* is Locke with an edge: God's law of nature; government instituted to secure rights to life, liberty, and— instead of property per se—the pursuit of happiness; the powers of government derived solely from the people's consent; and the right to revolt. Politics and government are instrumentally valuable only. The added edge is the emphasis on rights in addition to individual property and interest. America would become the great land of rights talk; that is, Americans tend to conceive their political battles as battles about rights.

- Among the Founders and as George Washington's secretary of state, Jefferson was best known as a radical republican: He supported active, decentralized self-government by independent farmers. The ratification fight separated him from Alexander Hamilton and John Adams.

- Whoever supported the new Constitution was a federalist, but there were different kinds of federalists. Jefferson regarded himself as a republican federalist rather than a monarchical federalist, as he called Hamilton and Adams.

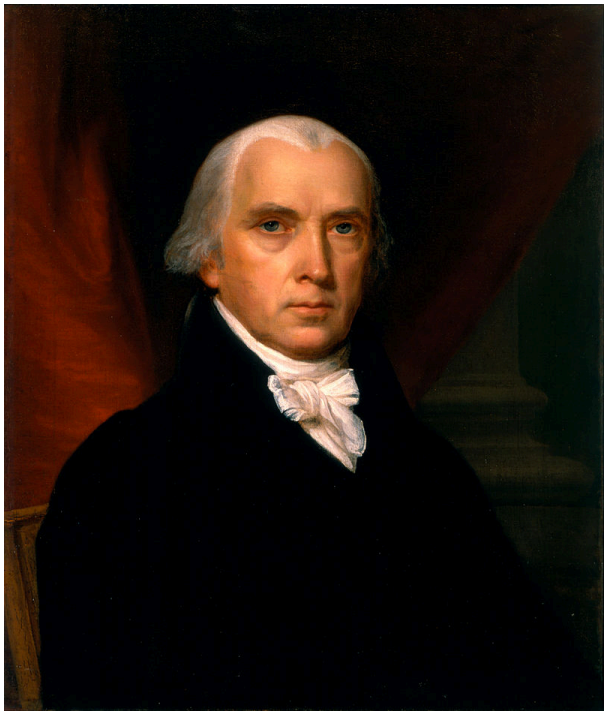
    - And Jefferson was a radical republican. Referring to a revolt over taxation and debt collection in 1786, he wrote, "God forbid we should be twenty years without such a rebellion."

    - In a famous letter to Madison in 1789, Jefferson further stated: "Every constitution then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years. If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force, and not of right."

Alexander Hamilton

- Alexander Hamilton (1755–1804), Washington's secretary of the treasury, was Jefferson's enemy. Hamilton was particularly concerned with America's economic progress in a commercial and manufacturing age. He was the first to systematically argue that although Adam Smith's attack on protectionism was right in the long run, in the short run, it had too many disadvantages for an underdeveloped economy.
    - Hamilton argued that an under populated United States agrarian society could not compete with England and other West European economies on manufacturing.
    - Consequently, government must act to support domestic manufacturing, including building physical and financial infrastructure and establishing protectionist tariffs. His view won the day decades after his death.
    - Hamilton was responsible for a host of institutions that would protect and promote American industrial trade, including the mint, the first national bank of the United States, the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Patent Office.
- Hamilton's aim was "one great American system," an empire across the continent. For him, the *Articles of Confederation* left the United States a loose confederation of weak states. He already feared factionalism between North and South. He wrote of the danger of "petty" republics without any shared, unifying purposes.
- Jefferson was not wrong in calling Hamilton a monarchical republican; Hamilton had argued that the presidency should be a kind of elective monarchy. He feared the violation of one-person one-vote by the equal voting rights of states under the *Articles*. He also opposed the *Bill of Rights* (1791) and the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, which were adopted by the Convention because of the insistence of anti-federalists.

James Madison



- James Madison (1751–1836) was the author of the famous concluding section of the Constitution and crafted the *Bill of Rights*. Along with Hamilton, he wrote the great majority of *The Federalist* papers.

- Madison gave the most sophisticated analysis of what he regarded as the danger of democracy: factionalism. The Constitution must limit the power of local majority factions that would use government to serve their special interests. Because of this, Madison favored a republic, which he took to be large and representative, rather than a democracy, which must be direct and small, which was advocated by J J Rousseau.

- Madison followed Montesquieu's principle of the separation of powers very seriously. There is no liberty if executive, judiciary, and legislative are in the same hands. Popular self-rule is not enough; in practice, it means majority rule. Tyrannical rule by a majority is just as dangerous as rule by a tyrannical monarch, and factions can come to control the majority. All power, including power of the majority, must be limited by a constitutional structure that divides it among government institutions and pits them in competition.

- One of the major issues in forming the Constitution was the question of equity of political power in Congress among states of differing populations. In *The Federalist* papers, Madison described the compromise to address this question by having two representatives from each state in the Senate and allowing the number of representatives in the Congress to vary with the population of each state. He viewed the entire federated structure as an advance in republican design.

- He then used the difference between federal and state levels as a further balance and limit on power. Thus, Madison showed that a larger country could be freer—more "republican"—than a smaller, more "democratic" republic.

Results of the Founders' Disputes

- The political system created by the Founders is a mixed bag, but in politics, it can be good to recognize the necessity of balancing competing values, principles, and institutions. One of the questions for the founding generation was: Which is the freer polity, a direct democracy that must empower majorities or a republic with institutional structure to keep local majorities or factions from dominating government? At the same time, the Founders were concerned with the realities of managing an economy that could compete in a North Atlantic world of powerful trading states.

- The results of the Founders' disputes may have turned out well for the United States but not in the short run for the principal antagonists.

    - Jefferson the Francophile and Hamilton the Anglophile fought as Washington's secretaries of state and treasury. Fearing the monarchical federalism of Hamilton, Jefferson and Madison formed the Democratic-Republican Party to run against John Adams, who was the Federalist Party candidate in 1796.

    - Adams won, with Jefferson serving as his vice president. During Adams's presidency, Jefferson was so discontented that he helped draft a secession threat by the state of Kentucky; he was willing to destabilize the Union.

    - Jefferson was elected president in 1801 with Aaron Burr as his vice president. In 1804, while still in office, Burr shot and killed Hamilton in a duel. Jefferson dropped him from the ticket before his own reelection.

    - Jefferson, the opponent of Hamilton's imperial America from coast to coast, wound up making the largest single addition to any American empire: the Louisiana Purchase, in 1803. He also passed the Embargo Act, a protectionist tariff, in 1807, against his apparent principles. Both Jefferson and Adams were a crucial component of the century of political brilliance, from 1689 to 1789, that created modern republicanism.

The moral and political ideas of John Locke, David Hume, and Montesquieu had a profound influence of the Anglo-American approach to political liberalism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Together with Adam Smith's ideas of political economy they would shape the future development of political and economic liberalism outside Continental Europe. The latter would take a different path influenced more by the ideas of the French Revolution of 1789.

Readings

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects,* 1739–40.

David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* 1751.

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* 1779.

Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, 1721.

Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Part II, 1748.

Constitution of the United States of America, 1789.

John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison, *The Federalist*, 1788.

Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*, 1776.

Questions

1. What is the function of skepticism in Hume's philosophy?

2. In Hume's view, what is the ultimate basis of our knowledge of matters of fact about the world?

3. Contrast the approaches of Plato and Hume to moral philosophy.

4. Discuss the relationship between Hume's moral and epistemological views.

5. We know that David Hume claims atheism to be an absurdly dogmatic position. What distinguishes Hume's rejection of natural religion from atheism?

6. Is the marriage of philosophy and religion more dangerous to the former or to the latter?

7. Why don't Montesquieu's relativistic insights lead to skepticism about a science of society?

8. Is there any way, in Montesquieu's system, to limit the depredations of power by means of written laws?

9. Why did some of the Founders fear and want to limit "democracy"?

10. What are the underlying conflicting principles built into the American political system?