

INDIRECT UTILITY, JUSTICE, AND EQUALITY
IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF DAVID HUME

ABSTRACT: *Differing interpretations of the political thought of David Hume have tended to emphasize either conservative, gradualist elements similar to Burke or rationalist aspects similar to Hobbes. The concept of indirect utility as used by Hume reconciles these two approaches. Indirect utility is best illustrated by Hume's conception of justice, in contrast to his conception of benevolence, which yields direct benefits. This understanding of Hume's consequentialism also helps underscore certain egalitarian aspects of Hume's thought.*

David Hume has attracted many labels from those who have attempted to grasp the complexity of his philosophical, political, and historical writings. In this essay I will contend that the principle that connects the various aspects of Hume's work is that of indirect utility. By indirect utility I mean the capacity of virtues, practices, and institutions to have generally beneficial consequences in the long term, even if they are not immediately beneficial. This principle not only covers such familiar notions as delayed gratification and enlightened self-interest, but explains why one sort of character and one sort of legal system should be preferred over another—or, more pertinently to Hume, why a system of laws is preferable to no system.

As we shall see, there are moments when circumstances of paramount necessity require the abrogation of the regular system of jus-

tice. Hume's conception of utility is not as ruthless in its calculating rationality as that of Jeremy Bentham. But a certain family resemblance and even lineage has to be acknowledged, even though Hume's conception of utility is much broader and more malleable than that of Bentham, given that it has to accommodate Hume's complex moral psychology of sympathy and the passions.

In making the case for indirect utility as a fundamental principle of Hume's political thought, it is useful to contrast this interpretation against two others. The first position I will be arguing against interprets Hume as a seminal conservative thinker. I will focus mainly on Sheldon Wolin and Donald Livingston, whose arguments strike me as the most persuasive.¹ The other interpretation, which is somewhat closer to mine, portrays Hume as being pivotal in the contractarian tradition, in spite of his explicit arguments against the notion of a social contract. David Gauthier develops this interpretation of Hume (1979).² While it does allow a role for consequentialism, Gauthier's position unnecessarily saddles Hume with positions that run contrary to his account of the origins of the state and civil society.

To the degree that there is a consensus on the status of Hume's political thought, it is probably that he should be considered a conservative political thinker. Sheldon Wolin's seminal essay, "Hume and Conservatism" (1976), emphasizes that Hume shared the conservative "distrust of reform" and that he influenced Edmund Burke with his account of the role of time, history, and experience in the development of political institutions. While it is undoubtedly the case that Hume influenced many later conservative thinkers, this doesn't quite do justice to the complexity of his political thought, as Wolin (1976, 254) seems tacitly to admit in the conclusion of his essay, where he appears to backtrack slightly from his main thesis by stating that Hume was a symptom of an age in which previous liberal gains were being consolidated, and thus in which "liberalism was becoming conservatized."³

A more rigorous and uncompromising case for considering Hume a conservative is made by Donald Livingston in *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (1984). Livingston (1984, 308–9) argues that conservatism is primarily a criticism of "a certain pattern of thought," namely "the violent intrusion of rationalistic metaphysics into politics." Livingston's analysis is an improvement on Wolin's account in three respects. First, he recognizes that Hume leaves room for reform in his political thought. Second, he realizes that Hume is not an irra-

tionalist. As Livingston (1984, 322) puts it, “A maxim such as ‘reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions’ was designed to shock the conceptual frame of the Age of Reason, and to throw into question not reason but a philosophical theory of reason.” Third, Livingston has a more nuanced understanding of the central role of time in Hume’s political thought, arguing that it “is a value internal to Hume’s conception of social utility. . . . Evolutionary reform, then, is not only possible in Hume’s system, it is internal to the narrative imagination and, consequently, to the moral world which the imagination weaves into existence” (Livingston 1984, 338 and 340). The chief weakness in Livingston’s interpretation is that it doesn’t connect these insights to Hume’s science of politics and his political economy, which, while displaying a characteristic caution, make an even more prominent place for reason than Livingston intimates.⁴

If Wolin and Livingston underestimate the role of reason and rationality in their accounts of Hume’s political thought, the same cannot be said of David Gauthier, who goes so far as to argue that Hume’s account is roughly as rationalistic as the one found in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. “Hume’s men, like those of Hobbes and Locke and Bentham, are possessive individualists. . . . Hume is sensibly aware of men’s interest in curbing interest. It is this awareness which makes his thought contractarian, for the essence of the social contract is found in the mutual advantage of restraining the pursuit of advantage” (Gauthier 1979, 36–37).

While it is true that Ulysses-like self-restraint seems to be a necessary component of the Hobbesian and Lockean account of the origins of government, self-restraint is not a sufficient condition. At the very least some notion of consent, explicit or tacit, is essential to any contract theory. Hume considered the notion of the social contract to be descriptively false as an explanation of how government can make claims of legitimate obligation on its citizens.⁵ While reason and interest certainly play pivotal roles in Hume’s account of the origins of government and civil society, other factors, such as sentiment, benevolence, habit, and custom also come into play. Where Wolin and Livingston underestimate the role of rationality in Hume’s political thought, Gauthier fails to take into account the complexity of Hume’s psychology.

In truth, Hume’s political thought is best considered as a form of consequentialism that combines an evolutionary account of the origins of civil society and government with a rationalist model of

human action that is qualified by Hume's psychological theory.⁶ Hume emphasizes the role of benevolence, habit, and convention in the spontaneous emergence of a society that does not need a government to enforce rules and keep order. Hume's claim is that if the society is small enough, benevolence, familiarity, and conventions are sufficient.⁷ However, as a society experiences economic and demographic growth, most of its members become strangers to each other, weakening the role of benevolence as compared to self-interest. People's natural myopia about the effects of their actions over time and on the larger community become significant. To provide for continued economic prosperity and to correct for the problem of short-sightedness, government is necessary. While justice exists prior to the advent of government, due to reciprocal restraint in the pursuit of immediate interest, long-term utility demands that reciprocity be re-inforced as a society experiences growth and change.

Justice, Civil Society, and the Origins of Government

The principle of indirect utility emerges gradually in Hume's account of the origins of justice, civil society, and government. No government is necessary for social cohesion in smaller groups, because Hume sees human beings as inherently social animals who can cooperate by means of conventions that emerge without being anyone's intention, and through the natural sympathy that enables us to be concerned with the welfare of others.

Hume (1978, 490) illustrates how conventions involving reciprocity come into being by drawing the analogy of two rowers in a boat.

Two men, who pull the oars of a boat, do it by an agreement or convention, tho' they have never given promises to each other. Nor is the rule concerning the stability of possession the less deriv'd from human conventions, that it arises gradually, and acquires growth by slow progression.

The habit and expectation that each member of a small society will show certain restraint and will perform certain roles promotes social cooperation. This reciprocity is self-reinforcing in that it leads to the recognition of common interest:

It is only a general sense of common interest; which sense all the members of the society express to one another, and which induces them to regulate their conduct by certain rules. I observe, that it will be for my interest to leave another in the possession of his goods *provided* he will act in the same manner with regard to me. . . . When this common sense of interest is mutually express'd, and is known to both, it produces a suitable resolution and behavior. (Hume 1978, 490)

Small-scale society is also marked by sympathy, because in Hume's view, benevolence is a natural virtue most strongly felt for our family and others who are close to us. Since in a small-scale society, by definition, all the members are close to each other, the direct benefits of benevolence are strong. Consequently, "nothing but an encrease of riches and possessions cou'd oblige men to quit" such a society (Hume 1978, 541).

With population growth and an increase in prosperity, however, the bonds of affection between group members become increasingly attenuated. This is one source of a larger society in which the public role of benevolence is severely diminished, although it never disappears entirely. The other source of the new kind of society is conflict between smaller societies.⁸ The root of such conflict can be competition over relatively scarce resources or inequality of wealth. Hume (1978, 540) declares that "the first rudiments of government . . . arise from quarrels, not among men of the same society, but among those of different societies. A less degree of riches will suffice to this latter effect, than is requisite for the former."

Hume speculates that the experience of fighting wars teaches men the benefit of having someone in authority, a military leader. Through analogy to this experience, the idea and practice of a nonmilitary leadership structure takes hold.

This authority, however, instructs them in the advantages of government, and teaches them to have recourse to it, when either by the pillage of war, by commerce, or by any fortuitous inventions, their riches and possessions have become so considerable as to make them forget, on every emergence, the interest they have in the preservation of peace and justice. . . . Camps are the true mothers of cities; and as war cannot be administered by reason of the suddenness of every exigency, without some authority in a single person, the same kind of authority takes place in that civil government, which succeeds the military. (Hume 1978, 540–41.)

For Hume, like Hobbes, conflict and the advent of government are closely related. The importance of war and conflict in the political thought of both comes in part from shared influences. Both Hume (1987, 422) and Hobbes admired and were deeply influenced by Thucydides. Hume places more emphasis than Hobbes, however, on the conflict between competing groups, as opposed to civil war. However, this is not to say that Hume was unconcerned with the danger of internal social conflict, which he believes leads to civil war (Hume 1978, 540). But unlike Hobbes, Hume does not believe that a social contract could have remedied the violent conflict that marks much of the human condition.

The face of the earth is continually changing, by the encrease of small kingdoms into great empires, by the dissolution of great empires into smaller kingdoms, by the planting of colonies, by the migration of tribes. Is there anything discoverable in all these events, but force and violence? Where is the mutual agreement or voluntary association so much talked of? (Hume 1987, 471.)

What, then, are the sources of stability, cooperation, and some degree of personal liberty? Hume's answer lies in the gradual emergence of conventions and cooperation in prepolitical societies. There, habits of reciprocity give rise to new artifices, which Hume calls the "rules of justice" or "laws of nature." Hume's conception of justice is his most significant single application of the principle of indirect utility. It is quite distinct from benevolence, which has direct and immediate benefits. Hume uses the metaphors of the wall and the vault of an arch to emphasize and illustrate this distinction. According to Hume, benevolence is like a wall because each benevolent act is a brick that adds something to the common good. Justice is like a vault because it is the system of justice as whole that is important, not the individual bricks (Hume 1975, 305).⁹ And unlike bricks of benevolence, the vault may structure the whole edifice by dictating outcomes that in individual cases seem unfair.¹⁰

Hume regards the rules of justice as indispensable to the ability of a society to function at all. "Hume's justice-initiators are parents who care about their children's concerns, and friends who care about each other's cares" (Baier 1991, 221). The three basic rules of justice are the stability of possession, . . . its transference by consent, and the performance of promises" (Hume 1978, 526). These conventions of justice

are artificial, but not arbitrary, in that they are an inescapable minimum requirement for any human society. In a small-scale society the natural virtue of benevolence, or generosity, and the artificial virtue of justice are to some extent complementary.

However, the convention of justice can arise only under Hume's circumstances of justice. Hume argues that there are aspects of the mind and facts about the external world that make justice necessary. "The qualities of mind are *selfishness* and *limited generosity*: And the situation of external objects is their *easy change*, join'd to their *scarcity* in comparison to the wants and desires of men" (Hume 1978, 495). For Hume, justice occurs in a middle range of moderate scarcity and limited benevolence. Hume imagines a world beyond justice: a condition of such great abundance that no conflicts over goods need arise, a state of the human mind given over to a perfect altruistic generosity.¹¹ At the other end of the scale, Hume (1978, 494–95) imagines an irremediable poverty in conditions of extreme scarcity, the human mind given over to a vicious, unrestrainable selfishness. This is a condition in which justice is unattainable.

The minimal conditions of justice being met, Hume assumes that a society will grow and prosper. The "natural law" of stability of possession curtails the possibility of endless quarreling over possessions; law transferring possession by consent provides a mechanism for adjusting to changing conditions and circumstances; and the performance of promises provides an orientation towards the future that partly corrects for human myopia. One of Hume's interpreters, Annette Baier, "points out that the special role of promise, among the sources of obligation, for Hume, is to enable cooperation among strangers, and to extend that cooperation to future actions and distant goods and property" (Postema 1986, 85).

As the society in Hume's account experiences growth in population and prosperity, internal strains gradually emerge to accompany external conflicts. "Hume's account is a genetic one: institutions are built upon institutions. The need for each arises from the defects in the institutions of the previous stage—defects which, paradoxically, are due largely to the success of these institutions" (Postema 1986, 84). (For Hume, as for Marx, men make their own history, but not as they please.)¹² As society enlarges, the positive effects of benevolence become increasingly attenuated, and "men being naturally selfish, or endow'd only with a confin'd generosity, they are not easily induc'd to perform any action for the interest of strangers, except with a view to

some reciprocal advantage, which they had no hope of obtaining but by such a performance” (Hume 1978, 519). While the rules of justice provide stability, human self-interest and myopia threaten. Whereas before, the consequences and effects of one’s actions were felt directly and were publicly noticeable, in the larger society of strangers it is possible to act selfishly, even to violate the rules of justice, without detection. The temptation and “allurement of the present” is too great to resist (Hume 1987, 38). And “avidity alone, of acquiring goods and possessions for ourselves and our nearest friends, is insatiable, perpetual, universal, and directly destructive of society” (ibid., 492).

To avoid the destruction of society and to ensure its further growth and development, government becomes necessary. But it is important to emphasize that this is not because Hume regards human nature as being fundamentally antisocial, but because at a certain stage in social development the institution of government is required to deal with what are now called collective-action problems. The most famous example of this in Hume is his “meadow problem.”

Two neighbors may agree to drain a meadow, which they possess in common; because ’tis easy for them to know each others mind; and each must perceive, that the immediate consequence of his failing in his part, is, the abandoning of the whole project. But ’tis very difficult, and indeed impossible, that a thousand persons shou’d agree in any such action; it being difficult for them to concert so complicated a design, and still more difficult for them to execute it; while each seeks a pretext to free himself of the trouble and expence, and wou’d lay the whole burden on others. Political society easily remedies both these inconveniences. (Hume 1978, 538.)

In addition to ensuring that bridges are built, harbors opened, fleets equipped, and armies disciplined, government ensures that the rules of justice are maintained in the larger and wealthier society of strangers.

Indirect Utility and Its Limits

These two accounts of the origins of government are woven together through Hume’s use of the principle of indirect utility, which contains both evolutionary and rationalistic elements. The evolutionary aspect lies in the genetic way that new situations and institutions grow out of old ones. The rationalistic element lies in the way human beings reflect upon their experiences and alter their actions in accordance with their

judgments. The principle of indirect utility shows how certain basic political and legal institutions come into being. It also points to the important role that uncertainty, contingency, and chance play in Hume's social thought. The principle of indirect utility assumes that perfect knowledge of the future is not available, so institutions are needed to provide a certain minimal stability and predictability that promotes the general happiness in the long run.

Most accounts of Hume seem to accept that once government is established, the initial distribution of goods is irrelevant to the concerns of justice, as long as that distribution occurs within a middle range of moderate scarcity and limited benevolence.¹³ Donald Livingston argues that, for Hume, this initial distribution, by definition, is justice. It can only change gradually, through the unintended consequences of human action—particular exchanges and transfers among consenting parties. Therefore any attempt to apply an abstract principle of distributive justice to a concrete historical situation is bound to be self-defeating and dangerous (Livingston 1984, 338–40).

While I agree with Livingston that Hume would be deeply opposed to the arbitrary imposition of abstract, *a priori* principles of justice on a society, it doesn't follow that his concern with distribution of goods in a society ends with the initial distribution. For Hume, justice is grounded in public utility and common interest, so to the degree that distributive inequality pushes a substantial portion of the population into a condition of radical scarcity, that portion of the population is no longer bound by the rules of justice. To put it another way, certain distributions of goods—depending on the circumstances—are unjust. The relevant example from Hume is his insistence that the “public, even in less urgent necessities open granaries, without consent of the proprietors; as justly supposing that the authority of magistracy may, consistent with equity, extend so far. . . .” Hume (1998, 85)¹⁴ emphasizes the importance of avoiding human misery and suffering: “It will readily, I believe, be admitted, that the strict laws of justice are suspended, in such a pressing emergence, and give place to the stronger motives of necessity and self-preservation.”

In short, there are circumstances in which the rules of justice do not hold: where paramount and immediate needs outweigh concerns about long-term benefits. This amounts to an exception to Hume's emphasis on indirect utility. Since justice is meant to help secure public happiness and security, adhering strictly to its rules under dire circumstances runs counter to its intended effect. However, this fact is

not without significance for the application of indirect utility to the principle of equality. The inference I want to draw here is that, for Hume, a distribution of goods that plunges a substantial portion of the public into abject misery could be pernicious to public utility. Perhaps this is his rationale for advocating gradual adjustments that reform distributive patterns that contribute to impoverishment and ultimately public disorder.¹⁵

This hardly commits Hume to perfect equality (something he strongly rejects), but can be seen as offering a case for the minimization of great inequalities. Hume's argument against perfect equality underscores the respects in which he sees social equality as desirable.

Render possessions ever so equal, men's different degree's of art, care, and industry will immediately break that equality. Or if you check these virtues, you reduce society to extreme indigence; and instead of preventing want and begary to the few, render it unavoidable to the whole community. (Hume 1998, 91)

Hume regards striving after perfect equality as ultimately futile and self-defeating, but he is concerned with issues of economic equality that are usually considered to be central aspects of distributive justice. While Hume criticized the notion of perfect equality in *An Enquiry Concerning Moral Principles of Morals*, he also acknowledged the pernicious effects of great inequalities:

It must be also be confessed, that, wherever we depart from this equality, we rob the poor of more satisfaction than we add to the rich, and that the slight gratification of a frivolous vanity, in one individual frequently costs more than bread to many families, and even provinces. (Hume 1998, 91.)

One plausible reading of this section has Hume arguing that while social and economic inequalities are harmful, any attempt to remedy them will in fact make conditions worse—an argument associated with such twentieth-century social philosophers as F. A. Hayek.¹⁶

However, in one of his political essays, Hume returns to the theme of minimizing inequality in a way that leaves little doubt that he regards it as a means to increased public utility.

A too great disproportion among the citizens weakens any state. Every person, if possible, ought to enjoy the fruits of his labour, in full possession of all the necessaries, and many of the conveniencies of life. No

one can doubt, but such an equality is most suitable to human nature, and diminishes much less from the *happiness* of the rich than it adds to that of the poor. It also augments the *power of the state*, and makes any extraordinary taxes or impositions to be paid with more cheerfulness. (Hume 1987, 265.)

Hume's conception of utility therefore has an egalitarian tendency that has been underappreciated historically. Hume (1977, 265) wants to avoid a concentration of wealth because "where the riches are in few hands, these must enjoy all the power, and will readily conspire to the whole burthen on the poor, and oppress them still farther, to the discouragement of all industry."

Is Hume a Conservative?

Hume's political thought is neither conservative, as Livingston and Wolin have argued, nor contractarian, as Gauthier has maintained. Rather, he is best seen as someone who does not really fit into either of these categories—who subverts them while reconciling their competing claims. Hume explicitly rejects the notion of the social contract as an explanation for the origins of political society, although he admits that the state of nature can serve as a "useful fiction." Hume also rejects the social contract as a source of political legitimacy, seeing time, custom, and habit as much sturdier sources of obligation than legitimation through the consent of the governed. "Time and custom give authority to all forms of government, and all succession of princes; and that power, which at first was founded only on injustice and violence, becomes in time legal and obligatory (Hume 1978, 566).

While the importance of time and custom in Hume's account may undermine Gauthier's attempt to incorporate Hume into the contractarian tradition, it bolsters the case for considering Hume to be a conservative political thinker.

Livingston's account of Hume emphasizes the role of custom, which Livingston couples with Hume's "criticism of philosophy in politics," particularly his criticism of certain metaphysical conceptions of reason and liberty, in order to make his case for Hume as a conservative (Livingston 1984, 308).

Livingston (*ibid.*, 310) is quite right to portray Hume as a skeptic

who “used the very tools of reason to limit the range of reason in politics.” And contingency plays a substantial role in Hume’s political thought with which any account of Hume’s “science of politics”—with its emphasis on unintended consequences, unexpected outcomes, and sheer circumstance—must come to grips. But this raises a basic question: are contingency and custom compatible with consequentialism?

In the case of Hume, my answer is yes. Hume’s recognition of contingency and complexity goes hand in hand with his belief that there are recognizable patterns of behavior in human action. Hume needed these regularities so as to develop his political economy and conduct his analysis of political institutions. But since these regularities do not let us predict the future with anything like perfect certainty, we need social, political, and legal institutions that indirectly promote utility by channeling the passions and the interests in ways that are most likely to produce public happiness.

Hume’s conception of indirect utility animates his desire to promote liberty and protect the institutions that foster and maintain it. “Nothing is more essential to the public interest, than the preservation of liberty” (Hume 1978, 564); “liberty is the perfection of civil society”(ibid., 41). Hume’s attachment to liberty drives his commitment to equal treatment under the rule of law. His emphasis on gradual reform, with the right of resistance maintained for dire circumstances, is likewise consistent with his consequentialism. Moreover, he sought to limit the role of religion in the public sphere, which is directly inimical to the conservative outlook. Hume’s political economy with its emphasis on the mutual benefits that derive from trade, coupled with more peaceful relationships, has been seen as the prototypical liberal political economy, one grounded in a conception of indirect utility that encourages nation-states to take the long view when trade imbalances emerge.¹⁷

Hume’s use of indirect utility is *compatible* with conservatism, though, because it results from a recognition of the limits of reason in the political, social, and economic spheres. Where it departs from conservatism is that it is also compatible with the application of certain abstract principles to political matters. Since one of the defining aspects of political conservatism is a rejection of abstract principles as a guide to political action, it is difficult to say how Hume could be seen as a conservative from this standpoint.¹⁸

One of the most appealing aspects of Hume’s consequentialism is

that while it offers a set of general principles to guide political practice and institution-building, it also offers a built-in skepticism about these principles. They have to be adjusted to changing circumstances and contingencies, according to whether they promote public happiness.¹⁹ This recognition of contingency gives Hume's consequentialism a richness that is lacking in other forms of this political philosophy.

NOTES

1. Other advocates of a conservative reading of Hume are David Miller (1981), Frederick G. Whelan (1985), and Anthony Quinton (1978).
2. For an application of Gauthier's approach see Jean Hampton 1986.
3. A question that could come up here is the relationship of Hume's consequentialism to liberalism. F. A. Hayek (1968) and John B. Stewart (1992) have made the case for Hume being a liberal political thinker. In this essay I have not explicitly dealt with the issue of Hume's "liberalism." This is a complex and vexing issue that will have to be dealt with elsewhere. On one hand, much of Hume's thought is consistent with aspects of liberalism, especially involving political-economy issues such as free trade. However, if liberalism is seen first and foremost as a political philosophy that is concerned with "rights," or with liberty as an end in itself rather than as a means to utility, Hume is not the most obvious place to turn.
4. Ironically Wolin (1976, 252) is on potentially stronger ground here, in that he acknowledges Hume's attempt to ground politics in Newtonian scientific method. At one point, he even calls Hume's position "analytical conservatism." However, he neglects to explore the ambiguity and tensions between Hume's evolutionary and his rationalist approaches.
5. In "Of the Original Contract," at one point, Hume (1987, 475) takes deadly aim at the notion of tacit consent: "Can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artisan has a free choice to leave his country when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives from day to day, by the small wages which he acquires? We may as well assert, that a man, by remaining in a vessel, freely consents to the dominion of the master; though he was carried on board while asleep, and must leap into the ocean, and perish, the moment he leaves her."
6. Knud Haakonssen (1981, 26) has called attention to the tension between Hume's evolutionary and rationalistic accounts.
7. The importance of group size for Hume's political thought is emphasized in Michael Taylor (1976) and Lawrence S. Moss (1991).
8. For instance, Gerald J. Postema's 1986 account of Hume's political thought has deeply influenced my own, but he underestimates Hume's awareness of the "nastier" side of human nature.
9. The importance of this passage is emphasized by Brian Barry (1989, 145-78).

- Barry's larger point is that there are two theories of justice in Hume, one a theory of justice as mutual advantage, the other a theory of justice as impartiality.
10. To appreciate the weakness of single acts of justice outside the system of justice see Hume 1978, 497. "A single act of justice is frequently contrary to *public interest*; and were it to stand alone, without being follow'd by other acts, any, in itself, be very prejudicial to society."
 11. A plausible case can be made that Marx envisaged a post-capitalist society as "beyond justice" in this way.
 12. This paraphrases Marx (1978, 595): "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."
 13. See for instance Richard Hiskes (1977) and Livingston (1984).
 14. See also Hont and Ignatieff 1983, 20–21.
 15. In an essay that focuses exclusively on Hume's political economy, Robert Lyon (1991) writes, "While Hume rejected collectivism and egalitarianism, he recognized that when inequality of income was too marked, undue political power in the hands of the wealthy followed, and even the state of the economy was adversely affected."
 16. Hume seems to regard attempts at perfect equality to be futile and perverse, to invoke two of Albert Hirschman's (1991) triad of terms (jeopardy, futility, and perversity) in his *Rhetoric of Reaction*. Hirschman uses Hayek as the primary example of "the jeopardy thesis" in this work.
 17. Hume's influence on Adam Smith has been well documented; see for instance Winch 1978, 18. Here I am following an insight of Hayek (1960, 411), who wrote, "In this sense I doubt whether there can be such a thing as a conservative political philosophy. Conservatism may often be a useful maxim, but it does not give us any guiding principles which can influence long-range developments."
 19. An interesting account of Hume and skepticism that moves in the direction of a contingent liberalism is found in Laursen 1992.

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