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# The Role of Political Economy in Hume's Moral Philosophy

CARL WENNERLIND

*Abstract:* Hume insisted that property serve as the foundation of society because it best promotes the greatest amount of industry and therefore contributes to public utility. Industry thus plays a central role in Hume's theory of justice. Given that Hume extensively discussed the social, political, cultural, and moral implications of industry in the *Political Discourses*, I suggest that Hume's economic writings should be understood as an integral part of his overall philosophical project. In offering a parallel reading of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and the *Political Discourses*, I argue that Hume's theory of justice does not resolve into a mere theory of property, as many philosophers complain, but rather, emerges as a rich account of how justice both generates the greatest material affluence and promotes the formation of the most virtuous society.

## Introduction

David Hume contributed seminally to a wide array of themes in moral and political philosophy, aesthetics and the philosophy of religion, as well as epistemology and metaphysics. Yet, it was as an historian and a political economist that he was best known during his lifetime.<sup>1</sup> While philosophers may note this fact in passing, they often disregard Hume's historical and economic writings as separate from that which really matters: his philosophical explorations in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), and *An Enquiry*

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*Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). In this essay, I argue that philosophers would be well-served by studying Hume's economic writings with greater attention, not because it was one of the genres that brought him fame and fortune, but rather because it offers valuable insights that clarify and illuminate the content and implications of Hume's theory of justice.

It seems to be a requisite caveat for all commentators on Hume's theory of justice to commence their discussion by lamenting his shortsightedness in focusing solely on property. D. D. Raphael, for example, found the theory "curiously narrow," and David Miller added that it was "an unusually narrow version of conservative justice," while Richard Hiskes found it "downright depressing."<sup>2</sup> In order to salvage the moral viability of Hume's theory of justice, philosophers have scoured the rest of Hume's philosophical oeuvre for clues about his position on classical moral issues, such as equality, fairness, and honesty. Recently, Annette Baier, also frustrated by the skeletal nature of Hume's notion of justice, employed *A History of England* (1754–1762) in an effort to derive a fuller understanding of how justice figured in Hume's moral reasoning.<sup>3</sup> She concluded that had Hume returned to the second *Enquiry* after the completion of the *History*, during the process of which he learned that "doing justice . . . comprises a lot more than respecting . . . other's property rights," he would have been in a position to offer a much more substantial discussion of justice and morality.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay, I argue that Hume's *Political Discourses* (1752), authored around the same time as the second *Enquiry*,<sup>5</sup> offer another set of valuable reflections that can usefully inform our understanding of his theory of justice and its implications for his moral and political theories. The most obvious reason for consulting Hume's economic writings when studying his moral theory is the fact that he derived and illustrated his concept of justice first and foremost in the context of commercial relations and not in any other possible sphere, such as the family, polity, or nation.<sup>6</sup> The second, and analytically more compelling, reason why Hume's economic thought should be read as an essential feature of his moral theory is because of the centrality of the concept of industry—diligent, systematic, and intelligent labor—to both his theory of justice and his theory of virtue. I will show that Hume not only singled out industry as the key criterion for justice (section 1), but he also held that industry is the main component of human happiness and the most essential building block of a virtuous society (section 2). Hence, the promotion of industry—together with the equally essential advancement of commerce and refinement of the arts (mechanical arts, liberal arts, and sciences)—was not only the kernel of economic affluence, but it also constituted the key principle of good morals. By recognizing the integral position of industry in Hume's moral theory, I link Hume's philosophical and economic writings in a way that illuminates both ends of the spectrum. It thus becomes clear that instead of resolving itself into a mere theory of property, Hume's theory of justice offers a rich account of

how a just society both generates the greatest possible material abundance and best promotes essential social virtues, such as fairness, sociability, politeness, and humanity.<sup>7</sup> In the final section of the paper, I extend the argument to Hume's evaluation of different types of government. I argue that Hume used industry as the key criterion for judging the merit of different constitutional forms, thus further extending the reach of his economic thought to include his discourse on government.

### **The Economic Content of Hume's Theory of Justice: The Second Enquiry**

One of Hume's aims in the second *Enquiry* was to investigate the possibility of deriving a set of moral principles capable of providing the foundation for a stable and prosperous society.<sup>8</sup> He revisited the inquiry he initiated in the *Treatise* about whether the general foundation of morals "be derived from Reason, or from Sentiment; whether we attain the knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense" (EPM 1.3; SBN 170). While Hume acknowledged that reason and sentiment "concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions," he concluded that neither reason nor sentiment alone constitute satisfactory means of deriving moral codes (EPM 1.9; SBN 172). Instead, he argued that we must also consider the extent to which an act contributes to public utility. More specifically, the proper question to ask is whether an act contributes to the "happiness of human society" and the "interests of the species" (EPM 2.23; SBN 181).

Hume first inquired whether the social virtues might qualify as the proper foundation for justice. He asked whether people, by being benevolent, "*sociable, good-natured, humane, merciful, grateful, friendly, generous, beneficent,*" were contributing to the formation of the most advantageous society (EPM 2.1; SBN 176). While social virtues such as generosity and benevolence were met with universal approbation, Hume maintained that they could not serve as the foundation for justice, as they were not always conducive to public utility.<sup>9</sup> In exploring what makes public utility pleasing, he considered stability, order, and peace, yet focused most of his attention on industry. He exemplified his analysis by exploring the consequences of two acts of benevolence: poor relief and liberality of princes. While giving alms to the poor was generally motivated by good intentions, he argued, "when we observe the encouragement thence arising to idleness and debauchery, we regard that species of charity rather as a weakness than a virtue" (EPM 2.18; SBN 180). Liberality of princes, similarly, might be viewed as a mark of beneficence, "but when it occurs, . . . the homely bread of the honest and industrious is often thereby converted into delicious cates for the idle and the prodigal, we soon retract our heedless praise" (EPM 2.20; SBN 181). Despite the many benefits of the

social virtues, their tendency to undermine industriousness prevented them from generating the greatest possible public utility and, thus, disqualified them from serving as the basis of justice.

Hume also added that actions traditionally deemed immoral might be viewed in a different light when their impact on public utility was considered. Luxury consumption served as one such example. Hume noted that while luxury had long been regarded a vice, when its utility to the public was considered, both our “*moral* as well as *political* sentiments” regarding luxury needed to be reassessed. Indeed, Hume argued that since luxury promotes an “increase of industry, civility, and arts,” it deserves praise for its contribution to public utility (EPM 2.21; SBN 181). Hence, Hume concluded that people do not generate the most beneficial societies or become as serviceable to each other as they are capable of becoming by being generous, selfless, and frugal. The key was for people to make themselves useful. “Can anything stronger be said,” Hume asked, “in praise of a profession, such as merchandize or manufacture, than to observe the advantage which it procures to society?” (EPM 2.11; SBN 179). In responding to his own question, Hume exclaimed, “what praise is implied in the simple epithet *useful*! What reproach in the contrary!” (EPM 2.12; SBN 179).<sup>10</sup>

It was at this point that Hume introduced property. For Hume, the best way to promote industry and, thus, public utility was by establishing firm private property rights. This is the only condition under which people would find it worthwhile to dedicate themselves to a life of industry. Only then would people feel secure in their enjoyment of the goods they produced and be able to form and act upon stable expectations about the behavior of others (EPM App. 3.11; SBN 310). “Hence,” Hume concluded, “the ideas of property become necessary in all civil society: Hence justice derives its usefulness to the public: And hence alone arises its merit and moral obligation” (EPM 3.13; SBN 188). Justice—as in the maximum promotion of industry—can thus only be maintained in a society with strict rules for private property.

Hume argues that the need for property is universal.<sup>11</sup> The only conditions under which justice would not be necessary, or even possible, were when “extreme abundance or extreme necessity” prevailed or when the human breast was implanted with “perfect moderation and humanity, or perfect rapaciousness and malice” (EPM 3.12; SBN 188). In the first scenario, justice was irrelevant because society was endowed with an abundance of wealth requiring little or no effort to satisfy man’s “voracious appetite” or “luxurious imagination wish or desire” (EPM 3.2; SBN 183). No labor, tillage, or navigation would be necessary to obtain endless conveniences and superfluities. The same would be true if we suppose that man’s “natural beauty . . . surpasses all acquired ornaments: The perpetual clemency of the seasons renders useless all clothes or covering: The raw herbage affords him the most delicious fare: The clear fountain, the richest beverage” (EPM 3.2; SBN

183). Here, justice would have no utility; it would be “totally useless,” a mere “idle ceremonial.” This led Hume to ask, “Why call this object *mine*, when upon the seizing of it by another, I need but stretch out my hand to possess myself of what is equally valuable?” (EPM 3.3; SBN 184). In such a world, the social virtues would reign supreme, and there would be no need for any mechanisms to adjudicate conflicts of interest.

Moreover, justice would not be required in settings in which people had completely transcended their selfish tendencies and become fully benevolent. Hume hypothesized that if “the mind is so enlarged, and so replete with friendship and generosity, that every man has the utmost tenderness for every man, and feels no more concern for his own interest than for that of his fellows; it seems evident, that the use of justice would, in this case, be suspended by such extensive benevolence.” He added, “Why raise land marks between my neighbour’s field and mine, when my heart has made no division between our interests; but shares all his joys and sorrows with the same force and vivacity as if originally my own?” (EPM 3.6; SBN 185).

Hume also considered the opposite scenarios, in which the dearth of material goods was so extreme that it could not keep the bulk of mankind from perishing, and in which the minds of men lose all capacity to rise above their most basic instincts, making it entirely impossible to establish and uphold the rules of private property (EPM 3.8–9; SBN 186–87). But since none of these four scenarios were realistic, Hume concluded that every society did, indeed, require a system of property.

However, property alone would not suffice to generate the greatest possible industry and consequent prosperity. Hume specified that a convention capable of facilitating the distribution of wealth throughout society was also necessary. For property owners to be able to alienate their property at will, there had to be a system and a means of exchange established. This led Hume to specify that markets and commercial contracts—which included money (both coin and credit)—served as necessary corollaries to private property.<sup>12</sup> While most commentators on Hume’s three conventions read him as specifying property, exchanges, and promises, I have argued that the context of his discussion and the fact that he refers to symbols representing promises in commercial exchanges make it highly likely that he had money in mind.<sup>13</sup> In highlighting the public utility of property, markets, and money, he wrote,

Who sees not . . . that whatever is produced or improved by a man’s art or industry ought, for ever, to be secured to him, in order to give encouragement to such *useful* habits and accomplishments? That the property ought also to descend to children and relations, for the same *useful* purpose? That it may be alienated by consent, in order to beget that commerce

and intercourse, which is so *beneficial* to human society? And that all contracts and promises ought carefully to be fulfilled, in order to secure mutual trust and confidence, by which the general *interest* of mankind is so much promoted? (EPM 3.28; SBN 195)

By providing incentives for industry, commerce, and the arts, Hume concluded that private property, markets, and money best promote the “interest of our species” and the “happiness on human society.” The conventions were not only pleasing to a person because of their usefulness to him personally, but they also met with his approbation because they brought great benefits to all people participating in the system (EPM 5.16; SBN 218). Hume had thus arrived at what he considered the proper foundation for his notion of justice.

Most commentators on Hume’s moral philosophy end their discussions at this point and conclude that while he succeeded in developing a theory of property, he simply failed to provide a comprehensive theory of justice. However, as I have already suggested, if the second *Enquiry* is read in conjunction with the *Political Discourses*, the full moral implications of justice become visible, and we come to recognize that a theory of virtue emerges out of Hume’s theory of justice.

### The Virtues of Commerce: The Political Discourses

What exactly made property—and its corollaries, markets and money—so conducive to public utility? Was it, as the second *Enquiry* suggests, simply that they motivate the greatest amount of industry, arts, and commerce? Or was there something more profound about commercial societies that made them so successful in generating human happiness and promoting the interest of the species? To explore these questions, it is useful to incorporate Hume’s discussion of the social, moral, and political implications of industry from the *Political Discourses*. Based mostly on the essays “Of Commerce” and “Of Refinement in the Arts,”<sup>14</sup> I argue that, for Hume, commercial prosperity had a unique capacity to promote virtue and good morals. Hence, while Hume did not view the social virtues, such as generosity and benevolence, as the proper basis for justice, he argued that justice, in turn, promotes some of the most essential social virtues, such as fairness, sociability, civility, ingenuity, and humanity.<sup>15</sup>

Hume begins his essay “Of Refinement of the Arts” by arguing that human happiness is comprised of three ingredients: action, pleasure, and indolence (EMPL 269). While action and pleasure are the two main components of happiness, indolence is favorable only in so far as it restores and prepares people to engage in further activities and pursuits of pleasures. I will thus only comment on action and pleasure.

Among all the various activities that people are capable of engaging in, Hume regarded industry as the most productive of human happiness. Indeed, he wrote, the “great end of all human industry, is the attainment of happiness.” It was for this end that the “arts [were] invented, sciences cultivated, laws ordained, and societies modelled” (EMPL 148).<sup>16</sup> Industry contributed to happiness in the dual sense in that people “enjoy, as their reward, the occupation itself, as well as those pleasures which are the fruit of their labour.” In addition to enjoying the tasks themselves and feeling a sense of accomplishment, work also promotes happiness by refining the character and manners of the individual (EMPL 270). Whether it was the work of the farmer, craftsman, brewer, baker, or merchant, through purposeful, intelligent, and systematic labor the “mind acquires new vigour; enlarges its powers and faculties; and by an assiduity in honest industry, both satisfies its natural appetites, and prevents the growth of unnatural ones, which commonly spring up, when nourished by ease and idleness” (EMPL 270).<sup>17</sup> Industry thus serves both as an encouragement to creativity and ingenuity and as a check on some of humanity’s destructive tendencies, such as drunkenness, debauchery, and lewdness.

In societies where the bulk of the population diligently pursue their calling and marshal their creative energies to refine and improve techniques and technologies, the culture of ingenuity tends to spread to other spheres of society. Hume noted that “the spirit of the age affects all the arts; and the minds of men, being once roused from their lethargy, and put into a fermentation, turn themselves on all sides, and carry improvements into every art and science.” He famously added that the “same age, which produced great philosophers and politicians, renowned generals and poets, usually abounds with skilful weavers, and ship-carpenters” (EMPL 270). Yet, even in societies blessed with great genius and ample resources, it was nevertheless necessary for people to work diligently, as it was the very act of purposeful and intelligent labor that served as the main ingredient in the improvement process. Hume clarified this further in *The Stoic*:

If nature has been frugal in her gifts and endowments, there is the more need of art to supply her defects. If she has been generous and liberal, know that she still expects industry and application on our part. . . . The richest genius, like the most fertile soil, when uncultivated, shoots up into the rankest weeds; and instead of vines and olives for the pleasure and use of man, produces, to its slothful owner, the most abundant crop of poisons. (EMPL 148)<sup>18</sup>

A persistent dedication to industry not only improves the general intellectual climate, it also enhances people’s capacity to engage in sophisticated moral deliberations. In addressing the moral effects of industry in his posthumously

published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religions* (1779), he claimed that “[a]lmost all the moral as well as natural evils of human life, arise from idleness; and were our species, by the original constitution of their frame, exempt from this vice or infirmity, the perfect cultivation of land, the improvement of arts and manufactures, the exact execution of every office and duty, [would] immediately follow.” Hume thus concluded, in a particularly vivid passage,

In order to cure most of the ills of human life, I require not that man should have the wings of the eagle, the swiftness of the stag, the force of the ox, the arms of the lion, the scales of the crocodile or rhinoceros; much less do I demand the sagacity of an angel or cherubim. I am contented to take an increase in one single power or faculty of his soul. Let him be endowed with a greater propensity to industry and labour; a more vigorous spring and activity of mind; a more constant bent to business and application. (DNR 11.10; 208)

While for Hume industry contributed most directly to human happiness and the interest of the species, he saw that the refinement of the arts and the advancement of commerce also contributed to the improvement of humanity. For example, in “The Sceptic” he noted that “[i]t is certain that a serious attention to the sciences and liberal arts softens and humanizes the temper, and cherishes those fine emotions, in which true virtue and honour consists” (EMPL 170). In particular, industry, commerce, and the arts tend to enhance sociability. In “Of Refinement in the Arts,” Hume observes that in commercial societies people no longer find it appealing to live apart from each other, as was so common in “ignorant and barbarous nations.” Instead, they will “flock into cities; love to receive and communicate knowledge; to show their wit or their breeding; their taste in conversation or living, in clothes or furniture” (EMPL 271). People’s increased sociability and growing intellectual sophistication would improve their taste and politeness, which were widely recognized as essential ingredients of a stable and convivial social order. Softer tempers and refined mores and manners would enable people to engage in more regular and purposeful interactions and form more lasting and congenial relationships.<sup>19</sup> Hume noted that “clubs and societies are every where formed: Both sexes meeting in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behaviour, refine apace” (EMPL 271).<sup>20</sup> He continued by stating that “beside the improvement which they receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but they must feel an encrease of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other’s pleasure and entertainment” (EMPL 271). The spirit of individualism, competition, and incessant pursuit of gain characteristic of commercial societies, which so many of Hume’s predecessors and contemporaries feared as a threat to good morals and

social cohesion, did not worry Hume in the least.<sup>21</sup> Instead, Hume concluded that economic prosperity was essential to the promotion of the social virtues, leading him to famously proclaim that “*industry, knowledge, and humanity, are linked together by an indissoluble chain*” (EMPL 271).<sup>22</sup>

Hume also believed that commercial societies had a tendency to promote fairness by checking the most egregious inequalities. While he showed no interest in perfect equality, he believed that commercial societies reward those who work diligently and intelligently. He suggested in “Of Commerce” that “[e]very person, if possible, ought to enjoy the fruits of his labour, in a full possession of all the necessaries, and many of the conveniences of life.” He continued, “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” (EMPL 265).

Inherent in commercial societies is a mechanism that tends to promote a sense of fairness and equality between nations. In “Of the Jealousy of Trade,” Hume noted that as one nation abounds with industry and produces numerous commodities suitable for exportation, surrounding nations will increase their efforts in order to be able to obtain some of these goods. While the inflow of foreign goods was initially imagined to be a problem because of the fear that it might drain the nation of money—a fear that Hume did much to dispel—soon, “the art itself [would be] gradually imported, to our visible advantage” (EMPL 329). In “Of Commerce” Hume pointed out that through emulation and imitation, newly imported technologies and techniques would spread throughout the nation, with manufactures working up “every home commodity to the utmost perfection of which it is susceptible” (EMPL 264). Imitation thus played an important role in sparking industry, promoting the gradual improvement of the nation’s arts and the diversification of its manufacturing base. Indeed, in “Of the Jealousy of Trade,” Hume reminded his readers that every improvement in manufacturing and agriculture that Great Britain had made in the previous two centuries had “arisen from our imitation of foreigners.” He added that “we ought so far to esteem it happy, that [foreigners] had previously made advances in arts and ingenuity” (EMPL 328). This led Hume to famously assert that “the encrease of riches and commerce in any one nation, instead of hurting, commonly promotes the riches and commerce of all its neighbours; and that a state can scarcely carry its trade and industry very far, where all the surrounding states are buried in ignorance, sloth, and barbarism” (EMPL 328). While there are no intrinsic limits to human creativity and ingenuity, the formation and implementation of new ideas is generally a slow and unpredictable process. The more people engage in the pursuit of new techniques and technologies, the greater the chances that real breakthroughs will be achieved. International commerce was therefore of great importance, as it connected people throughout the world and thus multiplied the

number of people pooling their ideas for the advancement of the arts. Although they perceived themselves as commercial rivals, trading nations were de facto engaged in a collaborative improvement process, one that could potentially continue indefinitely.

In addition to promoting both industry and the arts in all participating nations, the intrinsic dynamic of international trade also ensured that all nations, even late-comers to the commercialization process, were given an opportunity to share in the ever-growing prosperity. Hume notes in “Of Money” that there “seems to be a happy concurrence of causes in human affairs, which checks the growth of trade and riches, and hinders them from being confined entirely to one people” (EMPL 283). While the already rich nation has the benefit of a greater capital stock, the generally lower wages that prevail in poorer countries partly compensate for this disadvantage. Hume thus concluded that “[m]anufactures, therefore gradually shift their places, leaving those countries and provinces which they have already enriched, and flying to others, whither they are allured by the cheapness of provisions and labour; till they have enriched these also, and are again banished by the same causes” (EMPL 283–84). Hume thus seems to suggest that the dynamics of commerce promote a global economic prosperity, in which any industrious nation is able to participate. That is, as long as people uphold the conventions of property, markets, and money, and remain committed to a life of industry, they have an opportunity to participate in the march of progress—material, intellectual, and moral—that Hume envisioned.

The second component of human happiness, according to Hume, was pleasure. The enjoyment of pleasure constituted both an end in itself and served as the most important incentive for industry. Although industry, as discussed above, generated such vast social improvements, intellectual advancement, and moral refinement, the primary motivating factor that sparked people to work diligently and to systematically improve the arts was the prospect of pleasure. This is not to suggest that the enjoyment of luxury goods ranked as the highest pleasure in Hume’s mind; it clearly did not, for in “Of Delicacy of Taste,” Hume regards the “most expensive luxury” inferior to the enjoyment of “a poem or a piece of reasoning” (EMPL 5).<sup>23</sup> But, since luxury consumption satisfies some of the most violent passions, it serves as the strongest incentive for people to engage in industry.<sup>24</sup> Since Hume noted, in “Of Commerce” that “[e]very thing in the world is purchased by labour; and our passions are the only causes of labour,” he concluded that the only way to make people apply themselves with alacrity was to enlist their passions and “animate them with a spirit of avarice and industry, art and luxury” (EMPL 262–63). Indeed, it is impossible to force a person to produce beyond that which is necessary for his family’s immediate sustenance, but, Hume added, “furnish him with manufactures and commodities, and he will do it of himself” (EMPL 262). This is true on all levels of society: “When a nation abounds in manufactures and

mechanic arts, the proprietors of land, as well as the farmers, study agriculture as a science, and redouble their industry and attention" (EMPL 261). Even well-to-do merchants, trading in all parts of the world, intensify their efforts when they encounter new, even more splendid and spectacular, luxuries.<sup>25</sup> Commerce thus "rouses men from their indolence; and presenting the gayer and more opulent part of the nation with objects of luxury, which they never before dreamed of, raises in them a desire of a more splendid way of life than what their ancestors enjoyed" (EMPL 264).<sup>26</sup> Thus, the intellectual and moral improvements generated in prosperous commercial societies were essentially unintended consequences of peoples' headlong quest for pleasure through consumption.

Despite using the term "indissoluble chain" when discussing the relationship between commercial prosperity and the promotion of social virtues, Hume did acknowledge the possibility that the emerging culture of consumption might not always promote moral refinement. Although he argued that no single act of consumption was ever deserving of moral condemnation in itself, he recognized that there were certain conditions attending a person's consumption habits that might qualify his behavior as a vice. For example, if a person bankrupts himself in the process of pursuing ever greater enjoyments, becomes unable to provide for his family and friends, or fails to offer proper assistance to the poor, his consumption violates propriety and virtue.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, if a man is so fixated on consumption that he disregards "the pleasures of ambition, study, or conversation" as well as ceases to enjoy the company of family and friends, his behavior is a sign of stupidity and lack of humanity (EMPL 269).<sup>28</sup> But as long as people consume in some moderation, not only are they able to innocently gratify their senses, but they also participate in a consumption-driven economy that ultimately promotes public utility. Therefore, Hume argued, luxury ought to be de-moralized and recognized for its ultimate contribution to both wealth and virtue.<sup>29</sup> Efforts to root out vicious luxury, consequently, should be stopped, as there was no way to do so without also abolishing innocent luxury consumption, at which point the entire mechanism of moral improvement through consumption and industry would be lost. Hume concluded in "Of Refinement of the Arts" that "[b]y banishing *vicious* luxury, without curing sloth and an indifference to others, you only diminish industry in the state, and add nothing to men's charity or their generosity. Let us, therefore, rest contented with asserting, that two opposite vices in a state may be more advantageous than either of them alone" (EMPL 280).

As I hope I have shown, the path from justice to virtue, via industry, commerce, and the arts, was relatively direct and constituted the best possible route for mankind to travel. It was, therefore, advisable for philosophers and legislators alike to spend more time discussing and protecting property than worrying directly about promoting virtue. As long as the economy flourished and the arts progressed, people's character and manners would steadily improve, their moral

sentiments would be refined, and society as a whole would gradually become more virtuous. Hume thus concluded that the encouragement of commerce, consumption, and industry yielded not only the greatest material affluence, but also the most livable and peaceful social climate.<sup>30</sup> It follows that the notion of public utility that Hume employed to derive a criterion for justice was not solely about material abundance, it was also about a wide array of social, political, cultural, and moral improvements that economic prosperity engendered. By reading the second *Enquiry* along with the *Political Discourses*, it becomes clear that Hume did not merely offer a theory of property, but instead articulated a rich and inclusive understanding of how justice promotes virtue and morality. While one might disagree with, or oppose, the moral implications he draws from his theory of justice on account of his rather overzealous celebration of the benefits of industry, arts, and commerce, Hume ought not to be blamed for shortsightedness or failing to specify the moral consequences of organizing society around property, markets, and money.

I have argued that Hume posited justice as the proper foundation for the social virtues, and not the other way around. It should be noted, however, that Hume not only viewed justice as a form of social virtue but also claimed that property, markets, and money were rooted in virtues—what he called “artificial virtues.” He described how people form conventions that help them redirect their self-interest so that they are able to abstain from appropriating each other’s possessions, engage in well-ordered market exchanges, and honor contractual promises forged in the market place. While such virtuous behavior does not entail any significant sacrifice when performed among family and friends, it necessitates a greater restraint in the interaction between strangers. Indeed, it is not in the immediate interest of a person to respect the property of others or honor debts incurred to strangers. Hume, however, believed that people would gradually come to realize, by trial and error, the benefits associated with being part of a system of property, markets, and money and, thus, resolve to redirect their self-interest from the short-term to the long-term.<sup>31</sup> Hume called the actions required to uphold the conventions “artificial virtues,” thus differentiating them from the social virtues, such as benevolence and generosity. Hume also suggests that property, markets, and money (phenomena grounded in the artificial virtues) constitute the basis of justice (a social virtue), which itself best promotes traits like benevolence, generosity, and sociability (the social virtues proper). While he might be seen as conflating all of his moral categories into forms of virtue, it is important to remember that he makes a clear distinction between justice and the rest of the social virtues. The point of his moral deliberation was to show that however pleasing the social virtues (for example, generosity and benevolence) were, they were incapable of providing the foundation for justice. The key criterion for justice was that people make themselves useful to society. For Hume, this was an ongoing

process: "History, experience, reason sufficiently instruct us in this natural progress of human sentiments, and in the gradual enlargement of our regards to justice, in proportion as we become acquainted with the extensive utility of that virtue" (EPM 3.21; SBN 192).

### **The Economic Content of Hume's Theory of Government: The Political Discourses**

In addition to serving as the key component of public utility and justice, industry was also, for Hume, the primary criterion for evaluating different constitutional forms. He argued that the government's primary responsibility was to protect the conventions and the commercial prosperity they engendered. While he believed that a number of different forms of government were capable of adequately protecting property, he argued that certain constitutions were better equipped than others to safeguard and promote industry as well as commerce and the arts. Because of the centrality of industry to his theory of government, I suggest that not only can Hume's economic writings be profitably employed by philosophers studying his moral theory, they can also be used by scholars investigating his political theory.

Hume argued that the conventions of property, markets, and money emerged gradually as people came to recognize through experience, reason, and education the advantages of participating in a system that regulates the possession and transference of wealth. Hume noted in the second *Enquiry*,

Had every man sufficient *sagacity* to perceive, at all times, the strong interest which binds him to the observance of justice and equity, and *strength of mind* sufficient to persevere in a steady adherence to a general and a distant interest, in opposition to the allurements of present pleasure and advantage; there had never, in that case, been any such thing as a government or political society. (EPM 4.1; SBN 205)

While most people, he reiterated, do acknowledge that it is in their long-term interest to act in ways that uphold the conventions, there will always be some people who are unable to defer gratification and who will, therefore, violate the conventions. If all men, Hume asked in the essay "Of the Origin of Government," "are sensible of the necessity of justice to maintain peace and order; and all men are sensible of the necessity of peace and order for the maintenance of society," why is it that some people still transgress and violate property? He answered his own question by suggesting that "notwithstanding this strong and obvious necessity, such is the frailty or perverseness of our nature! it is impossible to keep men, faithfully and unerringly, in the paths of justice." He continued,

Some extraordinary circumstances may happen, in which a man finds his interests to be more promoted by fraud or rapine, than hurt by the breach which his injustice makes in the social union. But much more frequently, he is seduced from his great and important, but distant interests, by the allurements of present, though often very frivolous temptations. This great weakness is incurable in human nature. (EMPL 38)

Since this weakness was “incurable in human nature,” mankind must agree to the establishment of a government that can properly safeguard economic prosperity. That is, some body of people must be given the responsibility “to point out the decrees of equity, to punish transgressors, to correct fraud and violence, and to oblige men, however reluctant, to consult their own real and permanent interests” (EMPL 38). Indeed, this is the primary responsibility of government. “We are, therefore,” Hume pointed out, “to look upon all the vast apparatus of our government, as having ultimately no other object or purpose but the distribution of justice” (EMPL 37).<sup>32</sup>

The government’s primary role was to protect property, markets, and money, in order to generate as much industry, commerce, and advancement in the arts as possible. Fortunately, the interest of the government was perfectly aligned with that of the people. As Hume famously proclaimed in “Of Commerce,” “The greatness of a state, and the happiness of its subjects, how independent soever they may be supposed in some respects, are commonly allowed to be inseparable with regard to commerce.” He further elaborated, “as private men receive greater security, in the possession of their trade and riches, from the power of the public, so the public becomes powerful in proportion to the opulence and extensive commerce of private men” (EMPL 255). Wealth, for Hume, existed as “a stock of labour” that during normal times was employed for the satisfaction of the population, but that could, on short notice, be marshaled by the state to answer any emergencies that might arise. Not only was an industrious population better equipped to endure necessary increases in taxes to stave off a crisis, but it was also capable of providing the state with strong and disciplined bodies in case war became unavoidable.

Thriving commerce and vibrant industry not only strengthens government, it also simplifies the government’s task of governing, as the general moral refinement makes people more tractable. Hume noted, in “Of Refinement in the Arts,” that “[l]aws, order, police, discipline; these can never be carried to any degree of perfection, before human reason has refined itself by exercise, and by an application to the more vulgar arts, at least, of commerce and manufacture” (EMPL 273). Moreover, once commerce has progressed sufficiently and people’s tempers and humanity have been softened and refined, “[f]actions are then less inveterate, revolutions less tragical, authority less sever, and seditions less frequent” (EMPL

274). Even wars tended to be less cruel. Yet, if anger “loses somewhat of its asperity, by politeness and refinement,” there is no need to fear that the nation would become weaker since people are now in possession of a greater sense of honor, “which is a stronger, more constant, and more governable principle, [that] acquires fresh vigour by that elevation of genius which arises from knowledge and a good education” (EMPL 274).

While the gradual moral refinement of the population makes it easier for the government to govern, commercialization also tends to produce better and freer governments. “Where luxury nourishes commerce and industry,” Hume noted that the class composition changes in a way that “the middling rank of men, who are the best and firmest basis of public liberty,” gain greater political authority. This rising segment of the population, who emerged as “rich and independent” from their diligent cultivation of the land or through their success as merchants or manufacturers, “submit not to slavery, like the peasants, from poverty and meanness of spirit; and having no hopes of tyrannizing over others, like the barons, they are not tempted, for the sake of that gratification, to submit to the tyranny of their sovereign” (EMPL 277–78). Moreover, because they made their fortunes through the accumulation of property, they are the most likely to jealously protect equal and immutable laws regarding property. Hume suggested in the second *Enquiry* that if the ancient philosophers had come back to life they would have been mightily impressed by what modern states had accomplished. They would have considered “incredible, the degree of humanity, clemency, order, tranquility, and other social virtues, to which, in the administration of government, we have attained in modern times” (EPM 7.18; SBN 256–57).

Given Hume's preference for placing political authority in the hands of the middling sorts, one might be tempted to conclude that Hume unequivocally favored republics over monarchies. Yet, the question of which constitutional form was the most advantageous could not be settled that easily. In examining the recent history of monarchies, he concluded that monarchies were no more likely than republics to violate the principles of justice. “It may now be affirmed of civilized monarchies,” he wrote in “Of Civil Liberty,” “what was formerly said in praise of republics alone, *that they are a government of Laws, not of Men*” (EMPL 94). He added that “[p]rivate property seems to me almost as secure in a civilized EUROPEAN monarchy, as in a republic; nor is danger much apprehended in such a government, from the violence of the sovereign; more than we commonly dread harm from thunder, or earthquakes, or any accident the most unusual and extraordinary” (EMPL 93). Indeed, in “Of Civil Liberty” Hume expresses his belief that “[a]varice, the spur of industry, is so obstinate a passion, and works its way through so many real dangers and difficulties, that it is not likely to be scared by an imaginary danger, which is so small, that it scarcely admits of calculation” (EMPL 93). Yet, Hume still argued that there was one intrinsic feature of monarchies that

made them less compatible with commercial societies. He feared that commerce would likely fall short of its potential in a monarchy, “not because it is there less *secure*, but because it is less *honourable*.” The main obstacle was that “birth, titles, and place, must be honoured above industry and riches” in monarchies, which meant that successful merchants, manufactures, and financiers would pursue their trade only until they were able to “purchase some of those employments, to which privileges and honours are annexed” (EMPL 93).

Hume also explored the constitutional question in the second *Enquiry*. While he revealed a partiality towards republics, he once again acknowledged that the choice was not uncomplicated. He compared England, where “more regard is paid to present opulence and plenty,” to the rest of Europe, where “family, that is, hereditary riches, marked with titles and symbols from the sovereign, is the chief source of distinction” (EPM 6.35; SBN 248). He concluded that where

birth is respected, unactive, spiritless minds remain in haughty indolence, and dream of nothing but pedigrees and genealogies: the generous and ambitious seek honour and authority, and reputation and favour. Where riches are the chief idol, corruption, venality, rapine prevail: arts, manufactures, commerce, agriculture flourish. The former prejudice, being favourable to military virtue, is more suited to monarchies. The latter, being the chief spur to industry, agrees better with a republican government. (EPM 6.35; SBN 249)

Despite noting the progress and achievements of monarchies during the last century, Hume still believed that republics, at least for the moment, were more likely to jealously guard and uphold property, markets, and money. Yet, in looking towards the future in the essay “Of Civil Liberty,” he observed that “in monarchical governments there is a source of improvement, and in popular governments a source of degeneracy” (EMPL 95). The source of degeneracy was the national debt: the “mortgaging [of] the public revenues, by which taxes may, in time, become altogether intolerable, and all the property of the state be brought into the hands of the public” (EMPL 95). As the servicing of a ballooning national debt would absorb more and more of the nation’s property, all incentives for industry, commerce, and the refinement of the arts would soon be eliminated.<sup>33</sup> This worried Hume greatly. Finding a way to eliminate, or at least halt, the growth of the debt was, therefore, of utmost importance to the entire civilization project. Hume argued that monarchies enjoyed a greater degree of freedom in how they dealt with a strained fiscal apparatus. While monarchies, too, had a tendency to amass large debts, they had the option of unilaterally defaulting on the debt whenever they judged that the situation was out of hand. This option, indeed, had been exercised with some frequency throughout history, to the great detriment of many bankers.

While such a default would entail a massive violation of financial securities, Hume considered it an absolute necessity for the protection of property, industry, and justice in general. He famously warned in "Of Public Credit," "either the nation must destroy public credit, or public credit will destroy the nation" (EMPL 360–61). Here, non-monarchical governments were at a distinct disadvantage. "In popular governments," he argued "the people, and chiefly those who have the highest offices, being commonly the public creditors, it is difficult for the state to make use of this remedy" (EMPL 96). Hence, the creditors' political power and their conflict of interest prevented republics from pursuing the unpopular, yet sometimes necessary solution of declaring voluntary bankruptcy—the only way to protect the continued existence of a commercial civilization.

## Conclusion

Hume's theory of justice has been extensively criticized for being truncated and over-simplified. I suggest that the recognition of industry's centrality to his theory of justice, theory of virtue, and theory of government reveals the relevance of Hume's economic writings to his moral and political reasoning. The *Political Discourses* emerges as a text that is not simply about economic matters; it is, instead, an essential part of his overall philosophical project. For this reason, Hume's theory of justice can be read as a much more wide-ranging and sophisticated moral and political theory than is generally acknowledged. Moreover, Hume also appears as a far greater champion of commercial society than most philosophers recognize. Indeed, he was even more hopeful about the benefits of commerce than was Adam Smith. He might even be considered more enthusiastic about commerce than Mandeville in that he offered a more multidimensional defense of commerce, including economic, social, political, cultural, and moral considerations.

The aim of this essay is to argue for the relevance of Hume's economic writings to his moral and political philosophy. Although a more extensive investigation would have to be undertaken to explore all the ways in which Hume's economic thought illuminates and enriches his moral and political philosophy, this essay constitutes an effort to convince philosophers and historians alike of the potential usefulness of such an endeavor.<sup>34</sup>

## NOTES

Helpful comments were gratefully received from the editors, as well as Samuel Fleischer, Martin Kragh, André Lapidus, Ann Levey, Monica Miller, and Margaret Schabas.

1 Historian Emma Rothschild notes that Hume's *Political Discourses* "were of great importance to Hume's literary success and to his reputation in the century following his death." Yet, she adds, "they have been of much less subsequent interest." Rothschild, "David Hume and the Seagods of the Atlantic," in *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, ed. Susan Manning and Francis Cogliano (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 95–96. A number of other intellectual historians, including Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Christopher Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); and Margaret Schabas, *The Natural Origins of Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), have also highlighted the importance of Hume's political economy to his overall intellectual project. More recent expositions of how political economy figured in Hume's thinking include Christopher Finlay, *Hume's Social Philosophy: Human Nature and Commercial Sociability in A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Continuum, 2007) and Neil McArthur, *David Hume's Political Theory: Law, Commerce, and the Constitution of Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). See, also, the essays in *David Hume's Political Economy*, ed. Carl Wennerlind and Margaret Schabas (London: Routledge, 2008).

2 D. D. Raphael, *Concepts of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 87; David Miller, "The Ideological Backgrounds to Conceptions of Social Justice," *Political Studies* 22 (1974): 387–99, 391; and Richard Hiskes, "Has Hume a Theory of Social Justice?" *Hume Studies* 3 (1977): 72–93, 72. Other critical accounts of Hume's theory of justice include Lawrence Scaff, "Hume on Justice and the Original Contract," *Philosophical Studies* 33 (1978): 101–08; A. D. Woodley, "Hume on Justice," *Philosophical Studies* 33 (1978): 81–99; and Jonathan Harrison, *Hume's Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

3 Annette C. Baier, *The Cautious Jealous Virtue: Hume on Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

4 Baier, *Hume on Justice*, 16–17.

5 References to the *Enquiry* are to David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), abbreviated "EPM" in the text and cited by section and paragraph numbers, followed by page numbers in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), abbreviated "SBN" in the text.

6 Finlay convincingly argues for the necessity of understanding the human individual that Hume theorized in the context of a commercial society. *Hume's Social Philosophy*, 44.

7 While Nicholas Phillipson argues that, for Hume, "property was the mother of the civilization process," I suggest that industry should be recognized as playing an equally indispensable role in the parentage of civilization. Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 108.

8 Hume's *Treatise* could also have been used to support the arguments of this essay. However, to avoid engaging the debate about how the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*

compare and contrast, I have exclusively drawn on evidence from the second *Enquiry* in this essay.

9 Phillipson points out that contrary to Francis Hutcheson, who believed that there was a moral sense that predisposed people to treat others benevolently, Hume argued that “by themselves, benevolent feelings were profoundly anti-social.” Nicholas Phillipson, *David Hume: The Philosopher as Historian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 45.

10 For a recent discussion of the role of utility in Hume’s theory of Justice, see James Harris, “Hume on the Moral Obligation of Justice,” *Hume Studies* 36 (2011): 25–50.

11 For Hume, property is anything which is “lawful for him, and for him alone, to use” (EPM 3.35; SBN 197). Hence, even though he was open to reason and custom contributing to the formation of country-specific systems of property, justice dictated that property had to be individualistic and exclusionary.

12 Baier notes that Hume employed three artifices—“property conventions, conventions about transfer of property by consent, and contract”—when discussing the formation of society. *Hume on Justice*, 22. I have argued elsewhere that Hume’s notion of contract explicitly included money (both coin and credit), which implies that property, markets, and money constituted the foundational conventions of modern societies. See Carl Wennerlind, “The Link between David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* and his Fiduciary Theory of Money,” *History of Political Economy* 33 (2001): 139–60, and “David Hume’s Political Philosophy: A Theory of Commercial Modernization,” *Hume Studies* 28 (2002): 247–70.

13 Hume’s discussion of money as a form of promise was perfectly in line with eighteenth-century usage. For more on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century concepts of money, see Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620–1720* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

14 References to Hume’s essays are to David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. D. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), hereafter cited in text as “EMPL” followed by page number.

15 Lorraine Besser-Jones argues that people undergo a psychological transformation when they become part of a just society, which enables them to more fully develop their passions and engage in meaningful social relations. While she does not focus much on political economy, I argue that this transformation can most fruitfully be explored through Hume’s economic writings. Lorraine Besser-Jones, “The Role of Justice in Hume’s Theory of Psychological Development,” *Hume Studies* 32 (2006): 253–76.

16 Although Hume is not speaking in his own voice in some of the works I quote, such as “The Stoic,” “The Sceptic,” and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, I believe that on the topics covered in this essay, Hume’s comments are perfectly consistent with what he argues in the *Political Discourses*.

17 See E. J. Hundert, “The Achievement Motive in Hume’s Political Economy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974): 139–43, 140.

18 Hume similarly states in the second *Enquiry*, “[a] man’s time, when well husbanded, is like a cultivated field, of which a few acres produce more of what is useful to life, than

extensive provinces, even of the richest soil, when over-run with weeds and brambles” (EPM 6.10; SBN 237).

19 Allan Silver, “Friendship in Commercial Society: Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Modern Sociology,” *American Journal of Sociology* 95 (1990): 1474–1504. For the classic discussion of *doux commerce*, see Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

20 While relations between the sexes tend to be more respectful and reverential in commercial societies, Hume did acknowledge that increased sociability sometimes promotes “libertine love, or even infidelity to the marriage-bed” (EMPL 272).

21 Margaret Schabas offers a valuable counterpoint to the claim that Hume had an unbridled appreciation for commercial culture. While she notes that Hume’s friend Adam Smith was much more disparaging about the moral benefits of commerce, she argues that Hume, too, entertained a certain hesitation about the implications of commerce. “Hume on Economic Well-Being,” in *The Continuum Companion to David Hume*, ed. Alan Bailey and Dan O’Brien (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012): 332–48.

22 See Christopher Berry, “Hume and the Customary Causes of Industry, Knowledge and Commerce,” *History of Political Economy* 38 (2006): 291–317; and Neil McArthur, *David Hume’s Political Theory*, 16–36.

23 Hume pointed out in the *Enquiry*, “in a view to *pleasure*, what comparison between the unbought satisfaction of conversation, society, study, even health and the common beauties of nature, but above all the peaceful reflection on one’s own conduct; what comparison, I say, between these and the feverish, empty amusements of luxury and expense? These natural pleasures, indeed, are really without price; both because they are below all price in their attainment, and above it in their enjoyment” (EPM 9.25; SBN 283–84).

24 In places where there is no manufacturing, and therefore, few luxury goods, people working the land “have no temptation, therefore, to encrease their skill and industry; since they cannot exchange that superfluity for any commodities, which may serve either to their pleasure or vanity” (EMPL 261). See Hundert, “The Achievement Motive,” 141, and M. G. Marshall, “Luxury, Economic Development, and Work Motivation: David Hume, Adam Smith, and J. R. McCulloch,” *History of Political Economy* 32 (2000): 631–48.

25 Hume seems to suggest in the essay “Of Interest” that for some professionals, profits themselves are more important than the pleasures they can buy. He noted that if a man is given a lucrative employment, “especially if the profit be attached to every particular exertion of industry, he has gain so often in his eye, that he acquires, by degrees, a passion for it, and knows no such pleasure as that of seeing the daily encrease of his fortune” (EMPL 301).

26 Hume notes in the second *Enquiry*, “as riches are desired for ourselves only as the means of gratifying our appetites, either at present or in some imaginary future period, they beget esteem in others merely from their having that influence. . . . When

we approach a man who is, as we say, at his ease, we are presented with the pleasing ideas of plenty, satisfaction, cleanliness, warmth; a cheerful house, elegant furniture, ready service, and whatever is desirable in meat, drink, or apparel. On the contrary, when a poor man appears, the disagreeable images of want, penury, hard labour, dirty furniture, coarse or ragged clothes, nauseous meat and distasteful liquor, immediately strike our fancy" (EPM 6.33; SBN 247–48).

27 For a discussion of Hume on luxury, see Christopher Berry, "Hume and Superfluous Value (or the Problem with Epictetus' Slippers)," in *David Hume's Political Economy*, ed. Carl Wennerlind and Margaret Schabas (London: Routledge, 2008): 49–64; Ryu Susato, "Hume's Nuanced Defense of Luxury," *Hume Studies* 32 (2006): 167–86; and Andrew Cunningham, "David Hume's Account of Luxury," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 27 (2005): 231–50.

28 Hume wrote in the *Enquiry*, "all prospects of success in life, or even of tolerable subsistence, must fail, where a reasonable frugality is wanting." So often do we see, Hume complained, "worthless prodigals, having consumed their fortune in wild debauches, thrusting themselves into every plentiful table, and every party of pleasure, hated even by the vicious, and despised even by fools" (EPM 6.11; SBN 237–38).

29 For a fuller discussion of this point, see Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

30 Phillipson notes that "Hume realized that his economic thinking would fail to convince unless he was able to show that commerce and economic progress were ethically beneficent and it was to this task that he was to devote some of his most eloquent and persuasive prose." *Adam Smith*, 142.

31 Phillipson points out, "[a]n idea of justice presupposed that individuals had learned the hard way that it was in their long-term interest to restrain their natural instincts in order to serve a public composed of strangers, not friends. But such a course of action could not possibly satisfy our sense of interest unless we were reasonably sure that others were calculating their interests in exactly the same way." "Politics and Politeness in the Philosophy of David Hume," in *Politics, Politeness, and Patriotism*, ed. Gordon J. Schochet (Washington: Folger Institute, 1993), 312.

32 While the need for property is universal, Hume noted, in reference to Montesquieu, that each nation must create laws that are compatible with "the manners, the climate, the religion, the commerce, the situation of each society." In general, Hume argued, "all questions of property are subordinate to the authority of civil laws, which extend, restrain, modify, and alter the rules of natural justice, according to the particular *convenience* of each community" (EPM 3.34; SBN 196).

33 As J. G. A. Pocock points out, such a massive expropriation of property would likely "bring commercial government, and the European republic of commercial states, to ruin." Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 197.

34 The ultimate aim is to synthesize Hume's historical and political economic writings and make them jointly illuminate his moral and political thinking. Partial efforts in this direction have been undertaken in Claudia Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in*

*History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Wennerlind, “David Hume’s Political Philosophy”; and Constant Stockton, “Economics and the Mechanism of Historical Progress in Hume’s *History*,” in *Hume: A Re-evaluation*, ed. Donald Livingston and James King (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976).