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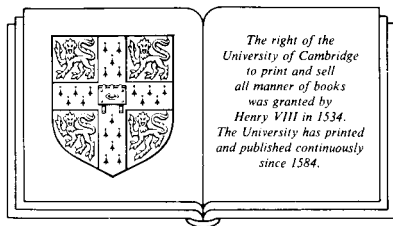
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Introductory Preface

This is not an exposition, analysis and critique of Hume's political philosophy as such. That is why it is not called 'Hume's Political Philosophy'. Nor is it a comprehensive and exhaustive study of every aspect of Hume's political science as such. That is why I abandoned the title originally chosen: 'Hume's Science of Politics', reluctantly, as 'science of politics' was contemporary usage, because for one thing, Hume's science of politics included economics; that was a very large and important part of it indeed, and full-scale, serious study of that should be left to economists, just as full-scale serious study of his political philosophy, which would involve Hume's ethics, an extremely controversial subject, is best left to philosophers. 'Hume's Philosophical Politics', however, describes what I have tried to do better than any other title I can think of. It is presumed to have a slightly archaic, essentially eighteenth-century sound, for this is a study of Hume's thinking on politics in the light of his political intentions and the historical context: the emphasis is on *historical*.

This is not where political theorists who write about past thinkers are inclined to put the emphasis; they are not primarily historians, and they probably have little inkling of the enormous hinterland which is beyond their horizon. This no doubt explains the enviable ease and confidence with which they handle their predecessors (Hume has been handled less than some in this way because he is not usually considered to belong to the first league of great political thinkers, and until quite recently there was a notable dearth of full-scale studies of this aspect of his thought).

This anti-historical attitude, if that is not too strong a word for what is really an indifference to and failure to appreciate the sheer thickness and complexity of the texture of the past – it is a question of degree, may be a good thing in its own sphere, but this is not the place to make out such a case. On the contrary the historian proper, who has his own task and peculiar sensibility, may even venture, and risk a snub, to suggest the paradox that a past thinker cannot be made relevant, or be seen as 'alive and frondent for us',

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to use Carlyle's expression, unless the historical minutiae, that, as such, are wholly irrelevant, are made most thoroughly one's own and properly understood in all their detail and bearings, as far as this is possible. Obviously if a past political thinker is to be made relevant to us, all sorts of adjustments have to be made, and allowances for the times he lived in, and the special needs of the times as he saw them. But how can one make the adjustments and allowances adequately unless one knows very precisely and comprehensively what to adjust and allow for? And reading even quite a lot of modern historians and textbooks will not necessarily give one that ability: indeed, if one confines oneself to the most modern ones, one may be led most seriously astray. Historians of ideas have to do their own history, and the fact that so many of them do not, is why other professional historians call their subject 'marshy'.¹

The principles of warfare, it seems, remain much the same; but if one is to learn from the study of an old battle or campaign, one must recreate its every detail with the utmost care and precision, no matter that the uniform, weapons, formations and tactics are wholly outmoded and 'irrelevant'. Failure to account for any of these 'irrelevant' matters may make a useless nonsense of the whole. How many 'historians' of political thought are in love with their subjects in the way in which even a novelist like C. S. Forrester, for example, was in love with the ships and naval tactics of the Napoleonic era? Do we make ourselves equally expert in the spars and rigging and scientific manuals of the old controversies, so that we could, as it were, sail any of those old ships with equal skill ourselves? Most of us would probably be sunk by the lightest pamphleteer.

Leaving aside the political theorists who do their history in the manner of a military expert re-fighting the battle of Waterloo on a flat and featureless table – and perhaps one can get something out of that, but just what is for others to determine – those who make a more genuinely historical effort, perhaps in order to win the relevance which is denied them otherwise, face formidable difficulties of interpretation. Hume is terrible campaign country, rugged, broken, cross-grained, complex, remorseless in its demands. One has to fight every inch of the way, and can never feel really secure. No interpretation ever seems to get going before it is pulled up almost immediately by some difficulty. The more of his writings one takes into account, the less confident one feels

¹ See, for instance, Sir Herbert Butterfield's Preface to *Man on his Past*.

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that one can ever break through. This is the 'general impression' that one ought to get; but one will not get it by trying 'to get a general impression'. And this perhaps is the ultimate mystery of Hume's 'scepticism', which the devotees eventually attain to.

That the precision of his language does not match the precision of his thinking is a common complaint, but Hume is uniquely difficult to interpret because no other thinker probably covers so much ground and says so much with such economy. Since one cannot be sure at any given moment just what he is saying, it is necessary to cast the net as widely as possible, and this is one reason for carefully studying all the variants in the different editions. But then because significant juxtaposition is part of our art and because in Hume there are not only so many different pieces that can and must be moved about in the process of interpretation, but so many different contexts, one is open to the danger of linking things together that really belong apart, using *A* to explain *B* when it does not really do so. No other thinker is such a challenge to one's intellectual honesty; and if an interpretation can be too clever,¹ it cannot be too honest, and it is much easier to be clever than honest in the history of ideas. It is one of the hazards of the trade. That is why I have deployed much quotation and reference, giving variants and dates, so that the reader can keep some sort of check on what is being demonstrated.

I have also deployed, and at some length, a great deal that does not belong to Hume's philosophical politics, some of it in Hume himself. This is in order to help define what is 'philosophical' in Hume's politics, by contrasting it with what is not. Generalized abridgement does not do this adequately. And if it looks like a mere display of learning, one might ponder an aspect of Hume's scepticism that is not much remarked on, because for most people Hume means a gadfly intelligence rather than a stock of learning:² viz: that if increasing knowledge is accompanied by increasing awareness of ignorance, and of the meaning of ignorance, then a display of learning can be also the sign – and the greater the learning, the larger the sign – that one knows that one does not know. Vulgar criticism of 'mere' learning is apt to forget this. It is also another aspect of a more truly historical approach to the history of political thought: an attempt to counter the tendency to rely

¹ *L'interpretazione non deve essere troppo intelligente*. Franco Amerio on Croce in *Introduzione allo Studio di G. B. Vico* (1947).

² But see, for example, the essay on the *Populousness of Ancient Nations*; and how many philosophers today could write a History of England, or part of one? The example of R. G. Collingwood shows that the question is not unfair.

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almost exclusively on internal lines of communication in the interpretation of a given thinker, which in Hume's case usually means trying to connect everything to his philosophy, as though he lived in a cocoon of his own spinning. One can display great ingenuity in this, but the question is: who is displaying the ingenuity? A historical interpretation will be more open-ended, generally more untidy, more tentative, with fewer tracks leading so obviously from *A* to *B*, from *this* in the philosophy (that is, the philosophy of the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*, which, incidentally, it is easy to generalize about with more verve than understanding) to *that* in the *Essays* or the *History*.

This does not mean that Hume's philosophical politics has to be presented as a formless mess. Viewed as an attempt to give the established, Hanoverian, regime a proper intellectual foundation, it falls fairly naturally into three main phases, which overlap only because Hume thought that the first part of his programme had been a failure, and had to be presented again in a different form. The *Treatise of Human Nature* was broken up and scattered about in essays, one of which (*Origin of Government*) was written as late as 1774. Otherwise the sequence is roughly chronological: a theory of political obligation; a science of politics; and a *History of England*: all three parts of a programme of political education for changed circumstances and new opportunities.

The term 'philosophical' changes its meaning, as will appear. It is a key eighteenth-century word, with many meanings and shades of meaning. In Hume it spreads out from an original sharp focus in a theory of association of ideas to attitudes less strictly defined, but the idea of philosophical politics provides an essential continuity in Hume's thought, which will be stressed in order to challenge and modify the commonly accepted notion that there was a significant development in a conservative direction. This is another reason why I have been free with variants and dates, not in order to dwell on change, but on the contrary to make the point as fairly as possible that in spite of it there was an essential continuity. The reader can see that if I put together and treat as one things that are twenty years apart, I am doing it consciously.

There is no standard edition of all Hume's works. I have used Selby-Bigge for the *Treatise*, *Enquiries* and *A Dialogue*. My edition of the *Essays* is an Edinburgh edition in two volumes of 1800. This has been collated with the Green and Grose edition of the *Essays*, and also, because Green and Grose do not have all the variants, with the editions published as revised and corrected by Hume

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himself. I have also used Rotwein's edition of Hume's *Writings on Economics*, and other editions at different times. But all references to the *Essays* are to the Oxford University Press edition of 1963: *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, because this is the most complete of the easily available editions. It has a number of important variants in the form of notes, though they are not dated, and it is not explained what they are. It does not have *A Dialogue*. Wherever possible I have tried to give an easily traceable reference without referring to the pages of this edition, but it is not possible to do this very often. It is true that most of the essays are not very long, but they are very full and they seem long when one wants to check a reference in a hurry. As for the *History of England*, I have explained my procedure with respect to it in an Appendix. With the exception of Hume's letters, I have modernized the spelling, use of capitals etc of the old texts, but not absolutely consistently, and I have quoted from translations of Grotius, Pufendorf and the other theorists of Natural Law, giving the sort of references which can be checked easily enough with the originals, if anyone wishes to do so. These translations are contemporary, but that is an advantage.

Some years ago I wrote a general study of the eighteenth-century Scottish thinkers, which began with Hume, the idea being to bring out the differences between Hume and the others, and between the others themselves, and this was done, and the whole thing given some sort of thematic unity, by showing how the idea of social progress meant different things in all of them, when it was seen in the light of their respective systems, the differences being at times a matter of subtle nuance. I called this 'The Progress of Society': that seemed to be the central and characteristic idea of the Scottish Enlightenment. Some of this had already formed part of a Special Subject at Cambridge on the Scottish Enlightenment – though in fact I was not allowed to call it that, because in those days the Scottish Enlightenment was still a somewhat backwoods kind of affair: it had to be 'Hume, Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment'.

'The Progress of Society' will, I hope, see the light of day, though not in its original form, because for one thing, the Hume section has been removed and made to stand on its own feet. Something of this interpretation of Hume has appeared very briefly already, without the necessary apparatus and references, and under different conditions, in a review article of Giarrizzo's *David Hume, politico e storico* in the *Historical Journal* (1963), and in

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my Introduction to the *Pelican Classics* edition of the first (1754) volume of Hume's *History: the History of Great Britain, Volume One, containing the reigns of James I and Charles I*. I do not agree with Giarrizzo's interpretation, but I found it extremely helpful at a critical stage of my own campaign. The reader will see that I owe debts all round, especially to the philosophers. And, of course, to the staffs of libraries and other institutions, especially the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh University Library, the Signet Library, New College Library, the Central Public Library, the Register House, the Speculative Society, the Royal Society – all of Edinburgh, the Bodleian, the University Library and the Library of King's College, Cambridge.

NOTE ON THE 1978 PRINTING

I have taken the opportunity provided by a reprinting to correct as many misprints and minor errors as I have been able to find. But I have not been able to rectify other mistakes that I have become conscious of, as, for example, that the so-called letter to Dr Cheyne was quite likely written to Arbuthnot, as Mossner has argued, or that the *Craftsman* had ceased by 1740 to be an opposition journal, or that my reference to Domat is not helpful as it stands. The reader can decide how important such things are, and will no doubt discover other weaknesses of this sort that I have missed.

D.F.

Abbreviations

<i>Treatise</i>	Hume's <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i> . ed. Selby-Bigge.
<i>Enquiry</i> or <i>Enquiry concerning Morals</i>	Hume's <i>Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals</i> . ed. Selby-Bigge. 2nd ed, Oxford, 1902.
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of David Hume</i> . ed. J. Y. T. Greig. 2 Vols, Oxford, 1932.
<i>New Letters</i>	<i>New Letters of David Hume</i> . ed. R. Klibansky and E. C. Mossner, Oxford, 1954.
<i>Essays</i>	<i>Essays Moral, Political and Literary</i> by David Hume (O.U.P. 1963). Any page reference number after the title of an essay refers to this edition.
<i>History</i>	Hume's <i>History of England</i> , London, 1808–10, 10 Vols.
<i>Pelican Classics</i>	Hume's <i>History of Great Britain containing the reigns of James I and Charles I</i> . (Pelican classics, 1970, ed. Duncan Forbes.)